Bodily Displacements of a Female Afro-descendant from the Dehumanization of Racialized bodies*

[English Version]

Desplazamientos corporales de una mujer afrodescendiente desde la deshumanización de los cuerpos racializados

Deslocamentos corporais de uma mulher afrodescendente da desumanização dos corpos racializados

Adriana Arroyo-Ortega**
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9522-4116
Colombia

Abstract

Objective: the article shows and reflects on the processes of dehumanization and bodily constriction suffered by female Afro-descendants based on the narrative of a young woman who studies at a public university in Medellín. **Methodology**: the research from which this article emerges had narrative analysis as its methodology. **Results**: the fundamental topics that emerge from the young woman's stories are focused on how the youthful, racialized body is the constant object of bodily controls from socialization processes, and how hyper-sexualization and location, like the denial of what is beautiful, dehumanizes

---

71

Universidad Autónoma de Manizales. L-ISSN 0121-6538. E-ISSN 2248-6941. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

them. **Conclusion**: the main conclusion of the investigation is centered on the fact that the dehumanization suffered by female Afro-descendants establishes them in a place of symbolic inequality that is just as relevant as inequalities regarding access to economic resources.

Keywords: Woman; Afro-descendants; Young; Body; Discrimination; Racialization.

Resumen

Objetivos: el artículo visibiliza y reflexiona sobre los procesos de deshumanización y constricción corporal que sufren las mujeres afrodescendientes a partir de la narrativa de una jóven que estudia en una universidad pública en Medellín. **Metodología:** la investigación de la cual emerge este artículo tuvo como metodología el análisis de narrativas. **Resultados**: los tópicos fundamentales que emergen de los relatos de la joven están centrados en cómo el cuerpo racializado juvenil es objeto constante de controles corporales desde los procesos de socialización, y cómo la hipersexualización y el lugar de ubicación, como la negación de lo bello, les deshumaniza. **Conclusión:** la conclusión central del texto está centrada en que la deshumanización que sufren las mujeres afrodescendientes las ubica en un lugar de desigualdad simbólica igual de relevante que las desigualdades en el acceso a los recursos económicos.

Palabras-clave: Mujer; Afrodescendientes; Joven; Cuerpo; Discriminación; Racialización.

Resumo

Objetivo: o artigo torna visível e reflete sobre os processos de desumanização e constrição corporal sofridos pelas mulheres afro-descendentes através da narrativa de uma jovem mulher estudando em uma universidade pública em Medellín. **Metodologia:** a pesquisa da qual este artigo emerge teve como metodologia a análise narrativa. **Resultados**: os temas fundamentais que emergem dos relatos da jovem estão centrados em como o corpo jovem racializado é constantemente

submetido a controles corporais dos processos de socialização, e como a hipersexualização e o lugar de localização, como a negação do belo, os desumaniza.
Conclusão: a conclusão central do texto é que a desumanização sofrida pelas mulheres afro-descendentes as coloca em um lugar de desigualdade simbólica tão relevante quanto as desigualdades no acesso aos recursos econômicos.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres; Afro-descendentes; Juventude; Corpo; Discriminação; Racialização.

Introduction

The Racialized Body as a Space for Inquiry

The ways in which young, racialized women[1] construct the body is one of the central questions of the research from which this article emerges, focusing on three young women, on the challenges and possibilities that can be defined around their bodies, and the relationship they establish with it. This text will reflect on the ways in which the body of a young Afro-descendant woman who lives in the city of Medellin is intersected with, and the social relations she establishes from the singularities of gender, generation, and racialization. Also taking up what Inés Dussel (2007) explains:

> Identity is a central point in current theories and politics, it has been conceptualized as a material practice that is primarily located in the body (Butler, 1993). It has been argued that identity patterns for African Americans, Latinos, women, and homosexuals involve significant differences in the body behaviors that are established as "normal" for each of these groups (Donald, Rattansi, 1992). Thus, bodies are seen as privileged sites for the construction of the social, and great attention has been paid to bodily practices that function as regulations of the self. (p. 133-134)

Despite this and the importance of the body in everyday life, there are still pending reflections about it, remaining in the epidermis of theoretical configurations that leave aside that "the act of knowing is rooted in and on a body not only oppressed or subalternized but also racialized within a colonial matrix" (Walsh 2013, p 50), as well as concrete experiences that happen to many women in Colombia and other countries in Latin America.

For this article, in particular, the authors will analyze the narratives generated in the inquiry with Camila[2], one of the young participants who represents herself as an Afro-descendant, concentrating her enunciation beyond a skin color in the socio-symbolic and cultural aspects that are built in singular communities and that refer to ways of feeling and interpreting the world, which recognize

---

1. For this article the authors take up the category racialization as made explicit by Isoke (2015, p. 1) "refers to an ongoing process of marking, categorizing, and reproducing human difference through the unequal distribution of life chances within specific geographic spatiotemporal continuums".

2. The three young women participants received all the confidentiality and anonymity considerations set forth in the informed consent and chose to appear in all research-related information under their first names.

the abduction of her ancestors from the African continent and the subsequent processes of colonization, slavery and marginalization historically experienced.

In this sense, the social field of the different Latin American countries and academia itself have been covered with paradigms that are not only androcentric (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1986) but also that in many cases have been racist and discriminatory toward Afro-descendant communities, and particularly toward women, accounting for historical and systematic processes of exclusion and invisibilization, which place them at an open disadvantage compared to their mestizo or white peers.

In the Colombian case, the situation of Afro-descendants in different parts of the national territory has not only shown the structural racism of society and the State, but additionally, in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, these situations have been exacerbated; adding to the lack of equipment and hospital infrastructure that historically the territories inhabited by Afro-descendants have experienced, the situations of violence have worsened in their regions in a more bloody manner with the arrival of the paramilitaries and neocolonization (Lozano-Lerma, 2016).

As explained by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE):

> Multidimensional poverty for the national NARP[3] group stood at 30.6%, 11.0 p.p. above the national poverty for this domain. In the capitals, poverty among the NARP population was 13.6 percentage points higher than total poverty. (2019)

This explains briefly but forcefully the difficult situation of marginalization and exclusion that Afro-descendant populations continue to experience in the country.

In this context, the body appears then as a territory that is marked by power relations (Foucault, 2010) and configured by regimes such as sex-gender and racialization, but that everyone inhabits differently according to their own experience in the world and in which historically, as expressed by Espinosa (2009):

> When a reflection on the subject and the bodies of feminism has been installed as never before, I wonder who has occupied the material place of this postponed reflection and why the concern has been limited to the sexed and gendered body without being able to articulate it to a question about the way in which the

politics of racialization and impoverishment would also be defining the bodies that matter in a region like Latin America. (p 40)

And this is directly related to hegemonic values that are anchored to the way in which the supposed importance of some bodies and lives over others is evidenced, and the stereotyped representations that continue to exist socially about Afro-descendant populations, about their bodies and the materiality of existence for them, generating epistemic and symbolic violence on a daily basis. As Rosalba Icaza (2019) puts it:

> Looking at non-white women produces an important epistemic shift. Not only does it mean looking at the inseparability of gender and race, but it reveals how the colonized subject was subjugated, dehumanized and her sexuality animalized while she was denied the sources of communal and collective meaning. (p. 34)

In addition, this context of ethical and political representations that are marked by the processes of coloniality, helps to explain the minimal presence of racialized women in public or private decision-making scenarios in Latin America, in state or university processes or in private enterprise; especially because in the framework of structural racism mentioned above, Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples have been placed in the place of physical or symbolic extermination, denying them equal access to fundamental rights such as good education, public services or recognition of their cultural processes; since, as mentioned by Walsh (2013), coloniality has promoted complicities in different spaces, including academic institutions, and generated prescriptions of racialization that place young Afro-descendant women and men as the last subjects in social spaces. Precisely, Afro-descendant youth are not homogeneous, as Adriana Arroyo Ortega and Sara Alvarado Salgado (2015) outline:

> Because of this contextual relationship, it is not possible to define a single way of being young; there are diverse circulating meanings in this regard that encompass both the production of the social sciences themselves or of other organizations that work with "youth," as well as what young people themselves have been building. (p. 22)

All of this strongly impacts the lives of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the ways in which their bodies, especially those of young women, are seen or not seen as collectively important in the face of the situations of violence, vulnerability, or contingency to which they may be exposed.

Narratives as a Methodological Approach

For the development of this research, from which this article emerges, narratives appear as a form of knowledge construction, which from qualitative research fosters the establishment of stories that, beyond what is spoken and written, build forms of approach to the subjects. As Paula Dávila, Daniel Suarez and Liliana Ochoa (2009) state, the identity of the subject is narrative, since the question of who one is raises the telling of a story of life, the narration of their history. What makes it to be considered the most accurate methodology for the development of the proposed research objectives, from the interest in listening to other stories, to build forms of diverse records of the experience of those who historically have not been heard, to be generated especially with the racialized young women, who interrogate the hegemonic visualities and the forms of structural oblivion to which they have been subjected. Here, on the contrary, different forms of narrative enunciation are rescued.

In this sense, it was important for the investigative process to build scenarios of mutual listening, of fluid conversation in which the young women felt comfortable and at the same time closer forms could be generated in the construction of their stories. Given that, as Leonor Arfuch (2016) mentions, "narrative research requires, above all, a position of attentive listening: not only to what is said but also how it is said, not only the content of a story but the modes of its enunciation" (p. 235). Therefore, the audiovisual interview and the daily video were generated as techniques with some guiding questions that allowed generating a conversation and promoting all the scenarios so that the young women could narrate themselves.

The field work of this research was carried out at the end of 2019 with three young university students whose ages were between 18 and 25 years old, who are part of youth groups in the city of Medellín. In addition to talking in a first meeting with them about their participation in the research, they were also informed of the conditions of confidentiality, anonymity, and others, recorded in the informed consent. Likewise, each one was asked to define how they would appear in front of their story, deciding individually and autonomously to appear with their names in all the investigation publications. Although the research was carried out with three young women, in this article only the findings of one of them will be analyzed. This because of the richness of her story, as well as because the analytical results that emerged from the other stories are found in other location keys around the body tracings, which do not always manage to coincide around the narratives that emerged specifically in Camilla's story.

Camila, in addition of being a young Afro-descendant woman who studies at a public university, develops levels of activism in some spaces, for which the

77

Universidad Autónoma de Manizales. L-ISSN 0121-6538. E-ISSN 2248-6941. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

University has become a place for claiming rights, meeting with others who have generated questions that she had already been weaving from her subjectivity[4]. In the story of Camila, there are no explanations about processes of academic racism suffered at the University, on the contrary, this has been a meeting space with levels of reflection and construction of other knowledge.

Bodily Obliterations and the Visual Hegemony of Whiteness

Young Afro-descendants must assume a set of practices around their bodies that are always examined in terms of the phenotypic configuration, but especially the lighter or darker tone of their skin, structuring the determinations of blackness or Afro-descendent around bodily pigmentation. For Camila, precisely from her childhood, skin tone was an issue to consider in her relationship with her own body and in the way she was seen by others, even within her own family:

> So, something that cut across the body a lot, obviously, is skin color, so for example, generally when I was little, well, my grandparents are like … my grandparents on my dad's side are like a combination with indigenous and my grandmother on my Mom's does have a fairly dark skin color, so like … first of all, the first relationship they made me have with my skin, was like saying "I look more like the lighter ones," right? (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

The historical and highly racist structured idea of the value of people according to their skin color has generated that in many parts of the world there is not only irrational hatred toward such a large group of people, but also that such coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007) leads to the fact that in many cases, these same people seek to generate discrimination scenarios with their children or closest beings according to the level of pigmentation of their bodies. As Achille Mbembe (2016) says:

> By reducing the body and the living being to a matter of appearance, skin, and color, by granting skin and color the status of a fiction with biological roots, the Euro-American worlds have made black and race two aspects of the same figure: codified madness. (p. 22)

---

4. In order to maintain the conditions of confidentiality and anonymity built with the participant, it is not considered appropriate to provide additional data about her, to prevent her from being identified in the university spaces of which she is a part.

This phenotypic reduction, typical of the invention of races (Quijano, 2014), has made other characteristics such as the hair of Afro-descendant women a source of ridicule, rejection or stigmatization, and that in their own close contexts, they seek ways to generate transformations in this regard or to value more strongly those who have less frizz; that is, those who may be closer to whiteness as a sociopolitical form of idealized body construction that privileges white/mestizo bodies over other racialized bodies.

> With the hair too, "Oh thank goodness you didn't make your hair so chontudo!" well, that's what they call it, so curly then. Rather, it was curly but beautiful, right? Then those things that they tell you since you were a child, that later when you grow up and when you realize it is: "But why do we always try to deny that side,"certain side. So then one realizes that in reality, like we are taught to hate certain things about our body, to hate those darker parts, to hate where my hair is curlier, right? which is a paradox because after all, what is my mother like or what is my grandmother like? so it's like I reject that, so those are the first relationships that one is taught. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

The coloniality of being and the stereotyped ideals of neoliberal beauty that are inserted in the forms of bodily and subjective production end up having a negative impact on the lives of many Afro-descendant women, who do not feel beautiful or who hate their own bodies, their origins or forms of body construction, establishing self-censorship, a desire to resemble the whiteness established as the dominant beauty ideal, which permeates the subjectivities of young women and the decisions that in many cases they make about their bodies and relations:

> I remember that when I was little, I kind of related more to my grandparents who were kind of clearer and all that, but later, like when you saw the whole world, that people in P* well, the Afro population is hardly there, well, the Afro population is very close and I studied in a very central place, so the Afro population in my classroom was like three or four, so when I interacted with other white, mestizo people, then I did say "oh no, I am black" so I no longer have that relationship like "oh! I'm on the lighter side" but "yes, yes, I'm black" Then also, let's also say, the other relationship that they tell you is like "you're black, but you're light-haired" and that somehow implies something, it means something, but you don't realize it, right? And in a certain way it implies a privilege in relation to the darkest Afro people. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

Not accepting and loving one's own body is not only crossed by the devices of racialization and the ideal of whiteness, but also appears linked to weight scenarios, in a kind of constant avalanche on the body that prevents it from being accepted not only by the young women themselves, but also by people around them.

> Let's see, I feel that, well, my body did change in the last two or three years at the beginning, that was very strange, because when I was 15 years old I was very skinny and I didn't like being so skinny , I said like 'Oh I look like, I don't know, like malnourished or something like that' and more or less around 17, well I started to gain weight and everything, and then I didn't like gaining weight, so It's like, I don't know; but I feel that this does not come from within me, but rather that all the time they teach us to hate ourselves, that is, regardless of what our body is like, they are always putting burdens on us so that we do not like our body. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

What is undermining the self-esteem of Afro-descendant women and the possibility of considering themselves worthy of public support, of being loved from their own bodily and cultural configurations, placing them in a kind of hypersexualized dehumanization that leads them to deny themselves, their own bodies and desires.   As Zenzele Isoke (2014) explains:

> Black feminists have long argued that the subjugation of black women under white supremacy operates through the historical exploitation of black women's bodies, especially through the global proliferation of controlling images that mark black women (especially poor black women) as abject and unworthy of love, caring, respect, and sympathy. (p. 357)

In this sense and returning to Lux Moreno (2018), fatphobia is an increasingly widespread idea of control of the female body, which is more strongly centralized in women, even in those who have already incorporated gyms and other practices into their vital paths of bodily constitution, and that can plunge them into insecurity in the face of the possibility of social rejection for not embodying bodily standards, for not being a socially valid body given that "being beautiful is transformed into the very possibility of being loved by others" (Moreno, 2018, p. 105). This makes women begin to travel with the mental burdens associated with aesthetic ideals of beauty from a very young age.

> I began to think a lot about these last ones, I don't know, two years, about how society imposes certain burdens on us that make us do not love each other, for example these days a friend who is very thin told me 'Oh no, a friend told me that she was fatter' but she is thinner than me, I say "impossible," that is, and she is a girl who goes to the gym every day, and she told me that at that moment she felt bad and I said "I mean, how is it that such simple words make us feel so bad?" (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

These considerations about body weight, the image that is transmitted to others, is not necessarily being generated by strangers, in many cases the comments and situations about the inadequacy of female bodies begin in their own family spaces and by other women that to some extent have imposed from the socialization scenarios in the processes of corporal discipline:

> I think it's more from the family, especially because my grandmother was thin, she ended up being overweight, my mother was very thin, and now she is also suffering from obesity, so all the time they are "Oh, take care of yourself!," "Oh, don't get fat!," "Oh, I don't know what!" The same thing happened to my aunts, so all the time I go to Pereira, "Oh, I see you fatter!" So all the time, there are those kinds of comments and the truth is that I hear them mostly from my family, my friends. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

This naturalization of violence that women must suffer especially from a very early age, are configured in a colonial way of looking at their bodies, which is structured from the closest spaces of socialization. As Lux Moreno (2018) says "body control has been instituted as a religion of bodies in which we initiate by entering to a social life and coming into contact with others" (p 166). What is taking hold with all the products on the market associated with health, beauty, and well-being, and that is structuring subjective female constitutions trapped in hegemonic ideals of thinness that ignore body diversity.

Dehumanization and The Abject from Body Control Devices

The experiences around the body do not end there, in the case of Afro-descendant women, hypersexualization scenarios are part of everyday life in which the gazes of others, especially men, place them in places crossed by sexual objectification that turns them into objects that can be consumed and discarded according to a neoliberal logic, as Camila expresses in the following story:

So when I go downtown, people are always yelling things, they always say to you "Oh mamacita!" well, those things you say like "I am under a lot of stress or it's disgusting" for example, once It happened with a foreigner, that made me very angry, I was in Poblado celebrating with a friend that she was turning 18, I was still 17 at the time, so two gringos passed by, two Americans, and one of them invited me to a party, and I told him "well no, I can't, I'm underage" at that time I hadn't related it but he told me that it didn't matter, that we go, and I said "Oh no! Thank you very much" and I went with my friend, about a block later she told to me, well, like, "why do you answer them? Can't you see what they're doing?" Then I made sure, it was that they were seeing me as a prostitute, of course, I was in a corner, I had shorts, right? I was waiting for her because she was doing something, so like, well, like they'll never see me as an academic person right? Well, no, even, it's not even that prostitutes aren't smart, but you can't see it either... well, people never think about that, right? (Personal communication, 2019)

The dehumanizing reification of the Afro-descendant bodies of women locates them only from a sexual point of view, ignoring what they are in terms of their human capacities and intelligence, excluding them from the circuits of knowledge production, realizing that colonial patterns and racism that still prevail in today's societies and in which "the logic that accompanies colonization is part of the matrix of scientific knowledge, perhaps its face is less pleasant" (Vargas-Monroy, 2011, p. 160).

These openly racist behaviors and thoughts, which are secretly integrated into the cultural ethos of many people, make them camouflage into everyday life and end up being naturalized, but, it does not mean they are less violent or generate less suffering in those who suffer from it. The murders of young afro-descendants, in different parts of Latin America, do not come out of nowhere, they are structured from systematic racist logics that have dehumanized afro-descendants:

It happened to me once, I have two, well, for me they are very strong, once when I was about 14 years old I liked a friend, so I told him that I liked him, and he told me like "Oh! ok! I love you very much, but I would never be with a black woman" so, in fact, at that moment, I didn't even take it badly, I took it like "Oh ok! Who would want to be with a black woman?" Well, I mean, it was imposed inside me that I perceived it that way, right? So precisely, because every time you imagine the love story you are not going to imagine a love story with a black woman. Why? Because we are not in those … well, our bodies don't fit in those narratives. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

These dehumanizing logics extend to other women, also placing Afro-descendants outside the logics of affection, desire, and the possibilities of affective relationships and sensitivities that involve affective ties:

> And also, once my best friend, she went to Buenaventura, and when she came back, she also came to study here in Medellín, and let's say that I began to tell her a little about political training and all that. I told her that unconsciously people were racists, and at that moment she realized, "yes, that is right. I have been too" and she told me that when she went to Buenaventura at that time, they saw two people, she and her cousin were looking at two black people kissing and her cousin asked her "Oh! Do black people fall in love?" and she said "I don't know." Then I asked her "why did you reply that to your cousin? – I don't know – you were my friend then!" and she said "I don't know, I saw them different, well, I didn't relate to them" maybe because I seem valuable, because suddenly I don't have such dark skin, or because suddenly I do not have the accent from the Pacific, so I did not relate to the common imaginary of a black person, (...) as the relationship before them was like "they are inferior, but you are my equal and then that is why my questioning of whether they fall in love or not." Well, that confession was very strong for me. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

The references toward Afro-descendants out of affective spaces dehumanize and place them in a state of nature in which they are not recognized as equals, they can be objects of cruel and degrading practices – such as those daily used with animals – but also as Eva Illouz and Shoshannah Finkelman (2009) state:

> As William Reddy argues, all "communities construe emotions as an important domain of effort" (Reddy 2001, p. 55, our emphasis), modern culture is particularly prone to regulate emotional life according to scripts of rationality, making it increasingly difficult to separate emotion from rationality. (p. 407)

Issues that seem denied in many societies to Afro-descendants who are placed either in absolute emotionalities or in hypersexualization, and in any case outside of humanity.

One can think about the close relationship to the eurocentric category of the white man as a measure of the human that should not only be asked constantly but to generate increasingly strong positions that expand the human, due to, as Rossi Braidotti states: "We – the dwellers of this planet at this point in time – are interconnected, but also internally fractured. Social class, race, gender and

sexual orientations, age and able-bodiedness continue to function as significant markers in framing and policing access to normal 'humanity'" (2009, p. 407). What configures subjects and geopolitical locations of the depictable, bodies that not only do not matter, (Butler 2010) but as Laura Quintana states they end up being abstracted "from their historical location, from their interdependence with other bodies (human and non-human), from their ecosystem dependence, from their fragility as agents part of broader assemblages to which they are thrown" (2020, p. 196), so the establishment of bodies as ideal become as a type of socially naturalized violence.

These structural violence and racisms have affected the behavior of the Afro-descendant women that in many cases have internalized not only that they are not beautiful, but that they cannot be part of affective relationships because of their phenotypic features, body type or skin color. Briefly, these women internalize the feeling of not being equal to white women and of being inferior, this only changes when processes of social and political empowerment change these perceptions:

> As it also changes one self's perception, for example, I said at that time, when my friend told me that I had so internalized that idea that a white woman was better or more beautiful than a black woman, as a black woman, that I even understood it but then, from all that training one says "I am important, I am relevant, we are on the same level" right? And then, one understands, one begins to understand those forms of racism, at that time I would never have realized it as racism, after having that deconstruction one says "well, I mean, how did not I realize it? Or how did not I realize it?" (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

Beauty is an extremely complex issue that cannot be structured from a binary imperative but for a long time and in different contexts, afro-descendant women have been seen from a different cultural and socialization foci as not beautiful, because their bodies do not correspond to the white eurocentric standard pattern.

This topic seems trivial compared to other difficulties and problematizations from daily realities of women today, but one must stop at this aspect because it significantly affects the subjectivities of afro-descendant women of their personal worth, affective possibilities and in the construction of their own vision, and that, as Camila's story relates it, she has only been recognizing the racism in these aesthetic ideals little by little, from the training processes in which she has been in. According to Toni Ingram (2021):

In what follows, I take up the idea of beauty as a process through a feminist new materialist framework. I bring together the work of feminist philosopher and quantum physicist Karen Barad (2003; 2007) and affect theory to explore feeling pretty as an intra-active affective-material process. Moving away from a focus on what beauty is, Barad's posthumanist framework of agential realism offers a way of conceptualizing beauty as emergent – a process or becoming. (p. 3)

What constitutes beauty not as a fixed attribute of certain bodies, but as a relational scenario determined by social buildings that have been culturally installed from different devices and that establish subjects with greater possibilities of access to symbolic capitals from the discursive frameworks of what is beautiful or not, thus it implies asking, changing, and imaging other political fictions around beauty that would have an impact on material forms of existence of many women who spend much of their lives dealing with social determinations around their bodies and the behavior that neoliberal models seek to impose on them.

Thus, beauty as a cultural construct is strongly crossed by the processes of coloniality and structural racism that in many cases make exotic and derogatory difference, it places it on a distant location, the unknown that can be invaded, phagocytized or instrumentalized:

How do others see my body? Yes, how others see my body, something very important is that many people believe that certain things are compliments to our body, but I often do not see them that way, right? I see many of them within a framework of exoticization, so I think that many people see my body and make it exotic and that bothers me a lot, it makes me feel very angry because I feel that they frame it in a stereotype that does not even fit with a woman who studies or works, or who is independent or who does many other things. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

To minimize the other to a single determinant from skin color, hair or make it exotic it is a form of colonial construction of the bodies that perpetuate stigmatizing stereotypes of the subjects, they establish borders and barriers to bodies located under a geopolitical perspective of the "third world" or impoverishment, from neoliberal logics of self-production and corporal exploitation. It necessitates according to Adriana Arroyo Ortega, Natalia Ramírez Hernández and Irma Sánchez Correa (2018):

To question the naturalizations associated with the controls of the bodies and lives of women who have ended up objectified and homogenized from the aesthetic,

it stocks other aesthetics features, insurrectionary bodies, no schematized and disciplined that can generate enunciations and interpellations to the historically constructed colonial traces and carry out effective transformations in the ways of installed patriarchal relationship, since one cannot think of the colonial without including the coloniality of the genre (Lugones, 2008) as an analysis that must be developed around the visualities and corporalities that interfere with everyday life. (p. 165)

The bodies of afro-descendant women have historically been working bodies, enslaved, but also hypersexualized. It is problematized by Camila in her story from a political indignation to the way her body and the body of other racialized women are seen, they have been reduced and essentialized in forms of social intelligibility that do not recognize other elements of their dignity, but they also have no considerations on their own desire and bodily empowerment, as they place them as bodies for others, they are instrumentalized in many cases to a male desire or a scenario of neoliberal impoverished production or marginalizing care.

I think that the black woman's body in general has always been very sexualized, even though she has been a woman who has had to work a lot historically, because she has not been, well, she has not had, let's say in quotation marks "privilege" as they say about middle class white women who if they did not have freedom were supported by their husbands. Black women were never supported by anyone, they always had to work, or well, at least from what we know from colonization. They always had to work, they never had the opportunity, if we can call it an opportunity, to get married and be supported by someone, so they were always working, working, working, so they are working women's bodies. But they have never been seen as working women's bodies, it is always sexualized, hypersexualized. So let's say that this is reflected in my daily life, when I walk in the street and people say "Wow, you black woman!" or when I get those super outrageous compliments, which have to do with black women. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

The exoticization and instrumentalization of Afro-descendant women's bodies is also daily occurrence when their bodies are invaded, touched, questioned and censored, which has led them in many cases to hide or transform their bodies in order to approach the hegemonic canon of what has been considered beautiful. More recently, however, these women have generated practices of vindication of their aesthetics, their beauty, and their existential poetics:

When people who do not know me and I do not know them generally come [they] tell me negative things. When I walk down the street they ask me if my hair is real or if it is a wig, it is really annoying because sometimes I feel that they see it pretty or that they see it as ... yes they see it pretty and they say "how, can this be hers?" So, I mean, in the last century black women have been straightening their hair precisely because before, if you ask a woman of 60-70 years old, having natural hair was something that was frowned upon, and they started to be insulted, so women started to straighten their hair, to use wigs, to gather their hair, they didn't keep it loose. So they don't think it's normal to see a black woman with her natural hair. Luckily, now it's becoming a little more normal, black women are starting to use natural hair, but it's really annoying when they come and say "Oh, is this your hair for real?" I don't know, I mean, what do they have to teach a person to come and invade your personal space without knowing you? I mean, to come out of nowhere and touch your hair or pull it and say "Oh, that's cool!" Well, I don't agree with that. (Camila, personal communication, 2019)

The corpo-spatial invasion has been a constant that Afro-descendant women have lived and that accounts for the coloniality of power and being that is maintained and re-actualized, that maintains discrimination but also generates mercantile aesthetics around them, as Emma Chirix García (2019) makes explicit:

The problem lies not only in the difference, but in the degree of valuation that each body acquires in the table of social hierarchy. Hence the need to bring to public light the construction of racialized, civilized, and colonized bodies from diverse spaces (p.146, own translation).

Reflecting on the very practices of corporal colonization – on the ways in which discourses that denigrate, infantilize or essentialize the bodies and subjectivities of Afro-descendant women continue to be enunciated – becomes an ethical imperative to generate social transformations that prevent them from continuing to be harassed, raped or murdered. Today more than ever – in the midst of a global pandemic that has raged hardest on racialized bodies – it is important to end political hierarchies based on skin color, phenotype, culture, and the application of legal fictions that reify human difference (Isoke, 2015) and to begin to generate – as Camila has been doing – at least questions around these kinds of racist naturalizations that constitute the first step to empowering herself and her own body, and to broader transformations in her everyday environments.

Conclusions

This text has tried to point out the colonization of the gaze and the social construction of beauty that considers some bodies as beautiful and desirable, corresponding to a canon that establishes as abject those bodies that do not coincide with it, especially those of racialized women or with body measurements different from the euronorcentric norm, generating behaviors and social expectations in relation to what is considered the ideal body, which, as stated in this article, constitutes a type of naturalized symbolic violence, embodied and made visible in the reflection on the relationships that appear in Camila's narrative.

These relationships, not always made explicit, account for some socio-cultural constructions of the beautiful, of socially accepted and excluded bodies, which continue to structure and reproduce inequalities that are not minor, because, as Eva Illouz (2019) puts it, in the light of Lamont's perspective:

> For, if Lamont considers traditional measures of inequality to be important, she advances more qualitative and intangible ones as well, such as recognition (or lack thereof). This is indeed a most welcome move. To those who have traditionally argued that inequality is a matter of fair redistribution of resources, Lamont retorts that the problem is multidimensional, and that it should therefore include a cultural dimension as well, where culture is here located directly in the self and its inner resources. (p. 741)

This implies understanding that considerations of access to economic resources – without ignoring their importance – constitute determinants of inequality. Additionally, for populations such as racialized women, the ways in which beauty is constructed, how their bodies are seen or not seen, and dehumanizing and systematic inferiorization generate historically naturalized inequalities that are not always analyzed by social policies, because they are considered to have less impact on the subjective constitution and on the conditions of existence of these groups, ignoring the implications that such scenarios have on the reproduction and continuity of systematic violence.

This reflection does not ignore the material conditions of existence, the inequalities surrounding the redistribution of resources. Nor does it pretend to situate the scenario of social transformation exclusively in the subjective field, leaving aside critical analyses of the ways in which the neoliberal practices of the world (Calveiro 2019) have been installed in many of the political and business decision-making scenarios. However it does consider it important to

continuously interrogate the material inequalities and equity measures adopted by governments, while questioning the symbolic practices of dehumanization that reproduce such inequitable scenarios.

Recognizing the narratives of racialized women, their bodily experiences and asking questions with them in this regard, constitutes a symbolic form of resistance that can be incorporated from research exercises. It also comes from the everyday, in a trace that can map the affectations of the processes of racialization and systematic racism that Latin American women, in their great majority, still suffer, in order to not generate a scenario of methodological purism that places one exclusively on the outside, but that can also question the places of enunciation and the implications of these discursive types from which one is located.

Camila, in her story, makes explicit scenarios of bodily obliterations. She also gives way to daily resistances that were also generated in the research itself and that allowed structuring the space as the possibility of a meeting of women's bodies that listened to each other from dissimilar experiences, but crossed by socially installed logics of power that affected their bodies and ways of relating to each other. Listening appears as a form of resistance that allows getting closer to research as a form of ethical-political transformation and encounter with ourselves (Pérez-Bustos 2019). Academic research can be a way to question the forms of bodily disciplining and dehumanization installed, in order to contribute from everyday practices to their necessary transformation, but also to the visibility of racialized bodies in order to stop the *apartheid* of racialized difference.

The process of emancipation and reflection that Camila has been weaving has not yet ended, it has been slowly strengthening and at the time this research was conducted Camila was precisely generating questions about the way in which she and others in her environment had situated themselves in relation to their bodies and, in general, about the different exclusions that Afro-descendant women suffer on a daily basis. More than a totally constructed emancipation, what is found in it is an exercise of corporal decolonization, which even today is performatively weaving as a vital search, which does not leave out the recognition of the obliterations suffered from the scenarios of racialization, but which does not remain exclusively in these places, but is in the transit of finding other spheres of location from its own everyday life.

References

Arfuch, L. (2016). Subjetividad, memoria y narrativas: una reflexión teórica y política en el campo de la educación. *Magis. Revista Internacional de Investigación en Educación, 9*(18), 227. https://doi.org/10.11144/javeriana.m9-18.smnr

Arroyo-Ortega, A.; Alvarado, S.V. (2015). Pensamientos políticos desde la juventud afrodescendiente: cuestionamientos raciales. *Aletheia. Revista de Desarrollo Humano, Educativo y Social Contemporáneo, 7*(1), 12-29.

Arroyo-Ortega, A.; Ramírez-Hernández, N., Sanchez-Correa, H. (2018). Retos y continuidades de jóvenes afrocolombianos/as desde sus prácticas identitarias: poéticas de la descolonización. In R., Septien (Ed.), *Afrodescendencias: Voces en resistencia* (pp. 153-172). CLACSO. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn96gn4.11

Braidotti, R. (2018). A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities. *Theory, Culture & Society, 36*(6), 31–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418771486

Butler, J. (2010). *Marcos de guerra: las vidas lloradas.* Editorial Paidós Mexicana, S. A.

Calveiro, P. (2019). *Resistir al neoliberalismo: comunidades y autonomías.* Siglo XXI Editores.

Chirix-García, E. (2019). Cuerpos, sexualidad y pensamiento maya. *In X.,* Leyva-Solano; R., Icaza, (Coords.), *Tiempos de muerte: cuerpos, rebeldías, resistencias* (pp.139-160). Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales; Cooperativa Editorial Retos; Institute of Social Studies.

Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. (2019). *Autorreconocimiento de población negra, afrocolombiana, raizal y palenquera. Debate de control político de la Comisión I Cámara sobre CNPV 2018* [PDF File]. https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/grupos-etnicos/presentacion-grupos-etnicos-poblacion-NARP-2019-debate-ctrl-politico-camara-rep.pdf

Dávila P.; Suarez, D.; Ochoa, L. (2009). La indagación de los mundos escolares a través de la documentación narrativa de experiencias pedagógicas: Un aporte teórico y metodológico. *Cuadernos de educación, 7.*

Dussel, I. (2007). Los uniformes como políticas del cuerpo. In Z. Pedraza (Ed.), *Políticas y estéticas del cuerpo en América Latina* (pp. 131-160). Ediciones Uniandes.

Espinosa, Y. (2009). Etnocentrismo y colonialidad en los feminismos latinoamericanos: Complicidades y consolidación de las hegemonías feministas en el espacio trasnacional. *Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer, 14*(33), 37-54.

Foucault, M. (2010). *El coraje de la verdad: el gobierno de sí y de los otros.* Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Haraway, D. (1991*). Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* Free Association Books.

Harding, S. (1986). The Science Question in Feminism. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society, 6*(4), 400. https://doi.org/10.1177/027046768600600481

Icaza, R. (2019). Sentipensar los cuerpos cruzados por la diferencia colonial. *X. L., Solano; R., Icaza (Coord.), Tiempos de muerte: cuerpos, rebeldías.* Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales; Cooperativa Editorial Retos; Institute of Social Studies.

Isoke, Z. (2014). Can't I be seen? Can't I be heard? Black women queering politics. *Gender, Place & Culture, 21*(3), 353-369. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.781015

Isoke, Z. (2015). Race and Racialization. *Oxford Handbooks Online,* 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199328581.013.38

Illouz, E. (2019). Is Self-Worth Crucial for the Reproduction of Inequality? A response to Michele Lamont's Lecture. *The British Journal of Sociology, 70*(3), 739–746. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12664

Illouz, E.; Finkelman, S. (2009). An Odd and Inseparable Couple: Emotion and Rationality in Partner Selection. *Theory and Society, 38*(4), 401–422. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-009-9085-5

Ingram, T. (2021). "I feel pretty": Beauty as an Affective-Material Process. *Feminist Theory.* https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001211000015

Lozano-Lerma, B. R. (2016). Violencias contra las mujeres negras: Neo conquista y neo colonización de territorios y cuerpos en la región del Pacífico colombiano. *La Manzana de la Discordia, 11*(1), 7. https://doi.org/10.25100/lamanzanadeladiscordia.v11i1.1630

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On The Coloniality of Being. *Cultural Studies, 21*(2–3), 240–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548

Mbembe, A. (2016). *Crítica de la razón negra: Ensayo sobre el racismo contemporáneo.* Futuro Anterior Ediciones.

Moreno, L. (2018). *Gorda vanidosa: sobre la gordura en la era del espectáculo.* Editorial Ariel.

Quijano, A. (2014). *Cuestiones y horizontes: de la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/descolonialidad del poder.* CLACSO.

Quintana, L. (2020). *Política de los cuerpos: emancipaciones desde y más allá de Ranciere.* Editorial Herder.

Pérez-Bustos, T. (2019). Mi tiempo ya no es mío: reflexiones encarnadas sobre la cienciometría. *Nómadas, 50,* 35–43. https://doi.org/10.30578/nomadas.n50a2

Vargas-Monroy, L. (2011). Lógicas científico/coloniales del conocimiento: una crítica a los testimonios modestos desde territorios de frontera. *Athenea, 11*(3), 157-64. https://raco.cat/index.php/Athenea/article/view/247480

Walsh, C. (2013). Introducción. Lo pedagógico y lo decolonial: *Entretejiendo caminos en Pedagogías decoloniales: Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re) existir y (re)vivir.* Ediciones Ab ya-Ya la.