

## DISCOURSE AND AFRICAN DIASPORA: HAIR AND IDENTITY AMONG STUDENTS FROM UNILAB-BRASIL<sup>1</sup>

## DISCURSO E DIÁSPORA AFRICANA: CABELO E IDENTIDADE ENTRE ESTUDANTES DA UNILAB- BRASIL

Kassandra da Silva Muniz<sup>2</sup>  
Ana Lucia Silva Souza<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This article is in the field of language, specifically in Transgressive Applied Linguistics, through establishing a relationship between Identities, Africanness and Diaspora. We will discuss about a Facebook group created within Unilab in 2015, in the city of Redenção. The group added students from different African countries talking about the hair and the use in its natural state. More than identification with the movement amongst black female youth to have their afrohair, there was a need to answer what it meant to be a black African student in a city known for being the first to "abolish" slavery in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Language. Discourse. Identities. Diaspora. Migration.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo tem foco no campo da linguagem, especificamente na Lingüística Aplicada Transgressiva e estabelece relações entre Identidades, Africanidades e Diáspora. Discutiremos sobre um grupo do Facebook dentro da Unilab, criado em 2015, na cidade de Redenção. O grupo acrescentou estudantes de diferentes países africanos em torno do tema do cabelo e do uso em seu estado natural. Mais do que identificação com o movimento entre jovens mulheres negras para ter seus afros cabelos, havia uma necessidade de procurar responder o que significava ser uma estudante negra africana em uma cidade conhecida por ser a primeira a "abolir" a escravidão no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Linguagem. Discurso. Identidades. Diáspora. Migração.

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<sup>2</sup> Doctorate and Master degrees in Linguistics from UNICAMP. Graduated in Languages from UFPE. Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages in UFOP. Research Group in Language and Identity: pragmatic approaches/UNICAMP. E-mail: kassymuniz@gmail.com.

<sup>3</sup> Doctorate degree in Applied Linguistics from UNICAMP. Assistant Professor in the Department of Vernacular Languages, in the Institute of Languages, in Universidade Federal da Bahia – UFBA. Research Group RARURAS/UFBA. E-mail: analusilvasouza@uol.com.br.



## Introduction

In the eyes of many white folks and other non-black folks, the natural afro looks like steel wool or a helmet. Responses to natural hairstyles worn by black women usually reveal the extent to which our natural hair is perceived in white supremacist culture as not only ugly but frightening. We also internalize that fear. The extent to which we are comfortable with our hair usually reflects on our overall feelings about our bodies (bell hooks, straightening our hair, 1989).

This paper<sup>4</sup> contributes to the critical and transdisciplinary strand of applied linguistics, this latter aspect being an emerging concept proposed by PENNYCOOK (2006). We are motivated by the possibility of thinking of language through its social and political features and, consequently, in ethical and engaging terms. As Pennycook argues, it is not possible to be in the minefield of language study in a disembodied way, disregarding concrete individuals within raced, gendered, and classed territories (PENNYCOOK, 2008).

Highlighting the possibilities of transgression within the field, the author, in his classic 2001 book "Critical Applied Linguistics: a critical introduction", points out the necessity of understanding the role of discourse on the formation of a multifaceted and conflicting subject in a world which is increasingly inserted in contexts of superdiversity (BLOMMAERT, 2001). This creates the foundation to think of a Transgressive/Mixed/Undisciplined Applied Linguistics field (PENNYCOOK, 2006; MOITA LOPES, 2006) which incorporates what he described as a "turn" that refocuses attention to the corporality of difference, identities as based on linguistic performance, and the existence of language as contingent on its use in acts of identity. (PENNYCOOK, 2006). Through the possibility of problematizing issues more than finding ready answers for those "new" identity contexts in which language can confer, extinguish, displace existences and subjectivities (MUNIZ, 2009; BUTLER, 1997), we intend to develop this approach with an embodied corpus. Embodied with gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, territorial geographies which challenge us, as researchers,

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to believe discourse is not a mere proposition of words that, together, may have some meaning.

In this article, we are interested in discussing issues related to hair and identity of African and black female students in the University of International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusofony (UNILAB), who created a page on Facebook to share experiences about this transition to natural hair. Body, performativity and difference will be addressed via the group founder's declarations, on which we base our analysis. Here, hair becomes a "hair-discourse", which shows language as an act of transformation of self and the world. The conception of language as action (AUSTIN, 1975) is constantly updated in a process that articulates social and cultural themes about identities in transit and in transition and about how the discussion on hair is still delicate and violent when it comes to black women. All of this is experienced in a context of a university that brings that has a policy of promoting respect of the multiple differences entailed in sharing this academic space on a daily basis.

### **UNILAB: challenges of a country hostile to black female and male immigrants**

The University of International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusofony, inaugurated in May 15th, 2001, appears as a political project with the objective of integrating member-States of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP, in Portuguese), through academic exchanges for students and professors, support for research and public higher education for its citizens. According to the General Guidelines, the university was founded aiming to be a reference and integration center for these countries and regions, constituting itself in a space for reciprocal cooperation, gathering and exchange of science and technology, cultural exchange and sustainable development.

We highlight that the support to Africa and the Asian regions with a Lusophone tradition was established as a main goal in the World Conference on Higher Education, carried out in July, 2009, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESDOC, and the Brazilian government sought to be part of this, including through the expansion and setting up of regional campuses of Federal Universities.



The case examined here is of a recently established regional campus in the city of Redenção, known to have one of the lowest per capita income rates in Brazil, a city with about 26,000 inhabitants who earn their livelihoods from retail commerce and the public service. The city, a center for surrounding rural areas, is also known for being the pioneer in the abolishment of slavery in Brazil, but this liberationist legacy has not been sustained, and, in general, the population proves to be extremely averse to the presence of black foreign students.

Brazilian racism is related to skin color and phenotypic features: the darker a person is, the least accepted he/she is within society, knowing that, in the current social imaginary, “black person” and “Africa” are both terms that, in the racist stereotyping structure, refer to underdevelopment, misery, violence and other stereotypes. Even as fluent speakers of Portuguese as a second language, the students have faced (and still do) negative reactions concerning their phonetic accents, idiomatic expressions and other features that differentiate them from the “correct language” speakers, as understood by the inhabitants of Redenção. It is interesting to notice that, as the city is located in the Northeastern area of Brazil and in countryside rural area, a place that is also negatively stereotyped linguistically, this linguistic prejudice against African female and male students reveals how essential is to investigate such language issues, especially considering identities, culture and performance as possibilities of changing this painful scenario caused by multiple forms of discrimination.

Therefore, the experience of African students in the city of Redenção brought up practical and subjective obstacles for the involved parties, even knowing they are in the city only for a short period of time. They are foreign students in a diasporic situation. The notion of diaspora (HALL, 2003) can be quite challenging when applied to the Afro-Unilab *Facebook* group, because there are some African female students in the context of diaspora who, after arriving in Brazil, get in touch with Brazilian black youth who are trying to reconnect with what they (the Brazilians) imagine to be “African”. The foreign female students choose an aesthetics and, sometimes, afro-natural hair as a way of seeking a connection with the idea of blackness they find in Brazil. It is impossible not to mention Hall (2003) and his question: “what is this ‘black’ in black popular culture?”, once the idea of performativity



is taken as elementary to understand the complex relationship established between language and identities in the context of UNILAB.

## Language and Identities: Performing discourse as action in the world

The locus of our research is online discussion of the activities related to “transitioning” towards Afrocentric aesthetics, particularly the “transition” towards natural-style hair, in the place of straightening. Straightening hair is a common practice amongst black Brazilian women, as it is amongst the black foreign students attending the university campus in Redenção.

Austin (1975), when postulating performativity in language through speech acts, was also calling attention to the way language is taken for action and acting over the real and, therefore, a constituent of reality, not merely a representation or correspondence of reality (AUSTIN, 1975).

The notion of discourse as a practice surfaces in the use of verbs in the Afro-Unilab facebook page, as well as many websites and YouTube channels that refer to “hair”, “transition”, “afro” and the like. Verbs such as “stand proud of”, “claim” and “empower” illustrate the power that language and subjects have to transform marginalized stories and identities into possibilities – a positive self-affirmation and an opportunity to change a country which has difficulty understanding the other in their difference without transforming it into inequality.

The linguistic and identity performance (“Yes, so I took my hair transition seriously and happy and the hair started growing, and I felt free and happy”<sup>5</sup>) experienced by the female students and other women that have re-existed (SOUZA, 2011) and, thus, re-set their existences, can only be analyzed if their hair-discourse is seen as producing change. Black female hair/body/corporeality works discursively simply by the fact that when young black women see themselves and when they are seen with a hair style which makes them feel free and happy, it causes a sort of displacement of self and others with the same desire of performing that possibility of freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “Sim, aí fui levando a minha transição capilar a sério e feliz e o cabelo também crescendo, e na medida que fui sentindo livre e feliz” Bela, student from UNILAB.



Instead of “ugly”, “dirty,” the concept/idea of *discursive hair* performs the power of instigates epistemologies that try to understand this transition hair movement. This kind of view enables to think theory as practice of freedom (hooks, 1994). Understanding the difference and the movement attempted by this “frizzy empowerment” means considering the Other in their totality, “embodied.” In this perspective we intend to perceive the presence of African, female students who have founded the Afro-Unilab group.

If one of the hallmarks of the diaspora is compulsory displacement, this idea is now substituted by the necessary displacement provided by the availability of Brazilian government support for foreign students. What remains from what we call diaspora is this movement of a population, since it is almost six thousand students, among Brazilians and people coming from many African countries, living in a rural city in Ceará, having the necessity of establishing new paradigms of survival, cultural and symbolic exchange and, also, having to deal with a new data to most of them: Brazilian-style racism. Nevertheless, these subjects, immersed in our complex, racial logic, continuously find themselves out of place for the integration promise does not meet their expectations, the hoped for and promised integration in the foundation documents of the University.

El enfoque y la práctica que se desprende de la interculturalidad crítica no es funcional al modelo societal vigente, sino cuestionador serio de ello. El interculturalismo funcional responde a y parte de los intereses y necesidades de las instituciones sociales; la interculturalidad crítica, en cambio, es una construcción de y desde la gente que ha sufrido una historia de sometimiento y subalternización. (WALSH, 2007, p.20).

It is in this black Brazilian diaspora context that we find African students who come to Brazil in order to qualify themselves professionally, but find an unequal, racial State which deals with them within the racist logic that prevails in the country.

The problem of African student migration in the process of late modernization covers discussions on the construction of a black identity and the group experiences in political and cultural interactions of the diaspora in the Black Atlantic (GILROY, 2001). Racial



identity is a basic factor in African migration as it brings the racial issue to light within the living context of the immigrants' social relations. (SOUZA, 2015, p.3)

When highlighting those students' reports/complaints, we could think of or be disturbed by the difference on the treatment given to what is called "gringo." The students remember that they do not have the "advantages" of being "gringos", it means, neither in the social coexistence nor in the university. On the streets, all African people have already been violently tackled by the police and only recognized as foreigners and students after they "opened their mouth" and, in the universities, they are not even presented as "exchange students" nor oriented by the institution at any level (SOUZA, 2015, p. 6)<sup>6</sup>.

Concerning aesthetic matters, considering the focus of the Afro-Unilab group on the experience of accepting the natural hair, what one is seeking might be found in a family experience, in which African ancestry is emphasized, or the hair dresser at the shopping mall, specialized in ethnical hair. Nowadays, there is no doubt that the many blogs, youtubers, and mainly products for frizzy hair in Brazil constitute a much wider affirmation of this black-political place.

Although the speeches on black affirmation and the use of turbans and accessories may suggest that this is about reclaiming an Africa in Brazil, it is each time more intriguing to notice that this is a diasporic movement, not an African continent displacement. The fact that many female university students from many African countries are wearing their hair frizzy in UNILAB, making it also a strategy to establish themselves as black women in Brazil, gives us an evidence to think over this theme.

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<sup>6</sup> (T.N.) In the original: "A problemática da migração estudantil africana no processo de modernização retardatária abarca as discussões que versam sobre a construção da identidade negra e das experiências coletivas nas interações políticas e culturais da diáspora do Atlântico Negro (GILROY, 2001). A identidade racial é um elemento presente na migração africana na medida em que traz a problemática racial para as relações sociais de vivência do/a migrante. (SOUZA, 2015, p. 3).

Ao evidenciar o relato/queixa destes estudantes, poderíamos pensar ou nos inquietarmos com a diferença de tratamento dado ao que é chamado "gringo". Os garotos relembram que eles não possuem as "vantagens" de serem "gringos", seja nos círculos de convívio (rua e lazer) ou na universidade. Na rua, todos os meninos africanos já foram abordados por policiais de maneira violenta e só reconhecidos como estrangeiros e estudantes depois que "abriram a boca" e, nas universidades, não são sequer apresentados como alunos de " intercâmbio" ou orientados pela instituição" (SOUZA, 2015, p. 6).



## Analysis Possibilities

In this section of the article, we will make some considerations on how the Afro-Unilab group, the focus of our reflection in this paper, was created. We will do it through interview data from a student we will further refer to as *Bela*, responsible for the creation of the group. Those data were collected in two different moments, 2015 and 2017, and they will be highlighted when necessary. It is important to highlight that in a perspective which takes discourse as action, the perspective of performativity as a way to turn the political and identity scenes linguistic (BUTLER, 1997), we will not stick to the analysis of the strictly linguistic level. We are interested in highlighting the creation of the group within the recently so-called frizzy empowerment, which places the body back into language, from the discursive and semiotic standpoints (PINTO, 2015; PENNYCOOK, 2001). It has to do with some corporeality which has been and still is marginalized in comparison to what is discursively built as beautiful, wanted and clean.

[...] The empowerment concept becomes the guiding principle of this new discussion about aesthetic affirmation in which the hair as a sign of blackness is no longer a negative element and redefines its meaning in the diaspora into a guiding principle against racism. Empowering, in this context, means using the information technology devices - in this case, social media - [...] (MATTOS, 2015)<sup>7</sup>.

Since the very beginning, *Bela* accepted our request to join the closed Facebook group, allowing us to observe the posts, the interaction among the African students, the gradual opening to black, Brazilian students and, finally, the actual moment, in which the movement does not show so much energy as it used to have considering the number of intense posts or dialogues, besides the fact that it is open to offers on hair, handcrafted earring and African patterned clothes and fabrics sales, calls to discussion groups and events. Below, there is the complete representation of the group's description ("About me") as it is presented on Facebook:

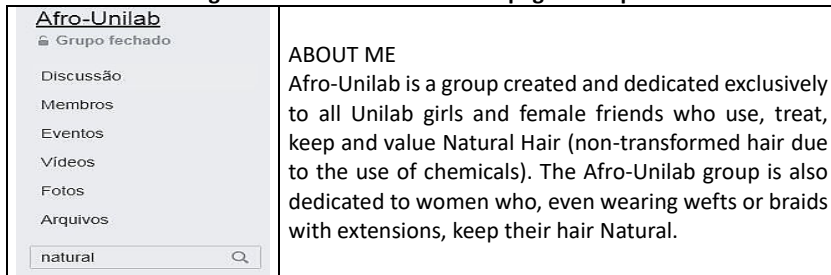
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<sup>77</sup>(T.N.) In the original: "[...] O conceito empoderamento torna-se o fio condutor desta nova discussão sobre afirmação estética onde o cabelo como signo de negritude deixa de ser um elemento negativo e se ressignifica na diáspora como impulsor do enfrentamento ao racismo. Empoderar nesse contexto é usar das ferramentas da tecnologia da informação, nesse caso as redes sociais[...]" (MATTOS, 2015).





**Image 1 – Afro-Unilab’s Facebook page description**



Fonte: Afro-Unilab group in Facebook.

Because it is a closed group, only members have access to the posts, and only the administrator may add new members, either by invitation or request. The group has 312 members – we believe most of them to be Africans – the first students, other students from UNILAB Ceará or Bahia, people from their networking in other countries, professors who are interested in this theme and also some men. Maybe due to this we notice the posts are not only related to natural hair. On the contrary, they present a diverse range of discourses on black culture or African culture artifacts that, in general, are related to the Afro-Brazilian culture.

The page was launched on February, 2015, and we had access to the creation process and its effects due to the interlocution with Bela, the group’s founder on Facebook, since 2014, when she had stopped straightening her hair. She wrote:

At first, I didn’t know what to do in order to create the group, I had even commented about it to a girl, X, she is from São Tomé. After some time, some girls from my country approached, some Angolan girls, and we were talking and there was also this Mozambican girl, they told me: Bela, how about we create a group only for women with natural hair, even because you are the one who was showed us the most how much our hair is wonderful. I answered them I had already wanted to create the group, I was only waiting for more people to show up. In that very moment we talked so much and decided to launch the group (BELA, 2015)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “em princípio não sabia como fazer para criar o grupo, até tinha comentado com uma menina, a X ela é de São Tomé. Passou um tempo vieram meninas do meu país, umas angolanas, e estávamos a conversar e estava uma moçambicana também, elas disseram-me: Bela, que tal criarmos um grupo só com mulheres de cabelos natural, até porque você é a que mais tem mostrado a todas o quanto o nosso cabelo é lindo. Respondi a elas que já queria criar o grupo, só estava à espera de mais gente. Naquele mesmo momento conversamos tanto e decidimos criar o grupo” (BELA, 2015).



We noticed that the creation of the group was a collective action from students from many nationalities and it took shape with the interaction of Bela and her female friends from the university, who, even in a small conversation group, affirmed their natural hair was “wonderful.” In this regard, the page breaks/displaces/questions linguistic stereotypes that imprison black people around the world within signs meaning less, ugly and dirty.

Bodies are invisible or actively made invisible on the descriptions, classifications or linguistic affirmations, although they play a main role on the building and classification of languages in colonial contexts. For example, Degraff (2005: 533) argues that it is no coincidence that languages spoken by former African slaves in former colonies are not classified as “an exceptional phylogenetic class”, with “non-linguistic implications (for example, sociological implications), such as the allegation that native languages are ‘lame’ for their speakers.” Linguistic practices of former African slaves’ bodies lose their status of languages in linguistic classifications, but the bodies which supported that “almost-language” status (the native bodies) disappear from the debates, making it visible only the so called “linguistic” or “structural” arguments (PINTO, 2015)<sup>9</sup>.

Pinto (2015) alerts us of the limits and possibilities that the field of language has got in order to understand a movement which aims to change the place reserved for the black population which has had their language-body denied. Which grammar, which semiotics, which language can have a dialogue with a *hair-discursive* perspective? We believe that the resignification of this black corporeality with the hair as a symbol (GOMES, 2005) relocates the idea of body, language and discourse. Not only because it brings to light someone who has always been marginalized, but also for

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<sup>9</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “Os corpos são invisíveis ou ativamente invisibilizados nas descrições, classificações e afirmações linguísticas, embora ocupem um papel central na construção e classificação das línguas nos contextos coloniais. Por exemplo, Degraff (2005: 533) argumenta que não é coincidência que as línguas faladas pelos ex-escravos africanos nas ex-colônias sejam classificadas como “uma excepcional classe em filogenética”, com “implicações não-linguísticas (por exemplo, sociológica), tais como a alegação de que as línguas crioulas são ‘aleijadas’ para os seus falantes”. As práticas linguísticas dos corpos de ex-escravos negros perdem seu status de língua em classificações linguísticas, mas os corpos que sustentaram esse status de “quase-língua” (os corpos crioulos) desaparecem das discussões, deixando visíveis apenas os argumentos chamados de “linguísticos” ou “estruturais” (PINTO, 2015).



affirming that hair itself is a discursive agent, and not only this – a discourse which produces changes. These black, female bodies affirmed on what seems to be “only” aesthetic in sites, vlogs and blogs, which also walk down the corridors of universities, produce daily revolutions which, as in De Certeau (1994), if do not implode the system, certainly shake it.

The movement of sharing opinions is an important aspect to be highlighted, because, for many of the students, ceasing to straighten the hair is still a very recent activity in their lives. As our interviewee guarantees, there is the “difficulty on dealing with a new hair, because many of us, since childhood, our mothers started straightening our hair; because of this, in this new stage there is this difficulty in knowing how to treat it), also the prejudice, etc”.<sup>10</sup> The stage to which she refers is the treatment of frizzy hair, accepting it natural instead of accepting the culture of straightening it. She has experienced this situation herself and, due to this, she had the dream of creating the group, because she, in her own words, “Wanted to show them that we did not need to mask our hair, even because frizzy is also beautiful and it is a very versatile hair. (BELA, 2015).<sup>11</sup>

As we could notice, Bela is the leader of other girls. Having and treating natural hair is a challenge which has been the subject of many discussions in Brazil during the last five years, and it has also been the subject for the young students in UNILAB, who get together to discuss it. From the conversation circle, the Afro-Unilab group was born, a space to talk about achievements, knowledge, pains and wonders of having a non-chemically straightened hair, a space of interaction: how to treat it? Why? How can I enjoy wearing my natural hair more? Which are the recommended products for beauty and health of hair?

Bela aimed to influence other people, just like she had been influenced before, as the student describes:

From the moment I started watching videos talking about frizzy hair, I followed a page on Facebook, “Natural Angolans” this page has influenced me too much. But one of my greatest influencers (lol) was an Angolan lady, she studied in Unilab, too, her name is

<sup>10</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “dificuldade de lidar com um novo cabelo, pois muitas de nós desde pequena as nossas mães começaram a alisar o nosso cabelo, por isso nessa nova fase há uma dificuldade de saber cuidar) e o preconceito, etc”.

<sup>11</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “Quería mostrar a elas que não precisávamos mascarar o nosso cabelo até porque o crespo também é lindo, e é um cabelo muito versátil”



XX, she was one of the first ladies who showed up with a haircut without the straightened part (BELA, 2017).<sup>12</sup>

The testimonial demonstrates that, even though she was already living in Brazil, the search for information was important to influence the student and it seems to be for many other people because when we access a research website and search for the expression “Natural Angolans,” around 126,000 occurrences, among videos and written articles, appear, evidencing the strength among internet users who are interested in this theme.

Both the previous quote and the next one allow us to observe that visual contact and meetings in person influence the decision-making process of the interviewee:

One fine day I decided not to wear any chemicals on my hair because it displeased me to see my hair with both textures, straightened and natural. And I started wearing braids only, until one day I decided to go Big Chop, I confess I felt totally free from the chemicals which were imprisoning me, but I was also afraid of how to walk around, because I wasn't used to this new look. One of my sources of inspiration were two people, a Brazilian girl and another Angolan girl, the same country (BELA, 2015)<sup>13</sup>.

We might understand that the decision of changing the hair style was preceded by the contact with other people who already intended to perform a discourse through which we could observe the use of language as action, referring to the micro-resistances (DE CERTEAU, 1994) that might help us reveal other identities, disputed on a daily basis.

We come to ask ourselves to what extent Bela and her friends were influenced by the amplitude that the debate on hair has had in Brazil and that is literally on the streets, in Curly and FrizzyHair March and other movements

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<sup>12</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “partir do momento em que comecei a assistir vídeos que falavam sobre cabelo crespo, seguia uma pagina no facebook “Angolanas Naturais” essa página influenciou-me muito. Só que uma das minhas grandes influências (rrss) foi uma moça angolana, ela estudou na Unilab também chama-se XX, foi uma das primeiras moças que apareceu com o corte de cabelo, onde ela retirou toda a parte lisa.”

<sup>13</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “belo dia decidi não usar mais química no meu cabelo porque não agradava-me ver o cabelo com duas texturas liso e natural. E fui fazendo só tranças, só que um dia resolvi fazer Big Chop, confesso que me senti totalmente liberta da química que me aprisionava, mas também fiquei com medo de como andaria porque não estava acostumada com o novo visual. Uma das minhas fontes de inspiração foram duas pessoas uma brasileira e uma outra Angolana, de mesmo país” (BELA, 2015).



for black empowerment and black feminism. When she was asked about the influence of the empowerment movement, she says “it was also one of the ideas which influenced my hair transition and the page elaboration.”<sup>14</sup> The movement on natural hair in Brazil gets stronger, combined with other demands for black women rights, especially with the participation of groups from other cities in Ceará and from universities from other states, all of which are currently attending movements to claim rights, being them students’ rights or not. For many times, Bela’s narrative highlights issues on identity, present in the discussions of young people committed to the theme of hair, in a demonstration of the coverage of such discourses:

Yes, then I started taking my hair transition seriously and happy and the hair was also growing, and, as I felt free and happy, I started thinking about creating a group to help other people and encourage other girls to accept their hair, not because it is fashion, but for a matter of identity (BELA, 2015)<sup>15</sup>.

The articulation of frizzy hair, fashion, style or identity was, and still is, possibly the main discussion when it comes to Afro-Brazilian aesthetics.

Also between 2013-2015, other aspects might be taken as important to reinforce the groups of claimers on rights and identities – the creation of centers on women’s rights, conflicts, gender relations, equalities and inequalities among women and men, stigmas and stereotypes, hypersexualization of black, African women – issues placed among tensions and sexual abuses and physical violence reports perpetrated against female students - some of which were known and notified by the administration; others, were not.

We find, then, a confluence of subordinations which constitute what authors, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (2002), define as oppression accumulation that relies on these young, black, African students. The issues elicited above turn out to empower even more the identity affirmation of these students. The empowerment brought to them by the aesthetic

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<sup>14</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “foi também uma das ideias que influenciou na minha transição capilar e para a elaboração da página” (BELA, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> (T.N.) In the original: “Sim, aí fui levando a minha transição capilar a sério e feliz e o cabelo também crescendo, e na medida que fui sentindo livre e feliz comecei a pensar em criar um grupo para ajudar e a incentivar as outras meninas a assumirem seu cabelo, não por moda ou estilo mais por questão de identidade.”(BELA, 2015).



affirmation made it possible to better reflect on the oppressions to which those students were submitted within a college, but also geographical, context. Living in Redenção, countryside of Ceará, led to challenges to which surviving as a group through the discursive affirmation on hair was necessary to the group of students. This group, that discussed about hair, transition, afro-diasporic aesthetic as the affirmation of their beauty, turned out to be the starting point for unveiling a series of adverse situations to which they felt “submitted”:

The association of multiple subordination systems has been described in many ways: compound discrimination, multiple burdens, or as double or triple discrimination. Intersectionality is a concept for the issue and tries to capture the structural consequences and dynamics of interaction between two or more axis of the subordination. Besides, intersectionality deals with the way actions and specific policies generate oppressions which flow through such axes, constituting dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment (CRENSHAW, 2002).

Gradually, the discussions will uncover a veil which has been little discussed: inequality, racism, sexism and other “isms,” themes not openly debated before by every female person and every male person. But the silence cannot take place anymore. The fact that we, women, are in a group with other women from different nationalities and other Brazilian women, mainly Northeastern women, paves the path for other subjectivities to be brought up.

### Some unfinished ideas

Being directly or not involved with the shared ideas, against them or for them, the young female students were in the middle of a public debate, organized according to the controversial issues which happened in the institution and brought visibility to other issues which could not be “hidden” anymore, forcing the whole society to practice thinking over the greatness of the word “integration” in its most diverse dimensions. The creation of many other associations, cores, has raised solidarity, disgust, provocations, but, anyway, it has made the administration start, even more urgently, some policy to meet the identity demands. Beyond the administration, the many groups, today in the university, focused on the theme of diversity, noticed that the



possibility of achieving the right for a voice is an act of survival, facing the challenges of all Brazilian institutions in relation to racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia.

Performing a political identification of black and African women, operating a sort of displacement which places the body in the university and in the construction of knowledge and power, getting rid of the chains of coloniality, has allowed those students to be aware of their academic roles and to have a more complex view of the racial reality in Brazil. Concerning black racial issues in our country, when it comes to the challenges which hang on being noticed, Bela's testimonial allows us to understand that the subjects constitute acts of survival in order to set up the possibility of eradicating racism.

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