

**ARTIGO - ARTICLE - ARTÍCULO****Legitimizing and camouflaged identities: between racism, submission and resistance**

Identidades legitimadoras e camufladas: entre racismo, submissão e resistência

Identidades legitimadoras y camufladas: entre racismo, sumisión y resistencia

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**ABSTRACT**

There is a clear tension within Brazilian society between the racial definition of categories which identify people in relation to their ethnic origin and the impact of this marking upon their social status. Several studies have discussed the 'Myth of Racial Democracy' in Brazil, identifying the existence of a "cordial" racism, and the tendency for a false "whitening" of the population. Our study aims to analyze the discourses used by coroners who are responsible for determining the race-skin colour of individuals who have died by violent causes (statistically one of the most important causes of death). The analysis considers the very specific nature of the work of the Medico-legal, by exploring the discourses used to classify skin-colour and the accompanying attributions made to behavior (qua cause of death) dependent upon these classifications. The professional's discourses concerning race-colour tend to correspond to a spectrum of what we term political-ideological positions. These positions reveal political identities concerned with processes of legitimizing, camouflaged, resistance and project. The research confirmed the phenomenon of "whitening" in cases of violent death, whereby people from non-white groups were classified as white on the death certificate. This means that this phenomenon affects not only the census record of the living but also the statistics of mortality. The results showed the main ideological mechanisms through which both racism and the construction of political identities run in health institutions. Also, they highlight aspects of the identity of those who identify the dead, how their identities determine the identity of their object, and how the adopted discourse justifies this determination.

**Keywords:** Health; Racism; Institutional racism; Sameness; Difference; Discourse Analysis.

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## INTRODUÇÃO

Put starkly, there are two Brazils: one is White and rich, and the other is Black and poor. As such, all the attendant health inequalities accompany the second group. Both morbidity and mortality rates are higher amongst the black population. The difference in life expectancy at birth for whites and Blacks has been maintained over the last 20 years, being greater among men. From 2000 to 2009, this difference between White men and Black men was 5.74 years, while in the period between 2010 and 2019, it increased to 6.52 years due to the higher mortality of black men from external causes<sup>1</sup>. They also die more often of diseases such as tuberculosis and AIDS.

Machado and Carvalho<sup>2</sup> detail some of the key socio-political determinants of these inequalities. They point to issues of power mechanisms within Brazilian health practices that function to make much of this inequality invisible, particularly the general invisibility of Blacks in Brazilian society, and the impact of health inequalities associated with issues of endemic racism on the health of that marginalized social group.

Several studies<sup>3,4</sup> have discussed the Myth of Racial Democracy in Brazil and the existence of a ‘cordial’ racism<sup>5</sup>. Authors<sup>3,6</sup> talk about the tendency for a false ‘whitening’ of the population which functions to ignore the prevalence of different ethnic groups within Brazilian society. Guimarães<sup>7</sup> has also pointed the prejudice’s role in the amplified reproduction of inequalities. The idea of racial democracy within Brazilian society is here read as an attempt to downplay or disavow the role of race and racism in health. This leads us to question processes of racial classification in terms of birth, mortality and morbidity rates. That is to say, current processes of classification operate in such a way that they systematically under-represent levels ethnic diversity in Brazilian society. In turn, this under-representation means that the role of racial prejudice and discrimination often goes undocumented in terms of health inequalities and social inequalities more generally. This has major implications for public health policy and practice within Brazil. There is a clear tension within Brazilian society between the racial definition of categories which identify people in relation to their ethnic origin and the potential impact of this identification upon their social status<sup>8,9</sup>. There is a danger that by ignoring race as a meaningful social category which stratify society that a major cause of social, political and health inequality is painted out of the picture.

On the other hand, it is necessary to take into account the political processes of a conservative nature that have taken place over the last 10 years. As Sanzone<sup>10</sup> says:

In Brazil, as well as in Trump’s United States and other countries in the Americas, we need to learn to deal both with the evidence that the new formats of conservative populism are essentially contrary to practically any multicultural experiment and with the fact that too close an association between progressive

policies and the promotion of new sectoral identities – even when they were thought of as measures in favor of groups of the population that have been historically discriminated against – is not without contradictions.

### Political Identities *versus* Identity Politics

These struggles bring us to the issue of identity politics and the ways in which the construction of political identities is often played out as powerful instruments of social cohesion, particularly in appeals to ‘imagined communities’<sup>11</sup>. However, if these political identities are also crucial for the development of actions, programs and counter-hegemonic projects or mobilizations, particularly in reference to historically stigmatized groups such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, the emphasis on multiculturalism and affirmative actions without connection to inclusive, redistributive policies and anti-racist education focused on tolerance may be undermining the emancipatory power of public policies in Brazil<sup>10</sup>. In this context, the political project of BME activists has been to make racial difference more apparent and explicit, and less easily denied. This can most starkly be considered as a reaction against processes of ‘whitening’ which seek to disavow difference. The assertion of difference to ensure parity of opportunity is an interesting paradox.

Historically, in the U.S.A. and South Africa, racism operated at a level of division and exclusion, while racism in Brazil is far more invidious. By discursively ignoring racism as a feature of Brazilian society, the possibility of making race into a political issue is fundamentally undermined, even denied.

In turn, this raises questions about the relationship between political identity projects and the more deep-rooted sense of social identity and individual identity within these different population groups. The hegemonic position is that ‘race’ does not exist in Brazil. Further to this, the dominant discourse concedes, that even if it does exist, then difference between racial groups is not a problem as all Brazilians are ‘Pardo’ (brown). This is what you might call a ‘have your cake and eat it’ discourse. It is a homogenizing discourse which underscores a hegemonic ideology of racial equality, but it is a racial equality that is founded on a disavowal of difference. Whilst the epidemiological evidence suggests a strong interplay between BME status and health inequalities, the hegemonic discourse makes it difficult to explain these inequalities through reference to race, once more primacy is placed on issues of poverty, whereas the actuality is clearly an interplay between issues of poverty and ethnicity.

In order to explore the hegemonic context around discourses of race in Brazil, we will pose a number of questions. What is the epistemological and ontological basis of the myth of racial democracy? How does it function, discursively, to delegitimize race and racism as a source of inequality? In whose interests can it be seen to operate? In what situation can we talk about institutional racism?

This study will seek to make these processes more visible. It is anticipated that by analyzing in detail the long chains of decisions and interventions, across practitioners, it'll become possible to discern the discursive function of the myth of racial democracy by way of consideration of clinical practice. This focus on clinical practice will allow those specificities that cause ambiguity to Brazilians' racial or ethnic identity to be made more apparent.

Our study aims to analyze the discourse of professionals who are responsible for determining race-skin colour of individuals who died by violent causes. The analysis considers the specific nature of the coroners, legal experts and necropsy assistants labor, as well their perceptions of the attributes (characteristics) used to classify the corpses skin-colour. Doing that, we consider three levels: first, at the ideological level, how the discourses about skin-colour contributes to perpetuate the myth of racial democracy (and consequently ignore social inequalities) and second, at the political level, how the discourses help the maintenance of traditional designs of power distribution, justifying systems of class domination<sup>12,13</sup>. Thirdly, the analysis will identify these processes at a social level, as evidenced in the mundane quotidian practices of legal-medical staff.

### **Analytical Framework: Race, Ethnicity or Skin-Colour?**

One of the broader definitions of race, ethnicity and racism, that this study will adopt, is found in Krieger<sup>14:10</sup>:

Race/ethnicity is a social, not biological, category, referring to social groups, often sharing cultural heritage and ancestry, that are forged by oppressive systems of race relations, justified by ideology, in which one group benefits from dominating other groups, and defines itself and others through this domination and the possession of selective and arbitrary physical characteristics (for example, skin colour). Racism refers to institutional and individual practices that create and reinforce oppressive systems of race relations. Ethnicity, a construct originally intended to discriminate between "innately" different groups allegedly belonging to the same overall "race", is now held by some to refer to groups allegedly distinguishable on the basis of "culture"; in practice, however, "ethnicity" cannot meaningfully be disentangled from "race" in societies with inequitable race relations, hence the construct "race/ethnicity".

Hall<sup>15</sup> conserves Althusser's notion of ideology as systems of representation materialized in practices and furthermore utilizes Laclau and Mouffe's<sup>16</sup> arguments about the discursive articulation between race and ethnicity being established through chains of equivalence. The post structuralists authors<sup>16:105</sup> call articulation "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. On that view discourse is "the structured totality resulting from the

articulatory practice". Chains of equivalence relate to the idea of the "dissolution of the particular identities of subjects within a discourse by the creation of a purely negative identity that is seen to threaten them"<sup>17:106-7</sup>. Such is the extent of the perceived threat, any social distinction is ignored, such that equivalences rather than differences between social groups are paid heed to. This logic of equivalence would certainly correspond with the 'myth of racial democracy' ideology, but it does not identify the constituent threat.

The issue of "institutional racism" is another important concept we will consider. Foucault<sup>18:256</sup> writing about institutional racism argues that it can be seen to justify, (in the mode of bio-power), the murderous function of the State. He qualifies this in reference to institutional racism as a precondition for exercising the right to kill, particularly indirect murder: through "the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on". The increased levels of morbidity and mortality within BME population groups in Brazil endorse this position.

Racism is primarily a way of introducing a division into the domain of life that is a manifestation of ideological control: most starkly, after Foucault, it can be thought of as the caesura between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum human races, of the distinction between races and hierarchies, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of biological relations that power controls. It is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population. It is, in short, a way of establishing a biological type of caesura that appears to be a biological domain<sup>18</sup>.

Howarth<sup>17</sup> drawing upon the foucauldian notion of archaeology<sup>19</sup> to analyze the ideological systems present in the political discourses of "Black Consciousness" (BC) in the history of South Africa Movements, found three myths; he calls these i) the "simple reiteration thesis" (this is where the BC movement simply repeats ideological elements from Black Panther Movement of the USA), ii) the "inverse racism thesis" (whereby the ideology of the BC movement is argued to be founded in a notion of racial exclusivity) and iii) the "nullity thesis" (whereby the role and impact (the efficacy and effectiveness) of the BC movement in overthrowing apartheid is questioned and undermined). All three myths function in different ways to delegitimize the BC movement.

The identification of these three myths resonates with corresponding ideologies in the Brazilian discursive context. However, whereas the South African context was intended to maintain a system of explicit racism, based on a logic of difference, the Brazilian context is concerned more with a system of implicit racism, in turn based on a logic of equivalence.

These ideological positions can be understood in terms of "enunciative modalities" of discourse identified by Foucault,

as the specific social subjects which are brought into being by the articulation of ideological discourses. In this revised sense, subjectivities are the function of discourses that literally constitute political identities. With respect to Black Consciousness, attention would be directed at the elaboration of an assertive black subjectivity capable of resisting the lures of ‘separate development’ in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s<sup>17</sup>. In the Brazilian context this can be seen in the example of affirmative actions like cultural valuation with new codes of thinking and behavior; return to Africa origins; adoption of the term “Black” as self-referential denomination and a new date, November 20, as National Day of Black Consciousness. The old day of “Slavery Abolition”, May 13, was rejected as a false day. In the ends of th 70ths the Unified Black Movement (MNU) was created with the objective to denunciate the myth of racial democracy and to struggle against discrimination and racism in Brazil.

Howarth<sup>17</sup> argues that Foucault sees ideology as a mere kind of discursive practice like others present in the society. Thus, he suggests that an archaeological analysis that aims to understand the development of a “revolutionary consciousness”, would explain the formation of a discursive practice and a body of revolutionary knowledge that can be expressed in behavior and strategies. This is precisely the problem that is faced with a revolutionary discourse of Black consciousness in Brazil. If race is held not to exist, then it becomes much more difficult to articulate discourses, behaviors and strategies around it.

In characterizing the rise of the BC discourse in South Africa, Howarth<sup>17:122-123</sup> adopts a relatively neutral position, one that takes ideologies to refer to a “system of political thinking” characterized through the ways in which individuals and groups construct their understanding of the political world and act according to that understanding. The task then becomes one of describing the “archive of discursive practices” that formed the ‘surfaces of emergence’ of the BC intellectual’s discourse. Howarth accomplishes this by using a translation of the Foucauldian position manifested in the notion of “changing purposes of the movement as manifested in its discourse: the desire to construct a black identity, the flirtation with armed struggle, the aim to overthrow of the apartheid state”. So, “in this revised sense, subjectivities are not necessarily qualified to speak by virtue of their institutional location, expertise or knowledge (although political leaders may share these attributes), but are the functions of discourses that literally constitute their political identities”.

He isolated six discursive formations from external an internal discourse and argues that the liberal ‘myth of integration’ must be opposed while, at the same time, it is countered by a universal humanism (presented in dialectical terms), in which white racism and black consciousness are presented as the thesis and antithesis. So, the archaeological analysis of BC discourse contributed to “new discursive articulations and possibilities to the overall archive of resistance

discourse in post-Sharpeville South Africa”, “reinvigorated the repertoire of resistance practices and transformed the ideology of ‘non-racialism’<sup>17:125</sup>.

Particularly, the “inverse racism thesis” was widely used by the Brazilian press as argument against the affirmative action which the university quota system is the most emblematic example<sup>20</sup>. This quota system requires the identification of difference in order to operate, whereas the inverse racism thesis disavows this difference, or rather paints the difference as negatively impacting upon the majority. All of this is legitimated through appeals to racial democracy, with the rubric that ‘they are no different to the rest of us’. Here we see the logic of equivalence can be used to maintain dominant social, political and ideological positions.

In fact, a series of achievements of the Black movement materialized with the Statute of Racial Equality and the policies that implement the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture in basic education, such as Law 10,639<sup>21</sup>. However, after debates and controversies generated by reparation policies in public universities, Federal Law No. 12,711/2012 guarantees access to universities and federal educational institutes, reserving 50% of places for former students from public schools (Black, mixed-race and Indigenous people), while Law 12,990/2014 reserves 20% of vacancies in federal public institutions for Black people<sup>22</sup>.

The historic achievement obtained with the issue of inequality placed on the agenda was not able to provoke more robust state action so that structural racism broke out with all the strength after the impeachment of President Dilma Rouseff, in 2016, making the democratic agenda in Brazil still more pressing and necessary.

In the book “*The Subject and Power*”, Foucault<sup>23</sup> proposes the necessary starting point for understanding relations of power are the rationales found in antagonistic strategies between those who resist and those who seek to dominate the other, the so-called anti-authoritarian fights. These issues inform the discursive framework which will be applied to the data. This allows the analysts to identify; 1) the systems of differentiation that allow domination; 2) the types of objectives being pursued, such as maintenance of privileges and accumulation of goods in general; 3) the means (speeches, financing, physical strength) through which they exert their powers; iv) the forms of institutionalization of these apparatus, and, at last; 4) the forms and degrees of rationalization.

Bourdieu<sup>24</sup> argues that the connection between racism and domains of biopower needs to be explored in the context of the knowledge sciences, which are a product of their own classifications. The struggle for the monopoly of legitimate division implies an analysis of the relations between the logic of classificatory science, and its practice. To develop this point, we propose to invoke notions of social identity. If knowledge sciences develop in a structural context which disavows the existence of race as a legitimate basis for social and health inequality, then the knowledge sciences own

classifications are going to be blind to race as a contributory factor. This study will talk to active knowledge science practitioners in an attempt to elucidate comments on how they negotiate and legitimize their classificatory systems in relation to issues of race and ethnicity. On way of doing this is through incorporating some notion of social identity.

Castells<sup>25,22</sup> states that social identity is “the process of constructing meaning based on a cultural attribute, or even a set of inter-related cultural attributes which prevails over other sources of meaning”. He develops this point by stating that this can occur by way of three processes: i) identity of **legitimacy**, ii) identity of **resistance** and iii) identity of **project**. Castells characterizes identities of legitimacy as those that are established by the rulers in order to expand and rationalize their domination; identities of resistance are those created by actors in a devalued and/or stigmatized position through the dominant logic, using mechanisms of survival and resistance to oppression exerted by the rulers; identities of project are created, as a new identity, from any available material, in order to redefine its social position.

Based on the Brazilian context, we propose a fourth element to add to Castells’ typology, and that of a chameleon (camouflaged) identity or, characterized by practices of denial, disavowal, and avoidance<sup>26</sup> of issues of race and race related behavior (the mask over the mask). This new form of identity is constructed through the practices described in Frame 1. In this new formulation, we sought to identify the discourses corresponding to the spectrum of each political-ideological position that reveals the political identities: legitimizing (or chameleon), resistance and project.

A discourse of the project identity can dialogue with the Petersen’s approach<sup>27</sup>: about difference and sameness. This author analyzed the discourses and politics of non-racialism, identity and difference in South Africa, and the relevance of non-racialism. He described six discourses of sameness: 1) African as **anti-ethnicity nationalism**, distinct from European, Asian or Colored, to sublimate ethnic identity and achieve a common national struggle; 2) **African as trans-racial** that recognized only one ‘human race’; 3) **Black as**

**trans-racial** unity against oppression (Black consciousness); 4) **South African** as a new form of patriotism; 5) **Human Being** has the primacy in the self-identity; 6) Non-racialism.

Non-Racialism is important, for him<sup>27</sup>, because allows the deconstruction of “Race” idea, the “continuing critical reminder of the need to subvert any essentializing discourse on race and difference” and to goes beyond. To confront these kinds of identities, he proposes to accept the fracturing of subjective, “affirming and resisting difference” to move away from “chromatic or anti-chromatic forms to express the Africanness identity” towards rethinking the language of difference/sameness in order to “break with the past”. Such a radical position, however, looks for a future that can be problematic in some conditions or conjunctures like the Brazilian one, where the oppressed voices can’t cross the ideological strong barrier formed by educational and mass media systems, which are, in turn, supported by the State Apparatus of “scientific” legitimacy. The adhesion to propositions of that kind could easily (and, perhaps, rightly) be interpreted as a tentative attempt to submerge the black demands in the melting pot of Race Mixture.

These four identities show potential for different types of political behavior in the face of situations that involve conflicts of power. The difference between the first two is that the identity of legitimacy relies on an implicit and normative discourse of white supremacy. If the notion of contact avoidance<sup>26</sup> is assigned to the category of the everyday racism, then, in terms of social relations, the many forms of negation of the other become more visible through the presence of the disqualifying discourses. The use of euphemisms, for example, is a resource that aims to convey an institutionally racist message, whilst at the same time “avoiding” social censure (and also the consequences of the law). Two strategies were particularly used by oppressed groups, depending on the environment: being invisible or changing colour. But, the camouflaged identity implies the unconsciousness, the doubt, and the desire to stay in some comfortable position. The camouflaged identity serves the oppressor more than it serves the oppressed.

**Frame 1:** Political Identities and Race-colour discourses

Identities	Discourses
Legitimizing – maintain, expand and streamline domination;	There is not race inequality but just economic inequality (slavery heritage). The black contributions to the Brazilian identity are focused in folk and exotics things (racism of intelligence).
Camouflage – both dominator and dominated escape through apolitical strategies such as negation and mimesis	There is not a clear adhesion to any discourse and the main behavior is “avoidance”.
Resistance – resistance and survival against the stigma and de-valuation using different principles or opposing the domineering;	There is a persistent situation of oppression and iniquity. The solution is “affirmative action” to compensate State negligence. Black is the one who feels like Black. (Including speech)
Project – new actors redefine their position in society transforming the whole social structure.	Rethink the language of difference in sameness in order to “breaks with the past and open up new space for the future”. Utopian position?

Source: Adapted from Castell’s typology. Made by authors.

## METHOD

The boundaries between Medicine and Justice are not always clear. In Brazil, Legal Medicine is a field of medico-juridical practices that include surgeons and physicians that are called “legist doctors”, (in Portuguese, “médicos legistas”). These doctors are public employees of the Judiciary.

It is the doctors’ responsibility to fill out a form stating, in detail, the *causa mortis* and other relevant data (in Brazil, Death Certificate is called “Declaração de Óbito” – DO). As a second step, the Notary issues a Death Certificate after a process of autopsy (necropsy). In cases of violent death (External Causes), a coroner is put in charge of filling out a DO in third form (three copies). One copy goes to the family, another goes to the Secretary of Justice and the third is sent to the State Health Secretary<sup>28</sup>.

The Forensic or Legal Medicine does not use, in theory, any race or ethnical category to identify someone; only the skin colour: Leucoderma (White, of European origin); Melanoderma (Black of European origin); Xantoderma (Yellow of Asian or American-Indian origin); Faioderma (a mixture of Black and White)<sup>29</sup>.

Santos, Coelho e Araújo<sup>30,31</sup> showed major discrepancies between the two tiers of recorded information. The DO recorded by the doctor and the technical report or necropsy compiled by the legist frequently disagree in terms of classification of the racial origin of the deceased. The System of Mortality Information uses categories: White, Black, “Pardo” (can be translated as Brown), Yellow, and Indigenous. To understand this process, we analyzed the discourses about colour, race and racism present in nine interviews carried out between 2007 and 2008, across two different professional groups: 6 coroners (forensic surgeons called in Brazil as Legists) and 3 assistants of necropsy. They were all employed in a medical-legal public institution for a municipality of 3 million inhabitants in the North Eastern area of Brazil, with a high proportion of the population formed by “Blacks” and “Browns” (pardos) (to borrow from the System of Mortality Information).

These medical-legal processes of race and skin colour identification are understood here as being constitutive of (and constituted by) a regime of practices. This notion of a regime of practices is taken from Foucault<sup>19</sup> by Glynos and Howarth<sup>32</sup> to develop their critical logics approach (social, politic and phantasmatic). In this paper we are interested in studying the implication of everyday social practices around race/colour in terms of the political impact that racism practices and the way they capture the subjects.

## RESULTS

The definition of race-colour is, for the coroner, something very peripheral. It is regarded as being of little import, according the same perspective adopted by others

coroners<sup>33</sup>. Our expectation about the medical-legal responsibility in provide the most reliable information was not corroborated, it appeared there were a number of obstacles.

### The game of truth and the process of racial identification in the necropsy act

Although Castell’s framework<sup>25</sup> identifies three possible identities, we actually identify one: the legitimizing identity. We identified the camouflaged identity in the empirical data and sought to give it a theoretical status. The identity of resistance was excluded from the forensic medical space of this study, or the discourse that supports it is almost inaudible. The Identity of “Project”, proposed by Castells, or still the Radical Identity, advocated by Peterson<sup>27</sup>, were not expressed in any speech. Issues of legitimacy and camouflage are more central concerned with the analytical argument we make in this paper. In any case, we analyzed some aspects about the absence of these last two identities (resistance and project).

#### Identity One: legitimizing

The identity of legitimizing, in Brazil, is actively denied, or rather, the legitimacy is constructed through the active denial of difference. A camouflaged identity is commensurate with the discourse related to the myth of racial democracy. It is the disavowal of difference that underpins them both. The myth of racial democracy allows the hegemony of the old beliefs and values to be re-articulated within new sets of practices because they are plastic, changing shape to maintain the grip of the hegemonic discourses of race. The myth of racial democracy functions as a fantasy, which enables the inequalities, causes by racial discrimination to be covered over and ignored.

Another way to express the belief of the white supremacy is through the deployment of a number of discourses that function to superficially exalt ‘Black’ contributions to ‘Brazilian’ culture. These discourses evoke the folks, the football, carnival. These cultural practices have no intellectual value (Bourdieu, 1983) and function to undermine and define a tightly delimited role for BME activities within a ‘mainstream’ non BME culture. The Extract 1 illustrates very well how that kind of discourse can be enunciated.

#### Extract 1

**Interviewer:** Do you think it is important to fill in the item race/colour on the DO?

**Interviewee F:** Look, I do not see any prejudice to fill it in. Each one has his colour and he’s qualified by that. I think we live in a country that is democratic even in relation to the skin colour, right? (...) I think the racial issue, it has to be clarified in the cultural field (...) Because, I think we discuss it very little, okay? **Disqualifying the Black slave**, you know? **And**

**also the White as the master on the farm**, the owner, the lord of slaves. I think that only when the White man to put himself in the Black man's shoes, understand? And the opposite. Only then, they will really start to discuss in a qualified way and **put an end to this question of colour**. Because when this planet was created by a spiritual genetics, seven races were created, you know? We have almost all of them here in Brazil. While in other countries there is only a race kind.

The problem of the Myth of Racial Democracy is that it manipulates the desire for fairness, as evidenced in Extract 1. That's why we disagree with Osberry<sup>34</sup> argument that the Brazilian Myth of Racial Democracy can be a "true story". The true story is that the people, in general, don't want to be Black and the myth functions to let the people think they can be White one day. They would become to be White and have access to all the facilities and acceptance of the White people. More than that, the White does not want the Black, to leave that position that was imposed on them, to give up their allocated place within the hegemonic hierarchy.

The practices of those state officials involved in the compiling of mortality figures function to complicity valorize this racial democracy myth, ensuring that it is enforced, as the hegemonic racial discourse in Brazil from cradle to grave.

The implicit assumption, made by the interviewee in Extract 1, is that it is possible to combat inequality through an empathetic exercise, in which one person puts oneself in the other's shoes and to stop disqualifying Black people as slaves and White people as masters. The existence of race-color is not denied, but begins to be legitimized "spiritually", and must be "clarified" in the cultural field. It is a completely ambiguous speech full of contradictions.

Racial democracy is exalted. The desire to "end the color issue" could be interpreted as a discourse of non-racialization, however, it appears at a political moment in which the argument of multiracialism, of miscegenation in Brazil, is being used against university quotas for Black and Indigenous people. In this sense, it works to legitimize a camouflage approach, without allowing, in practice, Black people to leave the place of slave, which is that of manual, poorly paid and unskilled work.

We can ask: Why should the race issue be clarified in the cultural field?

In the cultural field, nothing is effectively explained, everything is contested and contestable, culture does not have the same legitimizing criteria as science. In this context, "cultural" can be understood as entertainment, something related to "taste" and "common sense", something that cannot be debated, like religion, because everyone has their own.

The implication of this is that much ethnic solidarity has been undermined by conflicts with other identity categories like the ones referring to class and profession. It

is supremely ironic the manner in which this practice works. In seeking to disavow difference founded on notions of race, the myth of racial democracy accentuates difference based on social class, professional status and such like. In an effort to cover over one mode of difference, numerous other modes of difference are mobilized to distract the gaze. Therefore, the establishment and maintenance of a strong identity, one that is capable of producing intra-group solidarity, is part of the political effort made by groups that contest and resist the racial democracy myth. In an expanded group, the inclusion of "Pardos" who identify themselves with "being Black" and sympathize with that "being" is, in part, an attempt to challenge the legitimacy of these other differentiations and distinctions. In this case, which role does the professional identity plays on the reproduction of those kinds of "truth"? The next identity can help to explain it.

### **Identity two: camouflage**

The predominant political identity in the Forensic Medical space – the camouflaged identity – can be understood more as a position somewhere between the identities of legitimacy and identities of resistance. This predominance reflects the more general tendency, present in the Brazilian social fabric, of covering racism through a series of strategies, designed to disavow difference.

One of the coroners who represented the second identity – the camouflaged identity – was classified as "Faioderma" (brown skin in the medico-legal classification). He found that in terms of ethnicity, there is inequality, there is prejudice, and that some degree of social play is necessary. However, his successful personal experience against these social barriers seems to confirm (for him) the values of meritocracy. Coming from a lower social stratum, he considers herself to be an example that social mobility through personal merits is possible. This ended up putting him in the same arena as the Whites. Their argument relies on social and political differences (in terms of social status) to argue for similarity with (alleged) mainstream racial democracy. The fallacy of this argument consists in the fact that the exception does not confirm the rule. On the other hand, rising socially in Brazil is equivalent, especially for Brown people, to acquiring a "White" status.

### **Extract 2**

**Interviewee A:** I was raised listening to people saying that we should redistribute income and I never knew how to do it until I pass the Entrance Exam. I was born in a very poor family background. I passed the Entrance Exam for the University, was granted an education loan and, nowadays, I earn a very good salary. Certainly, in my case, there was a redistribution of income, because I got to a place where few people get, right? I have done an extension course, two post-graduation courses. So, the Black population, my maid's son, will not

have the same way that my son will to get there. Then, if there is an unequal situation, there is also an unequal way to get there. Now, if there will be quotas for race, if there will be quotas for public school, I have no idea.

**Interviewer:** The DO has a classification of race-colour that is different from the one in the Report of Autopsy, which is made according to skin colour. How do you translate a term into another?

**Interviewee A:** No, no... I ... I... uh... as I said, I have never stopped and made a question about it. **“My” corpses, that I see, I classify them as Faioderma,** I put White in the DO. I put the Melanoderma as Black, as it is written on the DO. I do not remember how it is written on the DO, but I have never made an evaluation, a more detailed thinking about it.

This extract clearly shows, despite his protests to the contrary, that he has an elucidated and concrete system for classifying corpses according to race. From a perspective informed by medical education and science, and by his acquired superior status, from this position he can classify Black corpses as “the others”, he also distances himself from the ‘Black’ servant class. So, the result is this: if it were his choice, then there is no White (everything is Faioderma) because of the mixture of different ethnicities that constitute Brazilian society (again this is the myth of racial democracy), but when he translates it into the DO, all Faiodermas become “White”. This is magic. In doing so, he, who is a “Faioderma”, becomes a “White person” (which once again raises the issue of social mobility). Evidence from previous studies shows this trend of “whitening” through social mobility<sup>8</sup>. There is mobility and contingency in the White and Faioderma groups, but there is no such mobility in the Melanoderma groups. Extract two confirms this process and illustrates some of the countless ways in which identities are transmuted. The discourse of equality coexists with the social practices of sifting made possible by the discourse of meritocracy.

As seen previously, one of the fallacies that underlies the denial of the existence of race (and, therefore, the denial of racism) is to reduce the social vulnerability caused by discrimination and prejudice to a mere economic or class issue. The third coroner we considered (see Extract 3) evoked this dominant discourse, that the adverse social conditions faced by black people are a legacy of slavery. There is no denying that this is true, but it is partial and does nothing to address any question of responsibility for the lasting legacy of these conditions. Also, the discourse of slavery as the cause of all social injustices serves to deny racism by prioritizing the historical context to the detriment of the more immediate social context.

But then, why does he do this? The coroner has a very biological bias, which legitimizes the political context (the myth of racial democracy), while ignoring issues of social justice. Extract 3 illustrates how, to escape the contradictions caused by these conflicting positions, he proceeds to deny

biological reasons through an argument based on “technical difficulties”; denies the political dimension (“racism as a cause of death”) and change through “doxa” (“black people die more because they are poor”). He also denies the ethical basis of information (“race is important”) by denying the value of the race-color attribute (ideology), as the importance would, in theory, be attributed “only” to the epidemiological aspect. As epidemiology really does not matter, for him, consequently, providing reliable information is not important.

Finally, the coroner invokes the restricted purpose of his work, stating that his only concern would be to determine the *Causa Mortis*, because race-color information is seen as bureaucratic and, as such, could be left as an administrative-level decision (carried out by necropsy assistants or other mid-level professionals), despite Brazilian law saying that it is a medical responsibility. Here the biological medical discourse is rescued to justify its omission.

### Extract 3

**Interviewer:** And who is to fill out the Death Certificate?

**Interviewee B:** The doctor, but in some cases... most times I am the one who fills it out. I do it based on the documentation as well as the form that comes from the Police Station. The doctor fills in with the cause of death and signs the Certificate (...) I think that since we are born the skin colour has been mentioned on the Birth Certificate. It helps us in the moment of the necropsy, right?

As a baby’s color is given by the father or another family member, the bleaching process begins at birth from an imaginary social perspective.

The delegation of the race-colour identification to the auxiliary is conscious and permitted because the medical practice is a strategic practice concerned only with bodies and the medical control of those bodies in terms of illness and disease. That is why Foucault<sup>35</sup> privileged the study of medical institutions. The naked truth which emerges from the doctor’s speech is that the legal medical professional do not understand the last finality of his technical action because they do not impact directly upon the doctors practice. He only sees the most immediately results, in the same way as the specialist that only see the organ that he exams. The aim of the job is practical and the agent pragmatic, apolitical and uncompromised with the public health orientations because he is an expert serving to “justice” even when the medicine principles should direct his work. In this case, the medical identity follows the basic speciality (surgery or clinic) and the old paradigm of infection diseases still present: individualist, curative, hospital centered. It is also worthy of note how tightly delimited the bureaucratic practices are laid out. There is little if any room for contingency in these practices. Any information is sourced from other information, such as birth certificates. This functions to make this an exacting process, not an interpretive or contingent process.

So, if the doctor is not the source of the practices of the race-colour determination, then the veiled subject - the auxiliary of necropsy – in such institutions can be described as half Black (“Pardo” or Brown), medium level schooling, lower middle class. He is, literally, in the middle, that is, between the dead (Black, male of the low class), and the coroner (also male, socially White, no matter his skin-colour and upper middle class). Women are few in this space.

This veiled subject is the one who really identifies the race-colour in the DO by External Causes. He is like a chameleon, dominated by the dominator’s discourse the same way as others health spaces.

### Identity three: resistance

The only doctor whom classified himself as Black tried to show to the interviewers that there is no “pure race” in Brazil, everybody has their quota of melanin and this can justify the behavior, in Legal Medicine, of classifying everybody as “Pardo”. This, which could be named as logic of equivalence<sup>16</sup>, appears on the speech as resistance of classify (and be classified).

#### Extract 4

**Interviewer:** What do you think could be done to improve the filling of that race-colour quest, not especially in forensic medicine, but, for example, in others... it is... a natural death. That are many under-registers in this camp, are not?

**Interviewed D:** Yes, and even in forensic medicine there is a tendency... there is, so to speak, there is... to filling like Brown (pardo), right? More than as White or Black, right?

**Interviewer:** So well, what do you think it could be done?

**Interviewed D:** It has more Brown because, usually, you cannot define the race. I think so. Why? Because the mixture is great. You three, for example, if someone says that you are White, it is talking only about the colour of the skin, right? I think, you to characterize the race here in Brazil, mainly in the northeast, is a very difficult job.

We could describe this movement in the sense of characterizing everyone as “equal” as a political act of resistance. However, such is the dominance of the myth of sameness that it cannot be described as a discourse of resistance, but rather as a discourse of blurring, of fuzzy logic erasing the difference that causes suffering. This logic, however, legitimizes and even reinforces the dominant hegemonic position, because it is discursive and has the function of hiding the truth. What’s the truth? That Black people suffer from racism, have no political voice, die more often, get sick more often, have a lower level of education and earn less than white people. This means, for most Black social movement organizations and critical Brazilian authors, that the best strategy to resist this hegemonic discourse is to insist on difference. This is the only possible strategy to impose respect, dignity, attention

and equity<sup>36,37,38</sup>. It is clear that the position of a Black surgeon in Brazil is already delicate, because he depends on the legitimization of other superiors in the class or professional order, which, as we have already seen, is dominated by those accepted as ‘White’. In this sense, the construction of racial identity as a political identity undergoes scrutiny in terms of liberal and enlightened discourses, so beloved by the Brazilian mainstream, by major distribution magazines and also by the mainstream media in terms of television and radio.

The Black stays, in the collective imaginary, in place of the dead, the sacrificed, the cursed, the alienated and excluded. The coroner’s object should be not the corpse, but the living being that lies behind the “material proof” of his body in the decomposition process as a victim of violence. To make visible the truth of this death (i.e. the assertion that the violent deaths of Black Brazilians are the direct results of social and institutional racism) is a political act necessary to repair in certain degree of the social and political injustice violently experienced by Blacks.

To let the “color” speak is a political act of resistance, one that seeks to transform the dominant mythologizing practices of racial democracy. It releases those “ignored” identities, giving them power over the principles of their own construction, creating the situation whereby they can seek to organize new equivalences, by “race” or skin-color, ethnicity or any other attribute or class which they may choose to characterize themselves with, like “quilombolas”. The identity of resistance supports discursively the assertion of difference, and rejects the Myth of Democracy, thus challenging the hegemony of the white supremacy project. However, it’s indeed worthy of note that this identity has not found in the texts analyzed by this paper. The speeches of resistance appear sometimes spoken with little conviction, for example, when the doctor talks about black quotas. In his answers, he demonstrates he knows about the discourse “politically correct” but also, through the way he uses the discourse, demonstrates that he doesn’t support it.

### Identity four: project

Black people (brown black people) make up the majority of the population of the state where this research was carried out. In this context, they are a dispossessed majority. In this sense, the project identity was absent from the institutional space of justice, even when a Black man spoke. Rethinking the language of difference in relation to practices that accentuate sameness is the main result of this analysis. Positions that seek to maintain iniquitous difference (through appeals to sameness) need to be challenged by new social and political practices that seek and accept diversity. This opening can then be used to transform the political and social domains, creating new logics of equivalence between groups, until now dominated by the hegemonic myth of racial democracy. The project becomes one in which the subject articulates his

identity in a mosaic of belongings that is structured around solidarity consciousness. In this way, a new Brazilian subject may emerge in the political recognition of equal rights, the uniqueness of each person and the sharing of inherited biological, cultural and ethical wealth.

### Some Possible Conclusions

Many Brazilian authors such as Gilberto Freire or Roberto Da Matta have interpreted the process of formation of Brazil's self-image, in terms of an Iberian, personalistic, patrimonial and highly hierarchical cultural heritage, where private and public life spaces are separated in everyday life. From this perspective, slavery, which occupied a peripheral place in Europe, in colonial Brazil, helped to forge relations in a peripheral state, embodied in the figure of the planter, the colonel, who concentrated great power. In this type of Muslim slavery, they say, polygamous and authoritarian, the mulatto, bastard son of the master or co-opted from among the most talented, would represent the middle class, the Brazilian equivalent of the European bourgeoisie, who would barely find their place in the interstices of a society that re-Europeanized with the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family in 1808, fleeing from Portugal<sup>39</sup>. Education supported by a White father or a godfather was for many the only possible form of liberation. Or illusion of liberation. Because, the Mulatto, now called Pardo or Faioderma, achieved, along with social mobility, whiteness legitimized in identification with the oppressor, especially those who, through marriage or merit, studied and became "someone".

The search for a deep grammar to explain the maintenance of unequal relationships that affect, in particular, Brazilian Blacks still today, has produced maps of various social dimensions of Brazilian daily life where the contradictions and dualities expose part of the cultural matrix responsible for discursive repertoires that we got to analyze. In these sociological studies, the image to be explained, of a friendly and cheerful Brazilian, in a violently and stratified society, finds its most vehement denial in everyday Forensic Medicine space, where, daily, and more intensely on weekends the massacres occur and a significant number of bodies is exposed to ritual necropsy. The logic of equivalence operates to make them all, "Pardos". If we consider the popular saying that notes "at night, all cats are gray (Pardos)", we would be forced to think, metaphorically, that the legal medicine institution lives and reflects a social night that elongates in time, and does not allow the color of violence surface in all its tonalities.

This research explored how the "whitening" race-colour in cases of violent death, which means that this phenomenon affects not only the census record of the living but also the statistics of mortality. The results showed the main ideological mechanisms through which both racism and the construction of political identities run in health institutions.

Also, they highlight aspects of the identity of those who identify the dead, and how their identities determine the identity of their object, how their discourse justifies this determination.

The other way would be to rebuild (through processes of resistance and social activism), Black identity, focused on the broad social integration of all ethnic groups to strengthen ties between the excluded, and place the recognition of these groups on the social and political agenda, in a friendly and fearless way. Thus, the idea that "color" can speak to inequality – a difference that is unfair – depends on the unmasking of camouflaged ideology. The dominant ideology, through its public institutions, works to cover up or turn a blind eye to acts of social extermination committed by the police and by the people themselves who internalize the violence to which they are exposed on a daily basis. The practices that altered ethnic-race-colour that define the dead identity do not help the justice, au contrary. This must be changed.

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## RESUMO

Há uma clara tensão na sociedade brasileira entre a definição racial das categorias que identificam as pessoas em relação à sua origem étnica e o impacto dessa marcação em seu *status* social. Diversos estudos têm discutido o “Mito da Democracia Racial”, no Brasil, identificando a existência de um racismo “cordial” e a tendência para um falso “branqueamento” da população. Nosso estudo tem como objetivo analisar os discursos de profissionais médicos legistas responsáveis por determinar a cor da pele dos indivíduos que morreram por causas violentas, estatisticamente uma das mais importantes causas de morte). A análise considera a natureza muito específica do trabalho do médico legal, explorando os discursos usados para classificar a cor da pele e as atribuições associadas feitas a *behaviour* (como causa de morte) dependente dessas classificações. Os discursos dos profissionais sobre *raça-cor* tendem a corresponder a um espectro do que denominamos posições político-ideológicas. Essas posições revelam identidades políticas preocupadas com processos de legitimidade, camuflagem, resistência e projeto. A pesquisa confirmou o fenômeno do “branqueamento” nos casos de morte violenta, em que pessoas de grupos não brancos foram classificadas como brancas na declaração de óbito. Isso significa que esse fenômeno afeta não apenas o registro censitário dos vivos, mas também as estatísticas de mortalidade. Os resultados evidenciaram os principais mecanismos ideológicos pelos quais o racismo e a construção de identidades políticas funcionam nas instituições de saúde. Também destacam aspectos da identidade daqueles que identificam os mortos, e como suas identidades determinam a identidade de seu objeto, e como seu discurso justifica essa determinação.

**Palavras-chave:** Saúde; Racismo; Racismo institucional; Igualdade; Diferença; Análise do discurso.

## RESUMEN

Existe una clara tensión en la sociedad brasileña entre la definición racial de las categorías que identifican a las personas en relación con su origen étnico y el impacto de esta marca en su estatus social. Varios estudios han discutido el “Mito de la Democracia Racial” en Brasil, identificando la existencia de un racismo “cordial” y la tendencia a un falso “blanqueamiento” de la población. Nuestro estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los discursos de los profesionales médicos forenses encargados de determinar el color de piel de las personas fallecidas por causas violentas, estadísticamente una de las causas de muerte más importantes). El análisis considera la naturaleza muy específica del trabajo del forense, explorando los discursos utilizados para clasificar el color de la piel y las atribuciones asociadas al comportamiento (como causa de muerte) que dependen de estas clasificaciones. Los discursos de los profesionales sobre *raza* y *color* tienden a corresponder a un espectro de lo que llamamos posiciones político-ideológicas. Estas posiciones revelan identidades políticas preocupadas por procesos de legitimidad, camuflaje, resistencia y proyecto. La investigación confirmó el fenómeno del “blanqueamiento” en los casos de muerte violenta, en el que personas de grupos no blancos eran clasificadas como blancas en el certificado de defunción. Esto significa que este fenómeno afecta no sólo al registro censal de personas vivas, sino también a las estadísticas de mortalidad. Los resultados resaltaron los principales mecanismos ideológicos a través de los cuales opera el racismo y la construcción de identidades políticas en las instituciones de salud. También destacan aspectos de la identidad de quienes identifican a los muertos, y cómo sus identidades determinan la identidad de su objeto, y cómo su discurso justifica esta determinación.

**Palabras-clave:** Salud; Racismo; Racismo institucional; Igualdad; Diferencia; Análisis del discurso.