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# Decolonizing Womanhood

edited by Katucha Bento and Tasnim Al-Ahdal

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## Contributors

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# Editorial

Katucha Bento and Tasnim Al-Ahdal

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Afro-Latin American and Afro Caribbean versions of Womanhood are debated in depth by the Feminisms from the margin; and Black Feminism, Chicana Feminism, Latina Feminism and Caribbean Feminism, have a long standing anti-racist/non-Eurocentric and radical history of being in critical dialogue with postcolonial and decolonial studies and movements. Unfortunately, racialized womanhood is a topic that has not been adequately picked up by the radar of Gender Studies or Social Science Studies in general given that their canons of thought do not reflexively and critically centre the implications and affect White Anglo Saxon or European voices that have historically and until this day, dominated their academic traditions and disciplines. Black Critical Race Theory, as well as Black, Chicana, Latina and Caribbean Feminism, along with their anti-racist, decolonial implications of reconceiving power relations that affect the ways in which we produce knowledge as social researchers and students in and beyond the academy, either remain on the margins or are completely absent from the syllabus.

Furthermore, the canonization of Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies within the wider rubric of the social Sciences and the lack of racialized and nationalised references in the curriculum has institutionally and systematically contributed to the fact that out of the UK's 18,500 professors in Academia a mere 85 are Black, and only 18 are Black Females. Such statistics point to Black Bodies as occupying an 'out of place', hyper-visible/invisible position in the academy. The exclusionary power of whiteness in the academia is the reason why movements such as "Why isn't my professor Black?" and "Why is my curriculum White?" are so relevant and timely. They are a result of Black British professors, academics, activists and students congregating and mobilizing across the country to resist and refute colour blindness in our universities, academic disciplines, seminars, conferences, curriculums/reading lists, classrooms and teaching and learning spaces in and beyond the academia.



This edition is a response to this systematic erasure of Afro-Latin American and Afro Caribbean Gender Studies in the curriculum, organised by a group of post-graduate students within the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. We agreed that the School urgently needed to engage in conversations about gender from a decolonial approach, with the main goal of challenging canons of knowledge and traditional ways of establishing academic discourses and practices in the department. Our way of achieving our objective was to organise an event inspired by the International Afro-Latin American and Afro Caribbean Women's Day, annually held on the 25th of July. The event took place on the 1st of July with the title "**Challenging Academic Debates on Womanhood: A Decolonial Approach on Latin and Caribbean Identities**" and presented an array of international and interdisciplinary contributions from researchers and lecturers with different perspectives and positionalities, such as: Dr. Shirley Anne Tate, Lecturer at the University of Leeds who presented "**Olympians: Shade, Value, Nation**", Clarice Cohn, Lecturer at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (Brazil) who discussed affirmative actions for indigenous people in Brazil: "**Indigenous Women in Brazilian Universities: Deconstructing Gender and Scientific Knowledges**" and Lisa Palmer, Lecturer at the Birmingham City University who contributed with a paper entitled: "**OK People, this is Lovers Rock?: Gender, Decoloniality and the Cultural Politics of Love**", whilst postgraduate students presented in a panel discussion including the following topics: "**Afropussies on Cyberspace: How Black Queer 'Periférica' Women Use Nudes for Self-Appreciation and Resistance in Brazil**" by Gabriela Loureiro; "**Indigeneity and Blackness: Negotiating Identity among Brazilian Migrant Women in the UK**" by Katucha Bento; "**Herstories: Lessons of Love and Healing from the Laps of my Grandmothers**" by Leona Satchell-Samuels and "**Reading of Feminism from the Margin: A Decolonial Perspective**" by Tasnim Al-Ahdal. In addition, Mel Z (Melissa Owusu) closed the event with her poetry and rhythm inspiring us all to decolonise our minds. The Open Letter at the end of this edition is part of our activist movement at the University of Leeds, which intends to address issues about both the pedagogical agenda and the need to hire people of colour in the university, allying our decolonial positionality with movements such as "Why is my curriculum White?" and "Why isn't my professor Black?". We understood this activism as urgent from June 2015, presenting the letter on the following year, in March 2016. The conversation were received by the university

and we are still in the anti-racist negotiations about the curriculum and staff, doing the academic and emotional work as students/ researchers.

The contributions of the event are organised in this edition to bring critical attention to the joint struggles that Black, Caribbean and Latin American Feminism, as well as student movements face to claim our spaces, voices and alternative non-western/Eurocentric positionalities in an academic space that we want to build together; and they also resist traditional practices that canonize knowledge production, research and ways of conceiving the 'Other' inherent in Western universities. Our readers will be able to spot how the participants of the event found ways through their research to write about it for this edition of the GJSS, in order to establish a dialogue with the intersectional struggles and agency in the construction of Black Caribbean and Black Latin American Womanhood as validated figures of knowledge, power and strength. Due to the success of the event, we have now decided to establish a series of events on the topic of "**Challenging Academic Debates**", where each edition of each event will focus on bringing attention to alternative perspectives and voices working within and beyond the academy, followed by a publication that aims to give continuity to these dialogues.

As co-editors of this edition and organisers of the event, Katucha Bento and Tasnim Al-Ahdal would like to thank the professors, academics and students who helped make this all possible by allowing us to come together politically – whether reviewing, politically articulated as a symbol of our revolutionary power to change academia together: James Beresford, for being an essential presence as friend, postgraduate student rep, cameraman, intellectual inspiration and opening the doors of the Graduate Journal of Social Science to this edition along with Alankaar Sharma, who helped us organise and review the material.

We would also like to thank Minna Seikkula, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, LaTonia Siler-Holloman and Tiffany Holloman, whose support in conceptualising and realising our joint political effort of Decolonising Minds at the University of Leeds was and is still fundamental to us resisting coloniality and 'fighting the power'. Finally, we would like to warmly thank Sérgio Andre Rossi, who designed the logo for "Challenging Academic Debates" capturing so well our idea of moving/flying away from the white-male-European-heteronormative canons by validating knowledge from the margin.



## About the editors:

**Katucha Bento** is a PhD researcher based in the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies (CERS), School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds, UK. Her areas of interest are Black Feminist epistemology and activism, coloniality, emotions, affect, diaspora, politics of racialisation, post and decolonial thought.

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# Challenging Academic Debates on Womanhood: A Decolonial Approach to Caribbean and Latin American Identities

Shirley Anne Tate

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The title is nothing short of a great one that has been a long time coming within racism studies, critical race theory, gender studies, area studies and feminism, but it gives me pause for thought. This is so because what links the Caribbean and Latin America – a huge and diverse region in terms of peoples, languages and cultures – is a common history. In 1492, Christopher Columbus's voyage ignited ruthless exploitation, genocide of indigenous populations, destruction of societies, nations and empires, European colonialism, African/African descent enslavement, Indian Subcontinental, Chinese and Javanese indentureship, as well as the development of new societies and cultures within the so-called 'New World' (Wynter, 1991). 'The Caribbean' and 'Latin America' as regions emerged out of terror, trauma, displacement, and loss, and their very names tell of the history of their emergence from Europeans' discourse/power/knowledge complex. White Europeans were instantiated as the pinnacle of humanity, distinct from those other humans who were encountered and dubbed less than those subalterns, whose proper place is subjugation. Sylvia Wynter (1995) speaks about this as the effect of the Christian *propter nos*, which insisted that Caribbean indigenous populations, such as the Tainos and Arawaks, and Latin American indigenous populations, such as the Aztecs and Guarani, be moulded into Christians with no rights, including no rights over life. *Propter nos* became the basis of the bio-politics (Foucault, 2008), created by the racialised necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) of European colonialism, wealth extraction and plantation economies (Best & Levitt, 2009), extending from 1492 to the 1800s when African and African descent enslavement ended and indentureship began in some of the region. Economically, the plantation economies, created as



an appendage of European metropolitan economies, extended from 1492 until today, producing permanent dependence on foreign ownership, the IMF and World Bank.

As we broaden the boundaries of our affiliative, affective and political circle to link these two diverse regions, locating 1492 and its aftermath as that which produces our connectivity, this also means that we have to think about creolisation. This process was the great binding force within the region's nation states, as they were ideologically constructed as particularistic by their elites (Braithwaite, 2005; Ortiz, 1995). Moreover, creolisation as an anti-colonial impetus for movement away from "the philosophies of the One of the West" (Glissant, 1997) was also the point of the emergence of Caribbean decolonial thought (Wynter, 2003; Fanon, 1986; Césaire, 2001; Garvey, 2014), as it sought to create a Black worlding of the world outside of Eurocentrism. Indeed, Fanon's work in particular has been the foundation of Hispanophone Latin American decolonial thought. A decolonial attitude continues to lie at the centre of Caribbean and Latin American identifications even whilst the regions remain locked in neo-colonial relationships with former European colonisers and the United States.

What about these identities contained within the title? This title begs me to insert 'Black African descent' before womanhood or before Caribbean and Latin American. The will to change this title is based on my own positionality, the fact that 'Caribbean and Latin American' and 'Black African descent' as identification categories implicate mixing and European, Indigenous, Indian Sub-continental, Chinese, Javanese, Jewish, Syrian, and Lebanese ancestry but also that Blackness still impacts our lives as women from the South whether we live there or in the Global North West, since we live in the contexts of its emergence. Further, in parts of Latin America, Blackness struggles to be acknowledged as part of the nation. Of course, I do not want to say that we all occupy the same position as Black African descent women, as that would be disingenuous. We all know that class, skin colour, hair texture, education, gender identity, sexuality, gender, race, location and myriad other intersections texture our lives differently. However, there still remain points of similarity that connect us to each other as Black African descent women, whether in Havana, Trinidad, Bogota or Rio de Janeiro. It is these connections with which I can only partially attempt to engage, in order to map the outlines of what a decolonial approach to our identifications might look like in the times and spaces

in which we find ourselves within Black Atlantic zones, where strategic essentialism is politically necessary in 'post-race' states. What is interesting analytically, of course, is that we still have to start from the question of who is 'woman' in order to think through a Black African descent woman's approach to decoloniality (Wynter, 2006). Allied to this is the continuing deeply divisive political issue of who is or can be the 'authentic' Black African descent woman and, therefore, who has the right to speak for 'us' as an organic community. It is also important to look at the body itself as the position from which a decolonial approach to questions of identification must or, indeed, can proceed. However, what is this 'Black' which prefaces African descent, and how can it continue to be conceptualised given the varying approaches to race and nation in the regions with a call to 'Mama Africa' (Pinho, 2010; Cooper, 1995), centuries old Black Nationalisms (Garvey, 2014) and alter/native feminisms (Reddock, 2004; Espinosa-Miñoso, 2014)? Let us turn to looking at Blackness as a similarity and beloved home but also a space of intimate trauma and Black imposed subalternity, in order to begin some of the projects of its decolonisation.

## Blackness: Intimate trauma, subalternity, decoloniality

In the white worlding of the world, within which the academy generates the study of race and racism, Blackness and whiteness have been constructed in social, institutional and psychic life through a racialised "existential socio-diagnostics [which is] a convergence of individual involvement in social processes and the imposition of social processes on individualisation" (Gordon, 1997, p. 41). Within this existential socio-diagnostics, Jamaican feminist philosopher and cultural theorist, Sylvia Wynter OJ (2006), highlights the problem of consciousness and who can speak within the representational regimes established by Eurocentric hetero-patriarchal power/knowledge regimes:

You cannot solve the issue of 'consciousness' in terms of their body of knowledge. You just can't. Just as within the medieval order of knowledge there was no way in which you could explain why it is that certain planets seemed to be moving backwards. Because you were coming from a geocentric model, right?

So you had to 'know' the world in that way. Whereas from our 'Man-centric' model, we cannot solve 'consciousness' because Man is a purely ontogenetic/purely biological conception of being, who then creates 'culture'. So if we say consciousness is constructed who does the constructing? You see? (Wynter, 2006, p. 2)

She shows here the problem of power in constructing the world, culture and bodies, which must lie at the heart of an examination of who is let into the circle of representation and who can therefore speak (Spivak, 1993). That is how the intersections which texture our lives establish the conditions for who is made (in)visible in political struggle. The issues highlighted by Wynter here of who constructs consciousness and culture lead us to other important issues. That is, how it is that there is still feminist contestation over the construction of Black women's political consciousness, as well as struggle within Black politics and popular culture over the representation of Black women's bodies, both of which are still important politically. We are still not past these issues, and they still need to be decolonised, so as to remove intimate trauma and the divisions of Black-imposed subalternity.

This is significant because what is played again and again through Black African descent women's (in)visibility and the relations of distance and proximity to their bodies is "a violent namelessness committed against blacks whose familiarity is so familiar that it transforms the protective dynamics of anonymity itself" (Gordon, 1997b, p. 13). For anti-black racists, Black African descent women are not nameless; rather, we are the very familiar nothing (Gordon, 1997, p. 28), established by whiteness since colonialism, enslavement and indentureship. We are bodies with which no relationality is possible because we are visible only as white constructions. Thus, as Black African descent women, we experience the absent/presence, 'the perversity of 'seen invisibility' (Gordon, 1997b, p. 37), the hatred, sexism and racism contained in the term 'misogynoir,' coined by Moya Bailey in 2010 ("Meet Moya Bailey," 2010).

Misogynoir-ist theory keeps in place Black/white opposition through sociogenesis (Wynter, 2001). "Sociogenesis refers to the role of human institutions in the constitution of phenomena that human beings have come to regard as 'natural' in the physicalist sense of depending on physical nature" (Gordon, 1997, p. 33). If Black African descent women remain such 'things,' this denies their perspective on

the world, their 'worlding of the world' so to speak (Yancy, 2008). Notice the plural 'women' as we should resist the trap of homogenisation which strategic essentialist politics asks us to do because to homogenise is to erase the very differences which are fundamental to the decolonial project with which we are attempting to engage by going beyond the binary logic of colonial opposition. This logic births trauma, alienation and subalternity within Black women's political and intimate identifications.

Edouard Glissant (1997, p. 17) described decolonisation's going beyond this:

The conquered or visited peoples are ... forced into a long and painful quest after an identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror. A tragic variation of the search for identity. For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an "opposite" for colonised peoples identity will be primarily "opposed to" – that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonisation will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.

Glissant reminds us that in decolonising Black African descent women's identifications we have to leave behind that essentialist Black African descent Caribbean and Latin American womanhood, which is only capable of emerging through whiteness. What we must engage with instead is a becoming on our terms, a becoming which exists within our cultural memory of revolts, maroonage, anti-colonial struggle and the development of theory and politics beginning from Black African descent women's bodies. This is a becoming which counters "the phobic dimension of anti-black [woman] racism" (Gordon, 1997, p. 36) through decolonising the power, knowledge and effect of misogynoir. Becoming, power, knowledge and affect are important for the project of decolonising identifications as it has inserted the very Black African descent women's bodies and psyches which have hitherto been absent-presences. In the decolonising task set forth by Wynter (2006) and Glissant (1997), we must decentre whiteness but centre racism by taking a critical position on matters of racialised gender, racism and their intersections. We move away from the limitation of being solely opposed to whiteness



by undertaking explorations of anti-Black African descent woman racism from the position that “racism is ordinary” (Gilroy, 2004) and “everyday racism defines [racialised gender], interprets it, and decrees what the personal and institutional work of race will be” (Holland, 2012, p. 3). As Black African descent women, we are not beyond racism, patriarchy, homophobia, class discrimination and able-ism, even as we strive to become ourselves on our terms.

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# Weaving Brazilian Blackness in the United Kingdom: Nation, Race and Migration<sup>1</sup>

Katucha Bento

**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to discuss the notion of Blackness by using the intersectionality of gender, race, nationality and migration as the key aspects of lived experiences of how Blackness is negotiated. I will present how the notion of racial democracy in Brazil is present in the racialisation process and construction of self-identification. Based on the conversations during my doctoral research, I will problematise the racialised identity of Diaspora in the United Kingdom in order to understand how Blackness can be negotiated and acquires particular meanings according to situated experiences. Weaving Blackness is a metaphor to understand discourses present in the building up of self-descriptions of racialised identities entangled with coloniality of power, resistance, and perceptions of the self in the practices/performances of the everyday. Vectors such as on indigeneity, national identity and migration form intersectionalities that are explored through epistemological lenses of Black Feminism and Decolonial Thought.

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My PhD research entitled “Shackles of Colonialism: Lived Emotions of Black Brazilian Women in the United Kingdom” is dedicated to examining how Black Brazilian Women emotionally negotiate politics of “Othering” in the UK and how this negotiation is interlocked within an affect economy of coloniality and agency in the everyday lives of these women in the diaspora. I focus on Black Brazilian women as agents of historical processes (Collins, 1991) that produce identities, ideas of nation, knowledge values and sociabilities. To organise my fieldwork in order to map possible participants, I looked for Brazilian women who self-declared as



Black, taking into consideration the complexity of the Brazilian category related to Blackness, such as “*morena*”, “*mulata*”, “*parda*”, to cite a few “mixed-race” colours in the racialisation politics in Brazil (about racial identity and racialisation in Brazil: Gonzalez, 1979; Souza, 1983; Paixão and Carvano, 2008; Guimarães, 2001 among others).

The issues of colour and race in my thesis are a key aspect which also inspires me to discuss how I understand the process of “weaving Brazilian Blackness” in the United Kingdom. The historiography of racialisation politics in Brazil shows us that the coexistence between a strong slave trade in the enslaving society with the increasing manumissions that were starting to form a new “class” of “free men” in the context was one of the factors that encouraged the social imaginary and intellectual production to reproduce the idea of a “racial paradise” (Guimarães, 2001, 2008). The markers of differentiation referring to race in Brazil are so dynamic that a “socially White” person could self-declare to be identified racially as being of the “*morena*” category, commonly used for those “dark Whites” with sun tanning (in this case the term is more common in Northern Brazil); or brown/very light skinned people (Guimarães, 2008).

Colour categories are tools to soften the racialisation processes and racial conflicts, generating the possibility to create, reproduce and popularise the notion of “racial democracy”. Lelia Gonzalez and Carlos Hasenbalg (1982) say that believing in a racial democracy in Brazil implies the absence of racial prejudice and discrimination, and therefore, the existence of equal economic and social opportunities to Blacks and Whites. Gonzalez and Hasenbalg assert that the dissemination of racial democracy in the social thought (inside and outside academic production) is an “ideological weapon against Blacks in Brazil”, as the social hierarchies, social inequalities, and the ideal of equal opportunity remain predicated by the racial terrain (Gonzalez and Hasenbalg, 1982, p. 84).

The experiences of racialisation are not only embedded by the issue of race, but also gender and class (Davis, 1981; Collins, 1991), an intersectionality that has many implications with regards to a shared but different experience of racism. In the case of Black Brazilian women, depending on the region they were located in Brazil, the identification of colour/race with Blackness, experiences, and perceptions of self, of each other, and of racism will vary based on such regional realities as well as being defined by class and social hierarchies in their life experiences.

Race/colour categories in different regions were present in the discourse of development – the advent of modernity as a national project in Brazil – which pointed to Northern Brazil as a ‘not suitable’ region for such transformation, where subaltern races and classes were the representations of tardiness of progress (Albuquerque Jr. 1999). The image of underdeveloped regions in Brazil were embedded with a racist repertoire using racial descriptions of “northern Brazilian” as a racialised category of “black/ mixed/ mulatto”, forging the ‘new racism in Brazil’ (Guimarães, 1999). Naturalising the image of Northern Brazilians as racialised peoples was also the strategy to differentiate development of Southern Brazil through a racist perspective, because the more South in Brazil, the concentration of white people increases and racialised people decreases. Therefore, a light skinned mixed raced person may be racialised as “black” in Southern Brazil, whereas the same skin colour may be considered as “white” in Northern Brazil. As Thales de Azevedo (1996) points out, this racialisation politics is not only about colour/race, but also physical features (hair, nose, and lips), dressing code, ways of speaking, good manners etc. (Guimarães, 1999).

Racialisation politics in Brazil is part of what Stuart Hall (1990) discusses metaphorically about Diaspora identities, as a complex process that is “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, 1990, p. 235). What I mean by Diaspora identities in this paper is a reference to the key and inevitable tension between Black Brazilian women having a shared identification with regards to intersectionality whilst maintaining the specificity of their lived experience with Blackness. My interest in this article is to understand how such a complex construction of Brazilian Blackness – a Diaspora identity – is negotiated in the British context, where the intersectionality of nation, race, gender and migration form important markers of differentiation in the debate of weaving Blackness within oppression, struggles and agency.

In this paper, I will first explain my exercise of weaving threads of Blackness in negotiation with the politics of racialisation, built with/ around/ against/ in resistance of stereotypes and marginalisation of Black people. Although Blackness is commonly identified with stereotypical hegemonic elements in the process of subjectification of non-White Western bodies, agency is implied in this space of negotiation, destabilising and re-signifying norms in order to place the marginalised Black at the centre (Arrizón, 2002; 2008). Weaving Blackness is a metaphor

to capture through my theoretical lenses – Critical Race Theory, Post- and Decolonial Thought and Black Feminism – how Black Brazilian Diaspora Women in the United Kingdom are negotiating their non-White European identity. Secondly, I will present the particularities that, in their multiple ways, may entrench the notion of Blackness in the Brazilian setting as important threads in weaving the identification of race in the Diaspora (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Brah, 1996). Such particularities are explored in more depth through the conversation analysis with one participant in order to deconstruct the notion of “racial democracy” within the discourse of Indigeneity, Blackness and Whiteness in Brazil and how it is lived in the British context. Finally, I conclude the paper by challenging the hegemonic Black and White binary constructing Blackness, suggesting a dialogical negotiation of weaving together racialised identities in the Diaspora.

## Weaving Blackness: The heteroglossia of coloniality

The idea of *weaving* Blackness for me is a way of examining the aspects of coloniality and heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1986) present within the building up of racialised self-descriptions through the narratives of Black Brazilian women in this research. The articulation of race to classify the world’s population into unequal social positionalities of capitalism and modernity, that Quijano (2000) calls “coloniality of power”, is part of the discursive construction of meanings. The racial system was introduced by coloniality of power that “has been consistently perverse, violent, and demeaning, turning people into animals” (Lugones, 2008, p. 12). Considering coloniality of power in discourse analysis helps to shed light over the social and emotional production of racialised perceptions of the self in practices/performances of the everyday.

Discourses are entangled in utterance and dynamic in which Blackness is constituted and unconstituted. This is to say that Blackness is negotiated in the everyday experiences in which coloniality of power, racialisation processes, and racialised performativities are practices of languages impacting the social (de) construction of Blackness. I am using the metaphor of weaving to understand practices of negotiating Black identifications as the excellence of discourses. To begin aiming at extrapolating fixed binary structures, my effort is to raise a “re-description” (Fish, 1989) of how Blackness is constructed, by offering a critical and



political understanding of whose voices are centered and in utterance in the discursive construction of Blackness. Weaving together Blackness is a necessary act, in Susan Friedman's words:

Groups who have been denied the agency and status of the individual for reasons of race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual preference (and so forth) have traditionally felt excluded from "the American Dream" ... Redefinitions of the Self to be (re)claimed have been critically important to these movements. (Friedman, 1991b, p. 157).

Friedman (1991b) points to the relevance of engaging with a multiplicity of meanings and experiences, which in this paper will be presented in one of the many and constant available (re)interpretations of Blackness that I call weaving Blackness. The main inspiration to the discursive action of weaving are my grannies. Both of them (from my father's and mother's families) used to weave. To illustrate this, I will use my granny's rituals of doing tricot: choosing the appropriate needle for the knit; deciding the texture, colour, thickness and length of the thread; sitting in a place they find comfortable; putting on their glasses; positioned in such a way that they could, not only see what they were weaving, but at the same time watch us (grandkids) playing. The ritual allowed them to produce different formats of clothes, change colours and threads during the weaving process, and even undo their knitting in case they made a mistake or changed their minds. One of my first jumpers weaved by one of my grannies during my childhood had different colourful stripes; each stripe with a different colour, texture and thickness of wool and my name in the centre. I remember my grannie unraveling certain parts of her weaving having missed the measure of one of my arms, and asking me which colour I preferred to be attached to the next stripe she was about to weave. Weaving something new, that can never be repeated, is embedded with the continuity<sup>2</sup> of the ritual in terms of the different possibilities of using what was woven to borrow, sell, donate in the process of being passed hand to hand, body to body in which the fabric would take different shapes, meanings, and emotions. This metaphor helps me grasp an answer to 'what could weaving mean for the construction of Blackness?'

Just as the process of my grannies' weaving did not end at the last knit, being reinterpreted according to the context; the process of construction of Blackness

also has the nuances of embodiment and particularities according to their performative agencies in the process of weaving the self-racial identification. Weaving, as a self-identification process does not seem to be a “solo project”; rather, it is always in dialogue with other voices (heteroglossia), the historical venues it took to become a form of expression, to whom it will be addressed and its relationship with space and time. I found intersectionality a suitable tool for this research, to understand the heteroglossia present in the construction of Blackness (Crenshaw, 1989) between race, gender, class and nation. The intersectionality of how multiple identities of Blackness, oppressions and agency are being validated on the ground of Diaspora is intrinsically related to coloniality of power (Quijano, 1991). The relationship with coloniality here indicates on one hand the cosmology, knowledge and organisation based on Eurocentric, White, male, hegemonic, Christian, heteronormative references that represent the pillar of power relations, system of production and exclusion in a modern society (Quijano, 1991). On the other hand, intersectionality exists in relationship with possible decolonised ways of self-representations and redescriptions (Fish, 1989); but in this case, not as a contradiction of the prior as opposite binaries, but as a process of transformation in which possible strategies for individual and collective identity take place (Arizón, 2000).

Weaving of Blackness, for me and the participants of my research, is part of the dialogical process in which we authenticate each other’s narratives of racialised identities through our performances, particularities, differences and similarities (Freire, 1999). We are weaving together notions of what Blackness may be through conversation (Bakhtin, 1986) used as the thread to negotiate our positionalities about our Black identities. The metaphorical thread of the ‘position of voice’ – marginalised, absent, through body language, among other tools to (re)produce meaning in the language game – on Blackness is part of the racialisation politics in Brazil. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin helps me to understand the dialogic context in which Blackness is weaved:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends to the boundless past and the boundless future). (...) At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogues

subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (Bakhtin, 1986, p.170).

There is a continuity of discourse through space and time such as voices of agency, identity, and coloniality of power – which predicates the institutional racism, hegemonic White, heterosexist power. These multiple voices, languages, body expressions are what Bakhtin (1986) calls “heteroglossia”. The voices are in relation to each other, (in)forming and being (in)formed by each other, mixing different levels of sovereignty and subalternity; *affecting* the way we see ourselves, constructing our racial identities and establishing conversations in which all this will be (re)negotiated with new textures, formats, knits. In this sense, heteroglossia helps us to understand that there is no classification – whether it is material, emotional or psychological – nothing is static, fixed or crystallised (hooks, 1991; Hunter, 2012; Lugones, 2014; Tate, 2005, 2009, 2014).

Unraveling the voices present in a conversation will allow me to explore links with coloniality and its continuity through the racial classifications present in my participants’ voices. As a tricot, I am suggesting that the idea of Blackness can be modified and remodeled; it never stops at the end of the last knit, or at the end of a conversation. In Bakhtin’s words about conversation: “it always creates something that has never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and moreover, it always has some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth)” (Bakhtin, 1986, 119–20). This perspective is committed to the shared cultural values and sociabilities that Patricia Hill Collins (1991) considers part of the construction of Blackness. With this framework, I am referring to the Brazilian Black Movement’s fight to promote Blackness in the political agenda, self-esteem – mainly of young Black people in the country – and its relationship with African elements to find the root of Brazilian Blackness. By presenting the possibility of understanding Blackness as a process that is weaved according to the local context in the heteroglossia, I intend to de-essentialise how we promote the negotiation of Black identity, not as a given fact, but as an everyday performativity lived and experienced with particularities that affect and are affected by coloniality (Tate, 2005; Arrizón, 2002).

Here, I am pushing my own limitations of being implicated in the research also as a Black Brazilian woman, breaking through the Cartesian Eurocentric thought

in an effort to explore the many possibilities that may be used to make Black Brazilian women feel their Blackness. This feeling of Blackness is part of the complex racial classifications in Brazil and the attribution of meaning in their migratory experience in the United Kingdom. Both contexts enrich the analysis with multiple voices of different nationalities, languages, institutions, emotions that are *affecting* the ideas and perceptions verbalised at the moment of conversation: the threads forming new shapes of texture. The multiple voices in a dialogue are present to formulate an idea that goes beyond the spoken language: the body language, the external voices (of friends, family, strangers, politicians, etc.) brought in during the talk, the situations or historical aspects that help to contextualise the understanding of the talk (Bakhtin, 1986; Tate, 2005). This is where the inherent tensions are manifested – through discourse – and negotiated, promoting the contradictions, oppressions and multiplicity of what it is like to be a racialised-gendered migrant. Not everything is directly spoken, but represented in many other ways during the dialogue, in this dynamic entanglement of discourse production (Bakhtin, 1986).

The heteroglossia present in one narrative – with its relational dynamic as intertextuality/ intersubjectivity – can be identified in their relationship with other social voices (discourses), affecting and being affected through time and space. In the conversation analysis inspired by Bakhtin, affect circulates through the discourses shaping and being shaped according to the local context and knowledge (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2010; Haraway, 1988; Hemmings, 2005; Ahmed, 2004; Tate, 2014). In my experience as a Black Brazilian migrant woman in the United Kingdom, I perceive that my own construction of Blackness comes from different venues where the Black movement, samba community, academic work are all embedded in the experience of being “Othered” through my Diaspora experience. I retake social voices (discourses) to contextualise the narratives of the participants<sup>3</sup> in order to critically explore the narratives and invoke the contextual discourses that are contouring the new possibilities of dialogue. What I find fruitful from centering Black Brazilian women’s voices in this research is the investigation of the similarities and differentiation among their standpoints. Weaving Blackness with them, therefore, also requires troubling/non-acceptance of the prescribed criteria of legitimisation of the canon of scholarships that crystallise ideas of Blackness, highlighting the diversity, richness, and power of Black women’s ideas as part of a long-standing Black women’s community (Collins, 1991).

## Who is Black in the “Racial Democracy” of Brazil?

Race in Brazil plays a central role in the hierarchies and coloniality of power present within social relations. This centrality does not mean that it is directly manifested or debated. On the contrary, race is reflected by the dialectic of hyperconsciousness and negation that affects the racial democracy ideology (Vargas, 2004). João H. Costa Vargas (2004) presents such a dialectic of hyperconscious/negation, which is mutually constitutive of a discussion of how Brazilians understand social hierarchies in dichotomies where thinking about and repressing; interrogating and passively accepting; and justifying and ignoring obscure the role that race plays in the social structures of power. The idea of racial democracy therefore, while it reinforces the silencing of the importance of race in the social relations, also strengthens social inequalities (Vargas, 2004; Gonzalez, Hasenbalg, 1982).

The hyperconscious/negation of racialised people in Brazil is analysed by Joel Zito Araujo through his study on the representation of the Black woman in Brazilian dramaturgy, which demonstrates how the female Black figures are represented as part of the construction of a national identity, in the context of Brazil's racial democracy (Araujo, 2006; 2008). Araujo argues that the media reinforces the argument of marginalisation and positions Black people in “their places” as subjugated individuals (Araujo, 2006, 2008). Therefore, the negation of the importance of race in having present racialised peoples, denying race as a determinant factor in the Brazilian social hierarchies (Vargas, 2010). The invisibility of the “racial” issue naturalises the Black representation with “impure ugliness” and “social humiliation” faced by Black actors and football players seen by the Brazilian public in general with acceptance (Araujo, 2008). The hyperconsciousness of race lies within this argument as symptomatic, with vehement insistence in saying that race is manifested and represented to be denied (Vargas, 2004), forged as harmonic social relations of racial democracy (Hasenbalg, 1979).

The narratives of racial democracy runs through myth and ideology that forge an idea of a nation where all Brazilians “are equals and live without racially motivated conflict. The force of such a myth becomes impressive when we take into account that Brazil has the largest Afro-descended population in the hemisphere and is second only to Nigeria in the world” (Vargas, 2004, p. 445). Racial democracy gives the notion of equal contributions to the nation, regardless of the violence

imposed through colonisation and White power that is established. This apparent friendly aspect in racial relations entails the notion of equal representation of the Blacks, the Indigenous and the White Europeans forming the Brazilian society, culture, and language (Da Matta, 1983). This perception is one of the possible versions of the coloniality of power in Brazil. It reinforces the presence of the European, in detriment of the “other” Indigenous and African peoples, workforce, culture and language (Schwarcz, 1995). The Asian presence in Brazil is not even mentioned during the process of the construction of the Nation-State in Brazil.

It is with this myth that “race” appears as the fundamental – and visible (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000) – definition of national identity. At the same time that it is not debated racism is not confronted. Along with the racial hierarchies, miscegenation was an important element that makes cultural dynamics visible within national identity, such as samba for example, and gives the notion of peaceful racial relations, known as racial democracy (about racial democracy and visible/ invisible dynamics of racialisation in Brazil: Guimarães, 2001; Vargas, 2004). That is to say, these myths were lived paradigms of the everyday life in the formation of a nation-State where miscegenation, hybridity and *mestizaje* were powerful threads weaved by coloniality; political agenda of racialised groups (Indigenous and Black); and agency towards self-classification and racial performativity.

The daily, lived experience is a clever part of the mechanism of racism, which one of the participants, Tamara (34 years old, from Sao Paulo) narrated as part of her childhood at the private school where she studied the first years of her education. She was bullied, called “monkey” and “*neguinha da beija flor*” (this term is a reference to *Neguinho da Beija Flor*, an acclaimed Black samba singer from Rio de Janeiro who is part of the School of Samba called Beija Flor. The translation of his name would be “little Black guy from Beija Flor”, therefore, the translation of this “name calling” is “little Black girl from Beija Flor”). Tamara also told me about racist songs the kids would sing to her at break time at school. This is one example of how racism is present in our everyday lives since early age as a joke, a song, something that seems trivial and can be “only in our heads”. Tamara told me she knew that being called a “*neguinha da beija flor*” was not a way to praise her Black female body, but at school and at home this did not seem to be a problem of racism. “*Neguinha da beija flor*” is a reminder of her marginal place in that context of private school with a majority of White students, or as Tamara says, “without



any Black representativity” (about children experiencing racism at school: Bicudo, 1955; Ginsberg, 1955; Telles, 2003). ‘Monkey’ is the animalistic category addressed to Black people since colonial times within European aesthetic conventions; the Western ‘*way of seeing*’ and representing the “Other” (Hall, 1992, 1997).

The heteroglossia around Brazilian Blackness, therefore, is embodied with arguments that rely on the Western European considerations of who is racialised (Fanon, 1952; Hall, 1992) as well as arguments of agency and self-identifications, very often deliberating that everyone has a Black/Indigenous heritage somehow, making racial identification a complex entangled dynamic between skin shade and possibilities of racial classifications. What makes this racial identification process more complex than simple binaries between Black and White is the colonial way to undermine the Black and Indigenous people, the reaction of the Black and Indigenous moments around the design of a political agenda, and the way Brazilian people incorporated both in the mythical construction of agency in their racial self-identification process (more about the myth of racial democracy and the formation of Brazil with three races on Schwarcz, 1993, 1995, 2012). Here, I am interested in exploring the multiple possibilities through which Black women perceive their Blackness. The next example is the beginning of my conversation with Fabiola (37 years old, from Espírito Santo, Brazil):

- 1 K: Tell me a bit more... Why do you consider yourself part of the research? How do
- >2 you self-classify racially?
- 3 F: In Brazil I classify myself as *parda* [brown], mainly because of the lack of option in
- >4 having something intermediary between Black and White, I guess. I don't see myself
- >5 as White, although this is something for lots of discussions around the table of pubs
- >6 among my friends.
- 7 K: Ok.
- 8 F: Because they think I'm White. But as it is... Self-declaration, anyway, I don't see
- >9 myself as White...
- >10 Here I define myself as 'mixed other', because in fact, I think that I am a mixture of a
- >11 bunch of things. Now, I, I... In my opinion, in Brazil is always very difficult to
- >12 associate... race with social status, right? You can be more or less White depending
- >13 on how much money you have in your bank account and that makes it very difficult.
- >14 Ultimately, people declare themselves as... Something different than White. Mainly

>15 who is mixed...

16 K: I understand...

17 F: Because if you say that you are Black doesn't mean necessarily that you are poor,

>18 but in the collective imaginary, it is much closer to a lower social class, or not.

19 K: Uhum

20 F: And maybe, I think that my ensign of declaring myself as *parda* is to show that

>21 there is nothing related with social class, but in how you see yourself, I guess.

22 K: I understand. Sure. And what is the venue you trace to classify yourself as

>23 *parda*?

24 F: I think it is a mixture of Black and Indigenous and White, too, you know?

25 K: Uhum

26 F: Certainly. But on the spectrum, if we would trace a rainbow of races, I would see

>27 myself halfway. Right there. With a huge Indigenous influence.... And Black, too.

28 K: Ok.

29 F: That is why I declare myself as *parda*.

This excerpt gives me the opportunity for a wide range of analyses about racial classifications in Brazil. In this paper, I will explore three aspects of how Blackness is weaved in this conversation: 1) the construction of Blackness among Indigenous and Black identities; 2) The intersectionality of Black challenging the stereotype of class; 3) The racial self-declaration in Brazil and whether it remains in her migratory project. The first analysis about the self-declaration asserts Fabiola's potency of how she wants to negotiate her positioning (line 3 and 8) in the "rainbow of races" (26) based on the cultural-political awareness of racial self-classification during the 90's in Brazil. The heteroglossia of this conversation along with institutional voices of how self-declaration is an ongoing racial negotiation is related more to colours – the marker of differentiation through skin shade and miscegenation – than the idea of race – the origin of kinship and generation (Nogueira, 1985).

Self-declaration during the 70's was in strong demand by the Brazilian Black movement under the slogan "*não deixe sua cor passar em branco*". The literal translation would be "do not allow your colour go by unnoticed", but the play with the words in Portuguese as "*passar em branco*" has a double meaning of "passing as White" and "passing unnoticed". The claim puts forward a powerful argument

for a racial and political visibility of Black people during a period of dictatorship when Black cultural activities (religion, music, civil organisation) were violently repressed. In Nella Larsen's words on passing she states that "passing asks us to read the 'error' of identity to acknowledge that when talking about passing we are also talking about the story that passing enables us to tell, the story of Identity as necessarily always displaced" (Larsen, 2003, p. 52). As a result of the pressure from the Black movement, the 1976 census adopted the racial self-declaration style, resulting in 136 different expressions for self-declaration (Moura, 1988). It represents 136 ways to perceive Blackness. This research was made public on national television and didactic books under the ideology of a multi-racial country in a racial democracy. After that, Census decided to keep only five categories of colour for its demographic study, which are: *negro* (Black), *pardo* (brown), *vermelho* (red), *amarelo* (yellow) and *branco* (White). Census uses the colours in the questionnaires for self-declaration; race is used to compile the data that will indicate the race of the Brazilian population. The colours *pardo* and *negro* would represent the Black race; red, the Indigenous; yellow the Oriental (in a broad general way "Oriental race" is much more related to the Japanese migration to Brazil during World War II) and the White colour would be the White race (Schwarcz, 1995; 2012).

The "rainbow" that Fabiola refers to in line 26 is the representation of this perception of harmonic colours united as a nation. Not only does she point out the treads of how to weave *her* Blackness, but also her location, "in the middle". Despite her autonomy, there is a reluctance to self-declare, after all, there is not a word on this ("lack of option", line 3) for someone who believes herself to be a mixture of White, Indigenous and Black in Brazil. This lack of wording Blackness beyond the mixture of Black and White is part of the aforementioned way in which racial democracy is forged, situating miscegenation discourses through the 'conception' of Whiteness. Here, Fabiola promotes a redescription the meaning of "*parda*", weaving the constituted Black and White mixture into a dynamic self-declaration process, not only in terms of miscegenation of Black, White and Indigenous but also in how she negotiates that beyond around the table of pubs (5), in the everyday and with me at the moment of our conversation. In my point of view, Fabiola has a light skin that could be socially considered as White in the Brazilian context and she is aware of this possibility, but confronting it (line 4 to 6) with her own of Blackness.

The negotiation present in Fabiola's narrative also points to the intersection of race and nationality, suggesting a criticism of how people racialised as Black are usually associated with poverty (lines 12, 13) and her detachment of class in her racial self-declaration (lines 17, 18, 20, 21). Intersectionality is reinforced here by her denial to recognise class as part of the reality of racialised groups. The privilege of how she navigates with her Blackness through the White, Black and Indigenous identity of "*parda*" allows her to be a smaller target of being racialised as marginalised poor considering her light skin shade. Moreover, a smaller target to suffer violent backlashes of racism and discrimination, including in her migratory experience as a Brazilian woman. This privilege speaks also from her middle class background, which allows her to navigate spaces of poverty – Fabiola grew up in an area near the favela where she was used to play with the kids there – and upper middle class – she also frequented tennis courts and private schools during her life. Nowadays she can afford to self-fund the living costs and courses to launch her career, paying fees of international students in London, where the cost of living is known to be one of the highest in Europe. I am pointing out here that dismissing class from the racialised identity may be part of the privileges that are not particularly related with the working class struggles, in which intersectional oppressions could be more present/ violent.

To be "*parda*" is usually related to being of a lighter skin of Black, usually associated with the miscegenation between Black and White, despite heritage or origin. In this particular conversation with Fabiola, she critically points to the limitations in the "measure" of racialised groups in Brazil. At the same time, she denies her friends' statements about her being White while also denying the institutional options for what she believes to be her racialised identity. The challenges she faces in negotiating her claimed Blackness in Brazil somehow finds comfort in the category of "mixed other" in the United Kingdom. This leads to another debate about the (in)visibility of "others" in the British context and the reproduction of the "rest" in relation to the "West" (Hall, 1992; Schwarz, 1996). I would argue that finding comfort in the category of "mixed other" could be another trap of racism. In times of the Brexit, when migrants are institutionally portrayed (politics and the media) as a threat for jobs and the moral integrity of national identity, the "mixed other" is a target of racism. At the same time, the "mixed other" is indeed, anything that can be/ wants to be racialised. This racial category that Fabiola feels represents

her Blackness is also the quality of her location, the place of race and nationality indicating she is not “originally” from here. These classifications take different meanings in her condition of migrant, requiring a different negotiation process of addressivity (Bakhtin, 1986): how she wants to self-identify and how she wants to be addressed by others. It is a weaving process that she does not do alone, but with the discourses present through time and space around/ within coloniality, her friends’ ways of radicalising her and my positionality as “Black” inquiring her about her Blackness. The meaning of “race” has a different national context where the Great Britain, Britishness and Englishness are playing a new role in the process of racialization and nationality. Weaving Blackness with Fabiola is understanding the continuity of making meanings with politics of racialisation that, the way we perceive and feel our racialised identities, needs to be re-inscribed, de-constructed, and remodelled.

## Final Considerations

This conversation opens venues for further analysis on how Blackness is weaved in the social fabric where race, class, gender and nationality play such important roles to define, classify, mark and differentiate one another. For now, this paper provides a partial approach to studies on Diaspora that consider the discourses and practices as important aspects in the everyday experiences of racialised peoples. The focus of this analysis was an attempt to challenge the ways in which the hegemonic power is articulated through the colonial perspective of “the West” and negotiated from the agency and resistance of Black Brazilian migrant women in the United Kingdom. The conversation with Fabiola shows how crucial it is to move away from binaries or fixed notions of race, embarking on notions of what constitutes intersectionality in this situated way to weave Blackness through dialogue (Bento, 2011; Gonzalez, 1979; hooks, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Lugones, 2014; Tate, 2005).

Exploring how weaving Blackness has its continuity and meaning negotiated in the experiences of the everyday, at the local level of race politics it makes sense to understand how racism is placed through/within the conjuncture of its dynamic. The possible structures of racism is what makes intersectionality useful to me: as a tool to understand lived oppressions and resistance in the experiences

of the everyday wherein Blackness is performed, negotiated, and *felt*. As a final consideration, I must point to: (1) the importance of exploring in more depth how the dynamics of power within the politics of racialisation is used to represent the “other” in the British context, in order to explore and locate marginalised diasporic experiences within other such contexts. (2) To understand the marginal narrative as part of a multiplicity of voices (heteroglossia), which *affects* and is *affected* by different dimensions of voices that can point to hegemonic discourses and discourses of resistance/ agency, weaving new meanings of racialised experiences in Diaspora. (3) Moving away from binarisms in my effort to explore how Blackness is negotiated raises the need to go beyond Black African centered references of Black identities. This enables new understandings of positionalities among Brazilian Indigenous and other racialised groups in Brazil that are weaving together identities/ performativity/ discourses of Blackness. Weaving is a way to reclaim the Black identity with particularities of our multiple racialised selves.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the event “Challenging Academic Debates on Womanhood: A Decolonial Approach on Caribbean and Latin American Identities” organised at the University of Leeds on July 1, 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> In this paper, I am referring to continuity as a process that is not fixed, crystallised in time and space. I argue that such continuity is not linear. Rather, it is embedded with tensions, fragments, dimensions, and contradictions that are part of the weaving process.
- <sup>3</sup> By centralising Black Brazilian women’s voices, I would also like to call attention to the inevitable tensions in the power relations during the research process in which my position as a researcher of data promotes an imbalance of power.

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# Affirmative Actions for Indigenous Peoples in Brazilian Universities and Ethnology Studies from a Dialogical Perspective: An Interview with Clarice Cohn

Katucha Bento and James Beresford

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Clarice Cohn is the coordinator of the Observatory of Indigenous School Education at Federal University of Sao Carlos (Universidade Federal de São Carlos, UFSCar) and the Laboratory of Studies and Research in Child Anthropology (LEPAC). She was also a member of the Affirmative Action Committee and later the Affirmative Action Program Management Group at UFSCar.

Clarice accepted the invitation to be one of the keynotes in the event 'Challenging Academic Debates on Womanhood: A Decolonial Approach on Caribbean and Latin American Identities' to discuss 'Indigenous Women in Brazilian Universities: Deconstructing Gender and Scientific Knowledges'. In order to organise a series of contributions for this special edition of the Graduate Journal of Social Science, we considered that it would be important to introduce the topic of Affirmative Action (AA) in Brazil from the perspective of someone who researches with indigenous groups, teaches and is present actively in the affirmative actions from inside the university.

We organised a set of questions about issues related to AA and ethnology in the Brazilian context to which Clarice responded through email. This was our solution to facing the distance and divergences in our agendas to have a face to face interview (even through digital means). What is presented here is the start of a conversation that urges to have a continuity with a critical perspective about possible alternatives of reparations, decolonial positionalities acknowledging privi-



leges and the struggles of racialised groups, along with other topics that may be raised from this interview. We believe that the dialogue is constant in search for decolonised spaces of knowledge and constant growth.

**1) Could you begin by telling us briefly the history of indigenous populations in Brazil, and the various oppressions and colonial violences they have endured?**

To begin with, we can get a good image of it by considering that the Indigenous population in the Brazilian territory is thought to have numbered four or five million before the arrival of European colonizers, and there are around 800.000 Indigenous persons living in Brazil today. So, we have been witnessing in Brazilian history a real genocide, which, unfortunately, has not yet finished.

Brazilian Indigenous Peoples are from many ethnic and linguistic families, and as far as it is known there are around 300 Indigenous languages spoken today, and something of around 200 ethnic affiliations. These peoples live all around the country, from north to south, in many different situations, in Indigenous Lands, in rural areas, in cities. They have met the Non-Indigenous differently, and if some of them had to live with them for 516 years, some are still living in what the State nowadays calls “voluntary isolation”. This means having no regular contact with the non-Indigenous. It is worth mentioning that all these situations have their vulnerabilities, but they must be seen as a product of both the history of the nation, with the peoples from the coast having had to cope with colonizers for longer, as well as with the wishes and strategies of those peoples themselves, many of them having used strategies to not have to live with the colonizers, such as going to live inland, running away from missions, etc.

Colonial violences are multiple. From the beginning, Portuguese, French and some Dutch colonizers used Indigenous enemies with each other to get control of the territories. So, they would make themselves allies of a group and fight against their enemies. The result was a complex system combining National (Portuguese, French, Spanish, Dutch) and the many Indigenous groups alliances, with a history of war – but a different war, which directed European control over what had been Indigenous lands. Those Europeans also used Indigenous work to exploit Pau-Brazil [tree], the wood from which is used to dye tissues red (this is the wood that named the country: *brasa* means ember in Portuguese).

Colonizers would also colonize souls, and many missions were built, to where Indigenous Peoples were taken from many different places (the “descimentos”) to live together, where they were taught Catholicism and Portuguese. Many of these missions would also congregate Indigenous children taken from their families and communities to learn religion, Portuguese and European techniques of agriculture (as if the indigenous ones were not good enough), and then the children would go back to their communities and teach the others what they learned – sort of making these children colonizers of their own peoples.

It is a complex history, as the national history changed so much between national control (Portuguese, Spanish), the power of the church in each moment (strong for many centuries; was weakened at some points), territorial control, and the production and use of resources. Indigenous Peoples were used as slaves in some points of this history, and they were even used to enslave other Indigenous Peoples, but they were substituted by African slavery (in a complex historical movement, in which for many years and in many places both slaveries co-existed, as the Indigenous Peoples were even called the “Negroes from the land”).

We could not forget the continuous violences made by those non-Indigenous residents that aimed Indigenous Peoples as workers and their land. That is a continuing violence, and many Indigenous Peoples, specially their leaders, are still nowadays killed to get control of their land.

Women were a specific target of these violences, having had their bodies violated by colonizers. They were made wives and procreators in many different ways and in many parts of the country – as “pegar a laço”, been taken by force, is a well-known expression in Brazil. In many places where there are conflicts over the land, colonizers would violate Indigenous women and kill them as a mark of their force and power.

In the 20th Century, the State would address issues of Indigenous well-being with a specific Service, which in some points protected them of the continuing violence, but not always. Indigenous lands were created and many Peoples had their right to the territory recognized. The Constitution from 1988 recognized their rights for land, for their different cultures and languages, for keeping their social and political organization, and for specific services of schooling and health care.

But violences are ongoing. Nowadays there are many evangelical churches among Indigenous Peoples, even in Indigenous lands, which, like the Catholic

Church in the past, aim to control their souls; there are many conflicts for land that could even make some populations disappear; there have been many community leaders killed in recent years; many indigenous lands are a sort of oasis in monocultural plantations, which make these lands poor in resources and often contaminated by the products used on the farms; projects of dams and roads made by the State itself impact indigenous lives and lands; and State services catering for the indigenous are not really as specialized as they should be. This means that their schooling is really poor, as well as the health attention, the biggest rate of children's mortality in the country being among Indigenous Peoples.

**2) In these years researching and coexisting with indigenous groups, tell us about your experience with activism and the moments you take part in it.**

Indigenous Peoples have been mobilizing themselves and Indigenous Movements have gained strength in the last decades, with many organizations and unified movements developing. They have also gained space in the media and recognition, a very important thing, as for many centuries Brazil thought of these Peoples are ending. They have been struggling also against another stereotype that would say how indigenous a person is by the language s/he spoke, the way s/he looked, where s/he came from .... they have been successful to show the country that it is possible to be Indigenous and living in the cities, etc. (and Brazil has signed Convention 169, which makes it legal).

I have been working for 25 years with an Indigenous People from Amazonia called Xikrin. We have been facing together many threats for their land, from miners and timber exploitation. But it became very difficult in the beginning of this century with the building of Belo Monte Dam near their land. As well as taking their land resources, there was pressure on the entire population that goes there to build the dam, because they would soon see themselves with no work, the risk of alcoholism and prostitution, etc., will take also their river. The dam makes a deviation in the natural course of the Xingu River, taking its water from many Indigenous lands, as well as putting at risk the Bacaja River where the Xikrin live in, which runs to the Xingu exactly where it will be dry (and it is commencing, as the dam is beginning to function).

I was called by them and by FUNAI, the federal service for Indigenous Peoples,

to take part in the studies of the social, economic and ecological impacts made by technicians on the dam. That was a very difficult task, since, as an anthropologist, I was not seen as a technician by them, and would talk in name of the Xikrin and their interests. This was not the way technicians saw things, and sometimes it was very difficult to explain to them. I collaborated as well in meetings and the studies the Public Ministry had made to evaluate the dam and its impacts. I therefore worked in the interface between the Xikrin, the builders, the State (FUNAI) and the Public Ministry (MPF). It was a very uncomfortable situation, especially regarding anthropology as a discipline, which doesn't have much of an idea of what should be public and political action of academic researchers like me. Many would say that I worked "for the builders." As I put it, I was beside the Xikrin trying to negotiate their situation in case the dam was built, and trying to make them heard using my knowledge of their language and culture, as well as my expertise. I was really very afraid, as I was aware of the limits of my action and influence, but the Xikrin was helping I would be able to work with them to avoid the building of the dam. I thought many times I was going to lose the friends who had for many years, as they put it, seen me grow older, just as I had seen their children grow up.

Of my two big worries, one happened – the dam was built, so we lost our war. But the other worry didn't happen, and we keep all the love we feel for each other – me and the Xikrin. This also means I will be still by their side to see for the real impacts the dam have and how to cope with them, working still with them, with FUNAI and MPF.

I have written extensively about schooling, having done researches as well as consultancies. I collaborated on the formulation of the Federal politics for schooling of the younger Indigenous children, as one of my specialties is Anthropology of children and the research of Indigenous childhood, and – along with representatives on Indigenous Peoples, FUNAI and the Ministry of Education – we proposed a policy which was promulgated. It allowed families that needed to take their young children to schools, such as those who lived in cities or worked in farms, to have special schools to take them, and that these would be culturally responsible institutions. It also guaranteed that the families who would rather take care of their younger children themselves would not to be forced to put them in schools. That was a difficult balance to make, between the needs of some (but not all) Indigenous Peoples for childcare and the needs of the State.



For 10 years now, I have been working on the program for the inclusion of Indigenous students in our University, and I have been working as a teacher, teaching them in classrooms as well as supervising research made by them. That is taking part in a movement, and we have many meetings and have organized two big national events at the University. They discussed such programs around the country, including the issue of how science could dialogue with traditional and indigenous languages, both bringing the Indigenous from all over the country and non-indigenous research and politics. The first was in 2013 (I ENEI, cf site), and the second in 2015 (II SBPC Indígena).

**3) There has been a lot of discussion in recent times about positionality in social science research, and how researchers negotiate the differences from those they are researching. Given your experience with indigenous communities, starting as a researcher and now as a friend, how do you consider your positionality in your work with indigenous populations in Brazil?**

That is a very important and difficult issue, and I think I have answered some of it in the previous question. As I put it, working with people means creating a bond, which is also affective. We should never think of social sciences as objective and emotion-proof. I was really kept from sleeping due to worries about the impacts of the dam on the Xikrin, as well as worries about how our relationship (our friendship, our commitment) would be when those impacts became unbearable.

I would say also that all my work from since I graduated has been around *taking their side*. Not only politically – since I have worked towards a better future both on the issue of lands and resources from Xikrin land, as well as on the issue of indigenous schools – but also as an anthropologist, since doing anthropology is to see the world from their point of view. We are specializing in that as academics, but not really as persons and political actors, and there are many resistances when we act politically in taking their point of view, as I could feel for myself in the dam situation. Also, as I said before, we are put in a difficult situation in what concerns our relationship with the Indigenous peoples themselves when we act politically, since we all have limits, both as persons as well as on the scope of our political participation.

But I am myself very proud to say that even if I haven't won all my battles,

I could keep a relation of commitment and responsible research both with the Xikrin and with those Indigenous persons dealing with the education politics concerning Indigenous schooling and the Indigenous students from our University. I would like to make an homage to my teachers who have taught me all of these things at university; they are many strong anthropologists that fought at their time or continue to fight these fights. The late Aracy Lopes da Silva, Lux Vidal, my supervisor who took me to the Xikrin, and Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, both strong women who are part of a strong heritage or committed anthropologists in Brazil. As a teacher, I am concerned with keeping this heritage alive, and many of my students are fighting with me and the Xikrin to minimize the impacts they are suffering due to the construction of the dam, for example.

**4) In terms of indigenous activism in Brazil, part of its success is the Affirmative Action (AA) as quotas in public universities. What kind of process do indigenous people need to face in order to be profiled as genuine candidates?**

I would like to give a two-fold answer. First of all, I speak for my University. It has been recognized as having both a program with one of the largest scopes of what concerns access to higher education (we receive Indigenous students from all over the country to all courses) as well as the biggest programs for their retention, with services concerning financial issues (housing, grants) and pedagogical issues (taking the star point of their very different and culturally responsive schooling biographies). We take as candidates all Indigenous persons who declare themselves as being Indigenous, who send along with the candidate form a letter written by themselves and a legitimation by a leader who stipulates that they take part of the community, as well as a document from the State that confirms the recognition of this same community and leadership. This is formulated to be responsive to the 169 Convention.

These initiatives were taken by the diverse universities themselves (but some would receive only Indigenous Peoples from their region, some to only some courses that they would reckon as useful for them, as Health courses or Pedagogy or Social Sciences) until 2012. Then a Federal Law passed stipulating that all Federal Universities should have 1% of their students originate from Indigenous Peoples (a rate calculated from the number of Indigenous Peoples in the Brazilian

Population); these candidates have to state their belonging to Indigenous communities with a letter that has a certification by FUNAI.

As I see it, we are still not responding fully to the 169 Convention, as we all still ask for the certificate by FUNAI. We should ask just for the letter where the candidate would state they are Indigenous through self-declaration. But that is still a complex issue, as the Universities want to protect themselves from frauds, but, more complexly, the very Indigenous movements think the certificate from FUNAI is a protection against fraud. I would be willing to fight against the University system to make the Convention be fully taken, but it makes things more complicated when Civil Movements from Indigenous Peoples say they want this fraud protection as they think some would take advantage from the AA Programs stating an Indigenous identity they might not have.

#### **5) How has Sao Carlos Federal University (UFSCar) been experiencing the AA in the classroom?**

The AA at UFSCar is not only for Indigenous students, but also for Black ones and for those that do their studies in public schools (we have an asymmetry in Brazil, where public schools are worse than most private ones). These students experience university life in different ways, and some, such as Black and Indigenous students, would suffer more from institutional racism. I would say that the University itself is not racist, but that, unfortunately, some teachers, staff, and students are.

On what concerns Indigenous students, I was quite surprised to see that some teachers would say they can't properly learn the scientific and technical theses they teach for having a different culture. That is, as I reckon it, a new form of racism, which says that they are not racially inferior, but rather limited by their culture. That is why we have been organizing academic events that are aimed at showing how sophisticated Indigenous knowledges are, fighting against this prejudice. We also have been working as an institution to work with these teachers to show them that culture has never been a limitation to learning.

But I would like to emphasize the important participation of these students – both to make visible their differences in their university life, promoting their culture differences – and also as researchers. They have been combining their knowledges and what they learn at the University in very different research projects, on

all areas, be they health studies, social sciences, agronomic studies, or linguistic and pedagogical studies. I am quite sure the University as a whole is gaining much with that, but I also reckon it is still not fully recognized.

**6) In terms of Ethnology Studies in Brazil, how have womanhood and indigeneity intersected in the discussions?**

As in most places, women have not been a focus of interest in Ethnology Studies for many years. That changed in Brazil in the 1980s, when feminism met Anthropology. Anthropologists started not only focusing on women in their studies, but also seeing the world from their point of view. That was a very important change, as it showed both that Indigenous women were important economic and political actors, and that making new studies talking to them and observing their world through their eyes could demonstrate other views of social and political organizations.

But it was not only a change in the academic and anthropological world; it was also a huge political change, whereby Indigenous women have become more and more national political actors in Brazil. Despite a traditional view kept for many years that in Indigenous worlds it was the men who would deal with “external” facts and actors – be it in war, in politics, or through shamanism – they are showing that women are not only capable of but also important in dealing with that. Nowadays, they act not only as shamans, but also as political leaders, be it in the villages or communities, or in political movements. They also act in political instances in the State dealing with legislations and politics on health and school services.

So, I would say that since the 1980s, anthropologists were more capable of looking at women’s issues, since Indigenous women have made themselves known through their political actions, which made it inevitable that good anthropological work about any Indigenous issue would have to see women as important actors and thinkers.

**7) What contributions do you think decoloniality could bring to studies of Brazilian Ethnology?**

Nowadays, there are many Indigenous persons searching for a place in Anthropology. They see it as an important tool for talking to the non-indigenous, and

to show them their ways of being and thinking about the world. It is not an easy and direct path, as we always have to face the issue of how meaningful Anthropology itself is to these Peoples. Furthermore, it is not evident that, being themselves anthropologists, they will be able to keep talking to their own people. Like everything else, Anthropology is a social and historical construction, and we could not suppose it to be universal, i.e., meaningful to all peoples. So, Indigenous anthropologists sometimes have to deal with the cost of being taken as “external” or colonizers themselves. Nonetheless, I find their discussion of Anthropology and of the studies previously made by non-indigenous anthropologists about their world very fruitful and intriguing for Anthropology itself. What is less clear to me is how anthropology could help those Indigenous persons to act as “mediators” between their worlds and that of the non-indigenous, as it would depend on a very difficult process of, let us say, double certification, which is being recognized as a good anthropologist by academia and as a good “translator of worlds” (to use Joanna Overing’s expression that links the philosopher and the shaman) in the point of view of their own people.

Speaking in other terms, I am quite sure anthropology has much to gain when the Indigenous Peoples themselves debate and practice it, and with all debates about decolonizing it, but I am not so sure about how this will or could be constructed as a meaningful effort by Indigenous Peoples themselves. That is a history in the making, and we will have to wait to see how it goes.

#### **8) Any message to future ethnologists in Brazil?**

When I began doing Anthropology, it was just after the promulgation of the Brazilian Constitution in 1988. This recognized the right of Indigenous Peoples to their land, to their culture, to their languages, social and political organizations, and to culturally and linguistically respectful services provided by the State. I was being taught by anthropologists who had been at the side of the Indigenous Peoples in Brazil fighting for this recognition of their rights both in the Congress and also “in the field” via public debates. The latter often meant fighting at their sides for elementary rights not respected during the long and crude Dictatorship. I was taught by these strong women (they were all women) to celebrate the recognitions of these rights and to keep fighting to implement them. So, my generation worked to

create and evaluate state policies and land rights. We had a huge debate as to how academic anthropological studies would deal with these more “terrain” issues (which are so compromised with reality), in order to make those rights come true.

I was always on the side of those who say that good academic anthropology and fighting “on the ground” are not incompatible. And that was what I always did, and that is what I teach and train my students to do.

But the new generation will have to face a different moment of this national history concerning Indigenous rights, which is, as Sonia Guajajara – a very important national indigenous leader, who acts both in Brazilian lands and in international instances and meetings – says the dismount of the rights. So, if my teachers had to fight to help Indigenous Peoples to have their rights recognized by the State, and my generation to make them come true in state politics, programs, and in the villages, communities, and the university, my students’ generation (which is, Just for us to remember, both Indigenous and non-indigenous students of Anthropology) will have to pave their way in this new situation. They will find themselves on a new battlefield, on which I doubt I am of much help. Another history in the making, and my message is for them to make it good!

Another aspect of the new context in which future ethnologists in Brazil will construct upon is this new dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous in the academia, in the universities, in the villages and communities, and in politics. This requires that Anthropology itself be decolonized and not taken as a unified universalist truth, but as a construct of this very dialogue. It is not now that Anthropology discovers the value of dialogue to the building up of the results of its studies. The so-called post-modern anthropologists have criticized the voice of authority of the ethnographical works, making us recognize that every work in anthropology is dialogical. Even then, however, there was the anthropologist – the universalist scientist – on one side, and the native on the other. Borders have been blurred, as natives and anthropologists combine to make different compositions. So, in finishing, I would say that future ethnologists will have to make the best of it and to rethink Anthropology itself as a horizontal construction that is, then, truly dialogic.



# Fat, Black, and Butch: The Use of Internet Nudes to Resist Racism and Practice ‘Erotic Therapy’

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**ABSTRACT:** The cyberspace and its participatory culture are frequently seen as a potential place where marginalised groups could tell their stories the way they see (Hughes, 2012). Given that Black women deal with an interlocking system of oppressions, one Black feminist in Brazil is creating new ways to deal with such oppressions in the digital sphere through the Internet nude. Raquel, a Black Brazilian woman living in Brazil who is also lesbian and fat, posts her nude on social media as a political statement about body positivity and anti-racist aesthetics. Based on a discourse analysis of an interview with Raquel about what the nude means to her, a couple of questions are raised: What are the opportunities and the limitations offered by the cyberspace to subvert social norms? What does the online backlash that Raquel suffered tell us about how the Black female body is constructed in public media in Brazil? What does her continued desire to use nude photos tell us about the potential within this act of taking nude selfies?

**KEYWORDS:** Black feminism; gender; cyberspace; embodiment; race

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In a time of continuous digitalisation, with the on-going development of new medias, the ways in which these processes happen to affect socialisation and subjectivities, it is necessary to go beyond the idea that the image is merely informational and explore its potential for affect and transformation of perceptive and affective structures of everyday life (Hansen, 2004). New technologies give us the opportunity to rethink the relations between affect, embodiment,



and image (Featherstone, 2010). Social networking technologies have been seen as a potential space for marginalised groups to tell their stories the way they wish (Hughes, 2012). In Brazil, half of the population have access to the Internet in their homes, a growing number according to national statistics, and 80% of them use their smartphones to access the web<sup>1</sup>. As a result, more people in Brazil are using the Internet for personal reasons<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, more individuals can produce media in a participatory culture, which is the relation between more accessible digital technologies and a shift in power relations between media industries and their consumers (Burgess and Green, 2009). In their work about YouTube, Burgess and Green (2009) explored the liberating yet troublesome traits of the video-sharing website regarding participatory culture, questioning who gets to speak and who gets attention, besides the compensations and uncertainties involved.

One example that shows the contradictions of participatory culture in networking technologies is the case analysed in the present article. Raquel, a 24 years old Black woman from Brazil who identifies as a lesbian and calls herself “Fat and Butch”, published nudes on her Facebook profile as a “feminist manifesto” against the racism, sexism, homophobia and fatphobia faced in her daily life. While Facebook provided her a platform to share with thousands of other users her nudes and thoughts about society, it also suspended her account for 30 days after an organised group of people reported one of her photos and Facebook saw it as a violation of the network’s regulation, the so-called “Community Standards.” In fact, Raquel was a victim of an organised attack: in a matter of hours, this particular photo had four thousand comments, most of them racist and fatphobic, one thousand shares, many of them using humiliating approaches, and one hundred hate messages in her inbox. Although she was punished by both Facebook users and the network itself for posting nudes, she continues to use Facebook until now as a way to express her thoughts and engage with other activists. Therefore, as we can see in this example, networking technologies can be useful and liberating spaces at the same time they enable censorship and online harassment. Moreover, the backlash that Raquel suffered tells us a lot about racial discourses in Brazil and her insistence in taking and sharing nudes is significant to understand the photography as a therapeutic practice, topics we will discuss further on.



## The Self in Participatory Culture

Another recurrent comment is the emphasis on the self in social media, an increasing fascination with the self in the Western culture that is perceived in reality television and other popular entertainment shows (Hughes, 2012). The emphasis on the self is also marked in personal blogs and social network in which people build character types to describe themselves in public, sometimes also to understand and perform themselves at the same time (Burgess and Green, 2009). In other words, the photos, videos, and words that people choose to publish on their social media – for example, selfies during a workout, pictures of travels and dishes, group photos among friends and family – are not randomly picked, they are part of this persona building process. In their analysis about YouTube, Burgess and Green (2009) exemplified this shift in social media towards the emphasis in individual's lives with the change of YouTube's by-line from a storage facility to a platform for public self-expression ('Your Digital Repository' to "Broadcast Yourself").

One important element of the concept of participatory culture is the notion of the user's agency. Usually, the user is depicted either as the passive recipient, as in old media such as television, or as the active participant well-versed in new media skills (van Dijck, 2009). Agency thus represents production in opposition to consumption, a binary that fails to recognize the multifarious concept of user agency (van Dijck, 2009). Given the evidence that over 80 percent of all Internet users neither create nor interact with online content, but merely scroll it (OECD, 2007), van Dijck (2009) questions the concept of participatory culture if the majority of Internet users are not participating, but consuming content. However, I find van Dijck's perception of online participation rather limited. Despite recognizing that even in what is called 'old media' viewers have increasingly acted as participants in game shows, talk shows, and quizzes over the past 15 years, van Dijck (2009) called the Internet users who don't create neither interact with content "passive recipients of content." The fact that users do not necessarily interact with social media posts does not mean that they are passive or mere recipients of content; they might absorb or question the content they see in new media in different ways, for example in inbox messages, interactions outside the cyberspace, by themselves or in closed groups. In fact, the last one – closed groups – is one of the ways in which women share nudes in Brazil, in what we might call "online communities." Van

Dijck also mentions mediated experiences in group identities (communities) in his work on YouTube, but he claims that community is tied to the involvement of users in a common cause or preference in music, movies, books or brands.

‘Communities,’ in relation to media, thus refers to a large range of user groups, some of which resemble grassroots movements, but the overwhelming majority coincide with consumer groups or entertainment platforms. (van Dijck, 2009, p.45)

Just as his notion of participation of Internet users, I find van Dijck’s concept of online communities rather generalizing, and one example of how diverse online communities can be is the widespread creation of groups of Brazilian women on Facebook with the purpose of sharing nudes as a therapeutical practice. It would be unethical to reveal the names of the groups since they are closed and demand that the participants don’t reveal details about them, but in my research about Internet nudes in Brazil I found three groups with that purpose, one with ten thousand members, another with six hundred and a third with 621 participants. All three groups explained in their descriptions that they were created with the aim of sharing nudes and love in “female solidarity” and to explore the female desire for a greater freedom. In order to be clear, in the present article, the nude is interpreted as a digital photo usually taken with the front camera of a smartphone, although it can be other types of cameras, showing a naked body or a naked part of a person, which usually is the same person who is taking the picture. The nude is also called “not safe for work selfies.” Recently in Brazil, a new culture is becoming increasingly popular, in what the participants of my research called “cultura do nude” (“nude culture,” in English). Nude culture can be understood as the widespread sharing of nudes and the popularization of the practice of taking and sending nudes online. The origin of the Internet nude harks back to sexting (having sex through text messages). So originally, people would take nudes with the purpose of sending it to the person with whom they were sexting and enhance the pleasure of seduction and online sex itself. However, apps such as WhatsApp and Snapchat permitted such openness that people started to send nudes to friends as a casual thing, not necessarily to tease, but to register a moment they liked and share it with people they love. The widespread sharing of nudes gave way to the acclaimed expression

“manda nudes” (“send me nudes” in English). This expression is now an internet meme, and people use it in varied contexts: sometimes to mean that some discussion is boring and that they would rather be receiving nudes than this or as a form of compliment to celebrate one’s attractiveness, like “you are so good looking that I want you to send me nudes”.

In my research, I decided to explore the meanings attached to them in a social media context, I spoke to ten people who are in such groups, all of them aged 18–30 years old, seven women and three men, four of Black, three Mixed and three white, from different economic and geographical backgrounds in Brazil. Some of the participants were not in the particular three groups mentioned before, the men specifically participated in WhatsApp groups and Raquel, one of the participants, didn’t post her photos in particular groups but on her profile on Facebook. In the interviews, I asked them about their meanings of a nude, the reasons why they take it, if they think is empowering and if it can be feminist. Some of the questions raised during the interviews were: can the nude be used to deconstruct naturalised sexual practices in the search for alternative knowledges of pleasure? Is it a care of the self practice? Can the nude give different meanings to the body? In this paper, I present the case of one of the interviewees, Raquel, to speak about her experience with nudes. Raquel described the whole process of taking nudes as “having a conversation with herself,” but not any conversation, a loving dialogue:

To me, it means the expression of a moment when I am ok with my body when I understand that I don’t need to dress up in a certain way to feel beautiful, it’s more a record of a good conversation with my body.<sup>3</sup>

## Nude as Therapy

Raquel’s conversation with her body can be related to the concept of phototherapy. Phototherapy can be understood as a practice of resistance through the validation of anger or discontent of one’s “inability to come to term with these fragmented selves constructed out of the needs, views, attributions of others and our powerlessness in relation to them” (Martin and Spence, 2013, p.403). Based on the notion that women are encouraged to accept situations that they should resist, Martin and Spencer developed the idea of phototherapy as a healing art, a form of

assertiveness trying to access women's "needs better and try to get them met, individually and collectively" (Martin and Spence, 2013, p.403). Martin and Spence's concept is more attributed to family matters as a "health education" inside the field of psychoanalysis, which is why they affirmed that "phototherapy engages with primarily the 'needy child' within us, all who still needs to be seen and heard" (Martin and Spence, 2013, p.403), but I believe that the concept can also be applied to nudes, as in an "erotic therapy".

In phototherapy, similar to what happens in traditional therapy, the photography (therapist) encourage the child (author of the nude) to recreate its own history, feel safe enough to protest and then learn how to be its own nurturer; a process in which reinventing and asserting oneself becomes possible "by becoming the subject rather than the object of our own histories" (Martin et al., 2013). If a person is labelled as an other – either regarding gender, race, sexuality, age, disability or class – phototherapy can be a way to redefine oneself and become active subjects in their dissonant history. Thus, the action of taking and sharing nudes can be therapeutic or even a healing process (Loureiro, 2016).

New digital medias bring new opportunities for people to document and display themselves, and this attention to oneself and the 'self-centeredness' present in digital photos is a key feature of the online environment (Barton and Lee, 2013). Sharing nudes is also about writing lives and selves and spreading it on the Internet. As other new practices, it can change how people see themselves, after all, presenting an identity online is not just about who we are, but how we want others to see us (Barton et al., 2013). But in order for the nude to be a transgressive self-invention practice (Tiinderberg et al., 2015), it will depend on how the photograph is taken, because practices of self-care are liberating only when the person in control is self-aware of it (Markula, 2004, cited in Tiinderberg et al., 2015).

In terms of self-invention, an important concept is the "looking glass", a process in which people fashion an identity in everyday life, not only in terms of cultural preferences but also constructing and presenting their bodies in a way that generates erotic meanings or pleasures, specifically online and with social tools offered by the Internet (Attwood, 2010). The looking glass relates to body image, which is the visual sense that others have of oneself based on a person's appearance, one's 'look' (Featherstone, 2010). The mirror is the most obvious form to do that, but the camera through photography is also a way to not only to represent the body im-

age but to imagine one's body image (Featherstone, 2010) – particularly the camera phone, which is part of an everyday object such as the smartphone. In their analysis of gender and digital media, Sal Humphreys and Karen Orr Vered (2013) compared the camera's function as an interface with the interface that Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987, 1990) explores while reflecting about the negotiation of her identities as a lesbian, mestiza and borderland dweller. Anzaldúa called this negotiation "mestiza consciousness" and the main characteristic of this new consciousness is "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa, 1987). As she explains in the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990):

As mestizas – biologically and/or culturally mixed – we have different surfaces for each aspect of identity, each inscribed by a particular subculture. Over this surface, she continues with her metaphor; the mestiza might also wear a mask for protection. Between faces, surfaces, and masks are "interfaces" and "it is the place – the interface – between the masks that provides the space from which we can thrust out and crack the masks. (Anzaldúa 1990, xv–xvi)

To cope within a given context – in Anzaldúa's case, being a Chicana in the United States, but also a lesbian and feminist activist, writer and theorist – the mestiza creates a new consciousness by changing the way in which she perceives reality and the way she sees herself. The tolerance for ambiguity is important here because she doesn't need to abandon parts of the self to cope within one context (such as the American or the Chicana culture), she develops an ability to "juggle cultures" (Anzaldúa 1987, 79). Anzaldúa thus questions the possibility of having one fixed epistemological or political standpoint destabilising ethnic, gender, sexual standpoints as foundations of identities (Koegeler-Abdi, 2013). This new consciousness is achieved through the simultaneous acts of "being seen, held immobilized by a glance, and 'seeing through' an experience" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.64). In other words, "the movement through fixed consciousness to a hybrid subjectivity formed through multiple and mobile identities" (Humphreys and Vered, 2013, p.6). Similarly to Anzaldúa's shifting subjectivities, new spatial practices such as the nudes, facilitated by media interactions, may generate new experiences of identity challenging what Anzaldúa would describe as "permanent boundaries of a fixed self" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p.145 in Humphreys et al., 2013, p.6).

This consciousness about oneself relates to the care of the self practice developed by Foucault (1988) in his later work after he recognized that the individual was presented as a passive body in his earlier work and dedicated himself to the notion of the self (McNay, 1992). To explore the care of the self-concept it is important to explain the technologies of the self:

Which permit individuals to effect by their means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, cited in Martin, Gutman and Hutton, 1988, p.18)

In other words, technologies of the self tell us about how people act upon themselves (Foucault, 1988). Certain Western societies inherited the Christian morality of self-renunciation as the condition for “salvation” according to which the only way to know oneself was through self-renunciation, so the principle “know yourself” erased another ancient Greco-Roman principle, the “take care of yourself” (Foucault, 1988). Taking care of oneself in ancient Greco-Roman cultures meant activities such as meditation, reading, studying, writing diaries and rereading them: “all the unimportant things” (Foucault, 1988, p.29). Originally, the care of the self was connected to the knowledge of the self in a way that the first contributed to the second, but this link among the two was broken between the times from Plato to the Hellenistic age (Foucault, 1988).

Foucault’s care of the self concept was rapidly adopted by feminist theorists and understood not as an indulgent act or a distraction from politics, but a provision for effective citizenship without underestimating emotions (Heyes, 2006). We owe the care of the self to ourselves and others so we can constitute ourselves as ethical agents (Heyes, 2006). During my research, many women spoke about the moment of taking and sharing nudes as a therapeutic practice very similar to the description of the care of the self concept. In their accounts, taking and sharing nudes changes their relationships with their bodies, just as the notion of what is photographable (Tiinderberg et al., 2015). For this reason, and drawing on Foucault’s concept of care of the self and Alzandúa’s “mestiza consciousness,” I argue that some Brazilian Black women use the nude as a way to escape homogenizing

tendencies of power through the assertion of their autonomies.

On the other side, feminist theorists also made critical remarks about Foucault's care of the self concept. Grimshaw (1993), for example, criticized him for ignoring forms of self-surveillance, shifting from the notion that disciplinary practices are forms of control to the idea that they might rather constitute autonomy. Besides, Grimshaw (1993) asserts, the concept is based on ascetic practices used by the ancient Greeks, specifically an elite class of privileged males who are assumed to be free, not only neglecting issues related to race, gender, class or sexual orientation once again, but also ignoring his own warning that 'nothing is innocent'. Furthermore, Foucault was not the only one to theorize about the care of the self.

The importance placed in the care of the self is not new to black feminist scholarship. More than 30 years ago, the Combahee River Collective affirmed that its politics "evolve[s] from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (Combahee River Collective 2014, 267). Neither is it something from the past, as bell hooks insists that "all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic" (hooks 2000, xvii). But this theory is not necessarily about moving beyond limitations of selfhood and producing new forms of political communities as affective politics, but also a simple practice of self-valuation (Nash, 2013). Black feminist interest in love stands for a specific self-work, which encourages the person to transcend the self (Nash, 2013). A good example is Alice Walker's call for a womanist self-love, the so-called "love herself. Regardless" – meaning in spite of everything else. In this interpretation, we can see it as a Black feminist advocacy for unconditional love starting with the acceptance of ourselves in the first place, but also an articulation between self and politics (Povinelli 2006, cited in Nash, 2013). Raquel appears to believe in something similar:

"In the end, the nude is a tool for you to show people who are far away that yes you are beautiful and confident with your body, with who you are and with what you want to express. It is a tool of digital empowerment that will impact on your day to day, because it is a way to fight standardization and the racist ways to portray us, if the media don't cooperate and stop showing perverted images of ourselves, we will through social media."

Raquel is describing her view about the political use of the body. Bearing meanings of class, gender, race (Scott and Morgan, 1993), bodies are indeed connected to power. In practice, this means that the body is also a site of agency and empowerment (Langman, 2008). For Linda Williams, porn can portray women with agency and desires be used to resist patriarchal codes (Williams, 1989, cited in Langman, 2008). If we follow this reasoning in which porn can be a tool to “give women agency to explore their own sexuality and redefine their sexual norms” (Langman, 2008, p.369), the nude can also be more than a device for sexting and be used as a vehicle for a different and individual erotica, even an “erotic therapy”. In other words, the nude can help women to feel more confident with their body-image and to claim a “feminist manifesto” against the heteronormative and oppressive way in which female bodies are presented in the media. Many women apply this concept in their daily lives and use their bodies to contest social or cultural norms, for example with the nude (a form of erotica) and amateur porn. Raquel, for example, frequently sees and uses her body as a political manifesto capable of challenging social norms. She started to take nudes to affirm herself and faces an organized attack by internet trolls. Raquel didn’t plan it to go that further, as she recalls:

“Last year I started to take nudes not to send it to the chicks. It was more to show them that we can do this type of stuff. (...) At the time I didn’t think ‘oh I am taking a nude to post on Instagram’ it was more because I was feeling good, having a good day, took a nice pic and wanted to share.”<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned earlier, one of her nudes became the target of an organised troll attack online, with thousands of comments humiliating her. In the photo, which will not be displayed here to protect the participant’s anonymity, Raquel is entirely naked, standing up, her left knee leaning in her bed, displaying her buttocks. Her right arm is holding her left elbow and hiding her nipples; her breasts are supported by the right arm. She is wearing only a pair of glasses and displaying a shy yet provocative smile. The position of her body somehow reminds pin-up poses, showing the body while covering some parts in a clear attempt of evoking sexiness, which brings some tensions between the idea of liberation while imitating old sexualised models of sexiness. The background of the photo is Raquel’s bed-



room, with walls covered with written phrases, one of which it can be read “Si, se puede” (“yes it is possible,” in Spanish).

According to phenomenology theory, embodiment and oppression are linked in everyday life, and social interaction and, as a result, group oppressions are not primarily enacted in law and policy, as might seem obvious, but on informal and unnoticed everyday speech, automatic bodily reaction to others, aesthetic judgments, jokes, images, stereotypes (Young, 1990). Oppression works through body aesthetic, through images, discourses, and stereotypes that continuously “legitimate” racism, sexism and homophobia for example, in Raquel’s case. Her everyday experiences as a “fat and butch” Black women are not only reflected but also reinforced online. The hateful messages are part of the continuum of violence that she always faces. Similarly to what Ariane Cruz (2014) argued in her work, Sisters are doing it for themselves about African American female pornographers trying to transform mainstream representations of Black womanhood in pornography, as a Black Brazilian woman Raquel uses the nude not only for self-appreciation but also in a political project of resisting racist and sexist representations of Black female bodies.

The fat black female body plays a triple role as the antagonist of what is accepted as normal, completely in the outskirts of normative boundaries, making its incorporation impossible (Shawn, 2005). Raquel’s embodiment goes even further, being an unapologetic lesbian who resists shaving. The interesting part is that, while her position is the farthest possible from the white male power center, because of its concentrated state of “otherness” in relation to hegemonic standards, it can also be an ideal location from which to observe how white patriarchy works, as a look on the other side of the looking glass (Shawn, 2005).

## The Black Female Body in Brazil

To understand how Raquel’s body might represent this antagonistic role, it is important to take a look at the main representations of Black female bodies in Brazil. It is known that mainstream constructions of beauty were used to reinforce the agenda of the patriarchy, so it is not a coincidence that the Western conceptualization of idealized femininity is white (Shaw, 2005). One figure that is central to this discussion is the myth of Mammy, present in the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and the Americas:

The first controlling image applied to African American women is that of the mammy, the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behaviour. (Collins 1991, p.71)

Mammy serves to soothe racial anxieties by creating a Black character with exaggerated traits who is acceptable for whites: she is subordinate, maternal and nonsexual, with a large body, dark skin, and non-angular facial features, thus without posing any sexual threats to white women (Collins, 1991). As a domestic caretaker, she represents a "ready availability of nurture despite her own economic oppression effected by those she must serve" (Collins 1991, p.72). Mammy's image was eternalized in films such as *Gone With The Wind* (1936), in which she is seen lumbering around the plantation house, a shadow against which white women's beauty is reaffirmed, the privileges that her dedication to the white family permits reinforcing which role Black women should aspire to. Her large body also symbolizes her maternal resources, "the ultimate state of Black allegiance to whiteness" (p.21), an infinite reserve of maternal dedication as the caretaker of the white family's children, suggesting an impossibility of oppression against Black women since their supply of strength and love can never be depleted.

This is a common racist construction involving fatness and Blackness that still haunts Black women. According to Shaw (2005), Black women reacted by reinventing themselves over and over again, although their efforts often resulted in them being tyrannized by unrealistic body-image goals privileging slenderness and creating new hegemonic oppressions. Myths that defeminize Black womanhood such as the Mammy image contributed to the effacement of Black femininity and the dehumanization of Black women (Shaw, 2005). The construction of Black femininity as essentially non-feminine because of her physical strength and aggressiveness were useful to differentiate it from what white femininity should be (Beckles, 1999, cited in Shaw, 2005).

The stereotypical images of the black mammy and the mulata are crucial to understanding race and gender inequalities in Brazil and to hide and naturalise historical politics of race and gender discrimination while perpetuating the na-

tional image of Brazil as a “racial democracy” (Caldwell, 2000). During the colonial period, women were differentiated based on patriarchal practices which associated white women to marriage and black women to illicit sexual practices – white women were designated to honor the social role of mothers and wives, enslaved women and then the mulatas were associated with “dishonorable” relations (Caldwell, 2000). The theory of Luso-Tropicalism, created by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, affirmed that there was a symbiosis in the union of the European with the ‘tropical’, which would explain an easier fraternization between the Portuguese and African, Oriental and Indigenous peoples in their colonies and the colonizer’s “natural propensity” for miscegenation (Freyre, 1958). The sexualised figure of the mulata emerges as the result of such miscegenation between the white Portuguese and the Black woman in what Pinho (2010) called the “hypersexualization of racial mixing.” Angela Gilliam (1991) called the Luso-Tropicalism theory “the Great Sperm Theory of National Formation”:

It metaphorically violates black women in retrospect, as if the historical rape it documented were not enough, by crediting the formation of Brazilian national culture – and of the mulata herself – to Portuguese men and their predilection for black women. (Nascimento, 2009, p.57)

Freyre’s work about Brazilian culture is extremely influential and his theory of racial democracy, which he originally called ‘ethnic democracy’ in his “Order and Progress” (1970), is still central in Brazilian nationalist discourse and part of dominant notions of Brazilianness and race (Pinho, 2010). An illustration of this notion of Brazilianness is Giacomini’s (1994) work on the “Show de Mulatas” (“Mulata’s show” in English). Giacomini (1994) describes the spectacle of mulatas in Rio de Janeiro, in which they are presented – in the beat of the Samba drums – to the audience as symbols of Brazil, as they dance, smile and invite the white men in the audience, many of them gringos (the Brazilian slang for “foreigners”), to come closer. The show can be seen as a symbol of the ritualization of Brazilian society’s hegemonic representation: Brazil markets itself to the world as a great racial democracy in which the mulata, representing the stereotype of the irresistible, sensual and available woman, conquers the white man, reversing white men’s domination over Black women for centuries and reconstructing the racial domination, thus

reaffirming the ideal of racial democracy (Giacomini, 1994). However, in this praise of racial mixing lies a camouflaged ideal of whiteness, as if mixing could end racial conflicts and extirpate Africanness from the national identity, repressing notions of racial determination (Nascimento, 2010). White privilege continues to prevail in Brazil and is perceptible in the media, for example, in which beauty standards are reinforced showing white and blond women as a symbol of femininity (Cadwell, 2010). One example is the overrepresentation of White women in Brazilian telenovelas (TV soap operas), which are considered not only an artistic and cultural media product but also a central agent in Brazilian culture and identity (Lopes, 2003). The dress codes, haircuts, slangs and lifestyles presented in Brazilian telenovelas replicate mainstream beauty standards (Baptista, de Araújo and de Brito, 2009). In thirty years, between 1984 and 2014, the major TV channel in Brazil, TV Globo, presented 162 telenovelas – 91.3% of the main characters in the shows were white and 8.6% were Black, while 53% of the Brazilian population is Black.

Raquel attempts to refuse racist and fat-phobic stereotypes questioning the Eurocentric standard of beauty while performing her view of Black femininity showing her naked body. Thus we can understand the nude as counterproductive of mainstreaming representations of nudity and the female body, since Raquel, according to her words, uses the nude to resist social and cultural standards of behavior and beauty. She brought a sense of belonging to the nudes, seeing them as a way to occupy space and feeling beautiful regardless of how women might look:

I think the nude can be empowering because I have been seeing many girls affirming themselves through the photos, you know, taking out that feeling of not belonging to this social space, we have to impose ourselves. (...) It's a way to fight all this patronisation, this racist form of portraying us. It's us by ourselves, literally.<sup>5</sup>

Raquel's experience with nudes demonstrates the body's potential as a privileged space to resist sexist, racist and homophobic constructions of the Black female body in Brazilian public media. Along these lines, the resistance of an Afro-Brazilian woman who insists on showing her body and affirming herself through online nudes has the potential to challenge hegemonic Brazilian discourses on gender, race, and nation, discourses that privilege whiteness and deprecate blackness

within Brazilian national identity, as explained earlier. Thus attempting to reclaim her body, Raquel is reinvesting it with positive significance and affirming her right to belong not only to the Brazilian nation but also to exist and affirm herself on cyberspace as differently embodied subject, free from racialised and gendered notions of inferiority.

Moving now from the discussion about sexuality, it is essential to remember that in Brazil, where Eurocentric aesthetic standards prevail, Black women are traditionally identified as being sexual rather than beautiful (Caldwell, 2007) – as exemplified in Giacomini's (1994) case of the "Show de mulatas" – reinforcing old myths about Black female sexuality. Black female sexuality has been represented in racist/sexist terms that further depict blackness as anomalous and disorderly, reaffirming the racist stereotype of the Black woman as a sexual primitive (hooks, 1992).

When black women relate to our bodies, our sexuality, in ways that place erotic recognition, desire, pleasure, and fulfilment at the centre of our efforts to create radical black female subjectivity, we can make new and different representations of ourselves as sexual subjects. To do so, we must be willing to transgress traditional boundaries. (hooks, 1992, p.106)

hooks (1992) speaks about the creation of Black women's representation as sexual subjects, something Raquel attempts to do with her nudes, presenting her idea of sexiness. Her body played a major role in the attacks she received online for "daring" to expose herself sexually since many of the attacks she received carried the word "fat" and "slut." If we understand the central role of the body in the cultural assessment and self-perception of individuals and the idea that difference constitutes identities – female defining maleness, blackness defining whiteness – then the fat black female body's triple removal from the west's conceptualization of normalcy provides an ideal location from which to look at dominant white patriarchy.

According to Lorde (1984, cited in Collins, 1991), the erotic is one among many kinds of power, regardless if it is used or not, and the suppression of the erotic is also a way to suppress information and power in our lives (Lorde, 1984, cited in Collins, 1991). The power within the erotic can be seen in the case of the mulata, as her body comes to represent the ideal of a whole nation in a racial ideology that

represses notions of racial determination (Nascimento, 2010). On the other side, if sexuality is a domain of repression when tied to race, gender and class, there is a strong potential in the erotic for Black women to explore and seek pleasure and agency (Collins, 1991). One example is African American female pornographers who are trying to transform mainstream representations of Black womanhood in pornography creating new images of black female sexuality in a DIY (do-it-yourself) style (Cruz, 2014). Thus even if sexuality is a domain of oppression and empowerment at the same time, the erotic is a source of power for Black women (Collins, 1991), and Raquel seems aware of that on cyberspace.

Nonetheless, embracing the erotic can be quite challenging for Black lesbians, even among Black feminists. Black feminist theorists and activists have been shedding light on the effects of homophobia on Black women and Black feminist lesbian writers such as Audre Lorde, and Alice Walker insisted on speaking about lesbian relationships in Black women's literature (Collins, 1991). In spite of that, one of the main obstacles faced by these women was the reluctance of Black heterosexual women to examine their homophobia, and one of the reasons for that is that heterosexuality is usually one of the only privileges that Black women have (Collins, 1991). Another reason is the Eurocentric thought of the lesbian as the ultimate other since visible Black lesbians challenge the norm of whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality, generating anxiety, discomfort and a challenge to dominant groups (Vance, 1984, cited in Collins, 1991). As mentioned above, in Brazilian culture, for example, the two main figures representing the Black woman are connected to white patriarchy, the mammy, who serves the white family, and the mulata, which is used as a symbol of miscegenation and cordial relations between the races in an ideology used by the white elite to purge itself of any responsibility in the violence of racism and patriarchy (Nascimento, 2010). One of the figures is desexualised (the mammy) and the other is hypersexualised within heteronormativity.

Regarding the violence inherited in racism and sexism, it is essential to remember that African Diaspora resisted west's fat-phobia, resisting ideals of slenderness and whiteness (Shawn, 2006). The economical and cultural authority that the west imposed in subaltern populations with Eurocentric values affected Black women significantly in the Diaspora. What is seen as beautiful according to the western values is the opposite of the fat black woman's body, but her body is also has a

significant role in the formation of both Blackness and whiteness because it works as an oppositional identity anchor (Shawn, 2006), that is, the definition of one is based on what the other is not. Thus, blackness is defined by what whiteness is not and vice-versa. One example is the rise of le cinéma colonial, referring to French colonies in Africa with depictions of happy and exotic savages in position to France as the “civilizing force”, after France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War during the 1930’s, thus using the colonies to reassure its nationalism (Sharpley-Whiting, 1999). In a similar way, during the nineteenth and twentieth century, after Freud’s provocations about the nature of femininity and with a desire for knowledge and mastery over blacks and women while raising primal fears and desires, French men appealed to the “ultimate difference”, that is, the sexualized savage, inspiring repulsion, attraction and anxiety over their imaginations of the Black Venus (Sharpley-Whiting, 1999). They displayed the body of Sarah Baartman, also known as Hottentot Venus, as an artefact in nineteenth-century Europe and used her to support the racist claim that Blacks were more akin to animals than humans (Shawn, 2006). Baartman is a symbol of the marginalization and objectification of Black women in the postcolonial world, exposing Europe’s gendered and racialised perception of Black female sexuality (Shawn, 2006). The inclination to identify the Black woman as overtly sexual was also a way to justify rampant sexual exploitation of African women during and after slavery and to sexualize the society from which she came, classifying it as “uncivilized” or “primitive” (Nash, 2013).

Tate (2015) affirms that the way in which Black women’s bodies were seen within the colonialist imagination is very alive today both in the metropolis and in former colonies. These bodies were seen as made for reproduction, either for sexual services, producing children or to provide white leisure, mere flesh for consumption, nude for sale at slave markets or in paintings for the white elite (Tate, 2015).

## Conclusion

If we look at Raquel’s understanding of the nude, she is not trying to find the truth about herself or liberation in consumption practices; rather she is in the process of experimentation and self-discovery. As argued before, to use the body as a vehicle for self-expression can be a way to challenge beauty standards and boost

self-esteem through a more positive resignification of the body, not necessarily a negative practice that damages individual's stuck in "false consciousness" neither a practice of "marketization of the self." Even if seen as a narcissistic act, we can question if narcissism is always negative. According to Heyes (2006), care-of-the-self-practices are a condition for effective citizenship, not indulgence. Thus, taking and sharing nudes in a conscious subjective process can be a care of the self practice that allows people to reinvent and assert themselves in a therapeutic process.

New digital medias bring new opportunity for people to document and display themselves, and this attention to oneself and the 'self-centeredness' present in digital photos is a key feature of the online environment (Barton and Lee, 2013). Sharing nudes is also about writing lives and selves and spreading it on the Internet. As other new practices, it can change how people see themselves, after all, presenting an identity online is not just about who we are, but how we want others to see us (Barton et al., 2013). But in order for the nude to be a transgressive self-invention practice (Tiinderberg et al., 2015), it will depend on how the photograph is taken, because practices of self-care are liberating only when the person in control is self-aware of it (Markula, 2004, cited in Tiinderberg et al., 2015).

If performativity produces identities and subjectivities permitting the resignification of bodies (Butler, 1990), the nude is also a type of performativity (Loureiro, 2016). After all, building subjectivities depends on the production of our selves as embodied subjects, which means that the nude has the potential to be both a sexual re-appropriation of erotica in a way that plays with identity and an instrument for seduction, sometimes even both at the same time. If bodies move through their relations in the world (Coleman, 2009), the cyberspace has the potential to be a liberating space, but not without contradictions, as it enables online harassment and censorship at the same time.

Even so, the re-appropriation of the nude can bring new ways to experience embodiment and affect self-knowledge, which is seen as a vital tool by many Black feminists. Collins (1991), for example, affirmed that Black women must be self-defined and self-reliant agents of knowledge to confront race, gender, class and sexual oppression:

Knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance. By objectifying African-American women and recasting our experi-



ences to serve the interests of elite white men, much of the Eurocentric masculinist worldview fosters Black women's subordination. But placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview. (Collins, 1991, p.221)

When Raquel conceptualizes the interlocking systems of oppression affecting her life and creates mechanisms to cope with them through erotica, she is rejecting generalized ideologies of domination and articulating her own experiences. What she is saying with her nudes is: "this is me, yes I am Black, female, lesbian and fat and I have a sexuality and a body which I find beautiful and will display as I like." The visibility may bother internet trolls that try to bring her profile down, but her statement is far more powerful. She is the agent of knowledge, but not any knowledge: self-knowledge, which can also be read as a type of self-love.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). 2015. Pesquisa Nacional Por Amostra de Domicílios (Pnad) – Acesso à internet e à televisão e posse de telefone móvel celular para uso pessoal : 2014. [Online]. [Accessed 22 December 2016]. Available at: <http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv95753.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). 2015. Pesquisa Nacional Por Amostra de Domicílios (Pnad) – Acesso à internet e à televisão e posse de telefone móvel celular para uso pessoal : 2014. [Online]. [Accessed 22 December 2016]. Available at: <http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv95753.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Loureiro, G. (2016). "*Manda nudes*": *body image, counter-sexualisation practices and erotica as a Brazilian cyber-identity project*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Leeds.
- <sup>4</sup> Loureiro, G. (2016). "*Manda nudes*": *body image, counter-sexualisation practices and erotica as a Brazilian cyber-identity project*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Leeds.
- <sup>5</sup> Loureiro, G. (2016). "*Manda nudes*": *body image, counter-sexualisation practices and erotica as a Brazilian cyber-identity project*. (Unpublished Master's dissertation). University of Leeds.

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# Nana Yaa Asantewaa

By Melz. (Melissa Owusu)

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This song is about the power and strength of black women, in a time and a context far removed from the Western conceptualisation of ‘feminism’. It tells of a woman, Nana Yaa Asantewaa who told the men of her clan that the British had no right to their land or the fruits of their labour, and thus began the final Anglo-Ashanti war also known as The War of the Golden Stool, in 1900. This song explores how the Ashanti people were fighters and not prepared to give up the Golden Stool to Queen Victoria of Britain, as it was the single item that united the whole Ashanti Kingdom. Nana Yaa Asantewaa organised a sustained defence against the British colonisers, in which she held them in a fort and gained full control over them. It was only due to Nana Yaa making a decision to free the women and children from captivity that the defence fell. A letter was carried by a woman to modern-day Nigeria to alert other British colonisers that they were being held in captivity.

I wrote this song as a young Black British person, to reflect on our position in society. We are distinct from many black people in the Americas because our history in the West has been a far shorter one and therefore we have knowledge of the homelands our families came from. Yet, living in Britain, as generation to generation are born into this previously foreign land, we struggle to create an identity for ourselves. This song is the reflection of that identity whilst handling a very important topic of colonial rule, and my use of the South East London colloquial language is the expression of Black Britain for me in this piece. That I am Nana Yaa Asantewaa, as are my sisters, that on these shores, we will continue to fight the ills of neo-colonialism and racism that plague contemporary life. The central theme of this song is that Black women are incredible and have been for a long time, despite narratives and stereotypes that have risen in the West to suggest otherwise.



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Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Warrior Queen of the Ashanti Kingdom  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Fought the British when the men didn't  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Our history forgets we Queens like  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Imma tell you a story about the Gold Coast  
Britain instated their rule  
Pillar to post  
They took slaves  
Straight from Cape Coast  
To Kingston Virginia  
And who the heck knows  
Anyway the place was formally known  
As the Ashanti Kingdom  
Where the fiercest rose  
Everyone knew our Kente was dope  
Festivals of yam, when the crop grows  
They try tell us our culture was false  
Sent missionaries, to change our moral code  
Soldiers brought Kumasi to a halt  
Searching, searching for all of our Gold

Something for their museums to hold  
Yaa Asantewaa was having none of it though  
She said if the men won't fight  
The women will take these colonial foes

Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Warrior Queen of the Ashanti Kingdom  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Fought the British when the men didn't  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Our history forgets we Queens like  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa

I'm a Queen like Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
I'm a Queen like women all over Africa  
God bless the Queens like my own mother  
I see a Queen every time that I look in the mirror  
You might say I'm gassed and that  
That black girls shouldn't think like that  
So wait pass me the drink and that  
So I can throw it in your face you pratt  
Anyways, feminism didn't come from white women  
They didn't come and give us the bring in  
Yeah Sojourner came to speak Truth  
To put a few dents in that glass roof  
But we were doing this thing before Western ties  
Western ties were our societies demise  
We were doing this thing before Western ties  
Western ties were our societies demise

Nana Yaa Asantewaa  
Warrior Queen of the Ashanti Kingdom  
Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Fought the British when the men didn't

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Our history forgets we Queens like

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

So much black girl magic

When black girls back it

Fighting beauty standards

We don't inhabit

When we come through best know that we clap it

Black women are beautiful across the plant

Them features, they used to tease us for in school

Have all of a sudden become the look that's cool

You want them big lips

You want that big ass

You want them big thighs

You want to look nice

Ask Saartjie Baartman who paid the price

Exhibited in Zoos

Until she died

All for the features you now fetishize

Right?

Black women are beautiful

Black women are smart

Black women are Queens

Black women are art

She's your mum, your daughter, your friend and your aunt

Love black women, black women are love.

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Warrior Queen of the Ashanti Kingdom

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Fought the British when the men didn't

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Our history forgets we Queens like

Nana Yaa Asantewaa

Nana Yaa Asantewaa





# Decolonising Minds @Leeds

## Open letter

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To:

Sir Alan Langlands – Vice Chancellor

Tom Ward – Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Education

Francesca Fowler – Director of Human Resources

Professor Jeremy Higham – Dean of the Faculty of Education, Social Sciences and Law

Norma Martin Clement – Pro-Dean of Student Education of the Faculty of Education,  
Social Sciences and Law

Anne Kerr – Head of the School of Sociology and Social Policy

Alison Sheldon – Equality and Inclusion Committee

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We as scholars, staff, and students of ESSL at the University of Leeds are concerned the direction of the curriculum and staff makeup in our School. As those who wish to achieve a high standing and global academic excellence for the university we are requesting a dialogue to discuss inclusion and diversity.

In the changing domestic demography, post Brexit and with emergence of states with economic power outside of Europe we believe the adoption of a decolonial perspective in both the curriculum and the activities will be beneficial for this institution. Further, this will acknowledge knowledge production from a non-European and male centric perspective.

We believe that a commitment to such will allow the University to maintain its high ranking, attract more students domestically and internationally and at the same time ensure the positive impact that the Social Sciences can have on the social, academic and political lives of students and staff members.



## What is the Decolonising of the curriculum request?

Decolonizing the circular is organised around acknowledging different ways of knowing, being, doing and producing knowledge. It request the adoption of authors that challenge Eurocentric narrative and provide an alternative discourse to power, dominance, freedom and empowerment. This is a call for a balanced teaching perspective that equips a student to articulate his/her argument from a robust grounding.

## How can this be achieved at Leeds?

1. The reintroduction of modules around race and racism at undergraduate level, and the MA programme of Global Racisms.

The Centre for Racism and Ethnicity Studies (CERS) established in the School of Social Policy has been a key organisation in the development of Critical Race Theory in the UK. The research area has an internationally recognised reputation for its theoretically ambitious and policy relevant research on racism, which among other things shows in form of collaboration with respected scholars around the world, such as Charles Mills, Barnor Hesse, Deborah Gabriel, Kehinde Andrews, Lisa Palmer, and many others who can be found on CERS website. This together with the highly productive work of senior scholars has created an environment that attracts students both from the UK and beyond.

However, with the removal of the BA option in racism, the main source of feeding into the MA course, has meant the staff involved in this course have been reduced and the MA programme run by it retracted.

## 2. Greater Transparency

We are concerned with the lack of transparency during the planning process to refurbish modules in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate programme, as well as the process of decision making to discontinue the MA programme of Global Rac-

isms. In the case of ethnicity and racism studies we feel the programme should not only be maintained but developed further. To keep the focus area vital it is necessary to ensure its own specific position in the teaching programme, merging it into a subtext of another discipline would be a great loss and reproduce the dilution/invisibility of such ideas.

### 3. The introduction of a new curriculum.

In order to achieve a balanced curriculum we suggest a revision to the reading list. One process would be to introduce around 3 authors in the bibliography (main reading list – not suggestion for further readings) every year for over the next 3 years. The objective would be to have a complete reorganised curriculum in which at least 50% of the authors break from the European-white-abled-male norm dominating the Social Sciences. We believe such an approach would set our institute on a track to success that would attract the brightest and the best from around the globe. Practically this could be assisted by adopting the following:

- The curriculum should include modules dedicated exclusively to discuss topics on race/ ethnicity and nation, not only be added in other modules to be presented in one or two lectures and dissolving the opportunity of addressing to such important issues in more depth.
- The modules on race, ethnicity, nation should be mandatory, not elective/discovery modules as an essential topic to encourage students to understand their own positions in society and build up a broader dialogue in the way we understand the world.

### 4. Introducing policy to hire scholars and staff of colour.

We are aware that the University of Leeds is inclined to promote diversity on the campus. However, we wish to see this extend in the Human Resources policies as a way to guarantee Racialised Minorities in the staff, including professors. Having professors of colour is not only about racial representation, but a way to offer diversity of thoughts and standpoints within the academy. All students from all races and backgrounds deserve to have a pedagogical strategy that enables them to engage in knowledge production with racialised teachers.

We understand that following such items will develop initiatives and solutions for anti-racist actions to promote diversity, which will reflect well by attaining an award in the next round of the Race Equality Charter and allow the university to improve the representation, progression, and success of minority ethnic students and staff.

We hope you take our concerns on board and look forward to hear from.

We will be circulating this document to other students within the campus and academic peers and hopefully forward you the signatures of those who stand in agreement with our concerns.

**Decolonising Minds @Leeds**

**Postgraduate Students – School of Sociology and Social Policy – University of Leeds**

- Katucha Bento
- Tasnim Al-Ahdal
- Alex Chelegeer
- Ashley Bullard
- Claudia Radiven
- Ismail Patel
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