Theoretical-empirical Article

Kandandu: Black Women's Identity, Racism, and the Street Carnival

Kandandu: Identidade da Mulher Negra, Racismo e o Carnaval de Rua

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■ **ABSTRACT**

Objective: we aim to understand how racism tangibly manifests in the lives of Black women, limiting their agency as they navigate social spaces through cultural expressions in the city of Belo Horizonte. **Theoretical approach:** we draw upon the concepts of structural racism and narcissistic pact, identifying convergences and divergences in the understanding of organizations as racialized spaces. **Methods:** we employ a qualitative approach within the context of ethnographic research, opting to conduct a semi-structured interview with Zuri, the president of an Afro block. As an analytical tool, we apply the concept of intersectionality. **Results:** we highlight that both structural racism and the narcissistic pact manifest in the daily life of organizations. Both phenomena are even more pernicious for Black women, particularly when they challenge a racist and sexist structure. **Conclusions:** the collective dimension of racism presents challenges to organizations and their stakeholders. This effect may lead individuals, especially organizational leaders who should be more committed to structural change, to hide behind the racism within their institutions and pacts among their team members.

Keywords: structural racism; intersectionality; black woman; Afro block; carnival.

■ **RESUMO**

Objetivo: buscamos compreender como o racismo se manifesta de forma tangível na vida de mulheres negras, limitando sua capacidade de ação, enquanto elas buscam negociar por espaços sociais por meio de expressões culturais, na cidade de Belo Horizonte. **Marco teórico:** apoiamo-nos nos conceitos de racismo estrutural e pacto narcísico, apontando convergências e divergências no entendimento das organizações como espaços racializados. **Método:** utilizamos uma abordagem qualitativa, em um contexto de uma pesquisa etnográfica, optando por realizar uma entrevista semiestruturada com Zuri, presidente de um bloco afro. Como ferramenta analítica, empregamos o conceito de interseccionalidade. **Resultados:** evidenciamos que tanto o racismo estrutural quanto o pacto narcísico se manifestam no cotidiano das organizações. Ambos os fenômenos são ainda mais perversos para as mulheres negras, em especial quando elas tensionam uma estrutura racista e sexista. **Conclusões:** a dimensão coletiva do racismo traz desafios às organizações e seus agentes. Tal efeito pode levar os indivíduos, especialmente as lideranças das organizações que deveriam estar mais compromissadas com a mudança estrutural, a se esconderem atrás do racismo de suas instituições e pactos entre os membros de suas equipes.

Palavras-chave: racismo estrutural; interseccionalidade; mulher negra; bloco afro; carnaval.

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INTRODUCTION

The term *kandandu* originates from the African language Kimbundu, hailing from Angola, and it signifies an embrace that transcends mere physical contact. In essence, it embodies a spiritual and fraternal connection symbolizing humility and respect for humanity, the world, and the rich heritage and wisdom of African ancestry (Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte, 2019). This embrace extends beyond the physical realm, capable of uniting philosophies, ideas, knowledge, and experiences across generations. In Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais state, *Kandandu* was chosen as the name for the celebration marking the official commencement of the city's Carnival, a cultural expression predominantly driven by Afro blocks.

On February 24, 2017, Afro blocks such as *Afoxé Bandarerê, Angola Janga, Magia Negra, Fala Tambor, Samba da Meia-Noite,* and *Tambolelê* graced the main stage of Belo Horizonte's Carnival, officially heralding the festivities. It was a day replete with symbolism and punctuated by moments of fervor against the erasure of carnivalesque cultural expressions within the city (Rezende, 2022). Black organizations such as the Afro blocks positioned Afro dance, drumming, rhythms, and Black culture at the forefront of a festival intrinsically intertwined with these elements through its rhythms, instruments, maestros, history, and collective memory (Kandandu, 2017).

In this article, apart from detailing the formation and establishment of the Afro-organization *Kandandu,* we aim to gain insight into the tangible manifestations of racism in the lives of Black women in Belo Horizonte while exploring how racism constrains their agency while they navigate social spaces through cultural expressions. Additionally, this study delves into the role played by the 'narcissistic pact of whiteness' within this specific context, aiming to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the racial and cultural dynamics prevalent in the city. Notably, the genesis of *Kandandu* is closely intertwined with the journey of a Black woman who, through her unwavering determination, challenged a racist structure and created the conditions for the flourishing of this festival.

Our endeavor is to delve into and scrutinize the resolute determination of this Black woman while considering elements of structural racism, the pact of whiteness, historical facets of Black culture, and the role played by women in perpetuating and disseminating this cultural form. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the understanding of structural racism by highlighting that if racism is indeed structural, it permeates the very essence of individuals, their actions, and their modes of organization. Consequently, racism emerges as a fundamental constituent of our organizations. Moreover, we assert the paramount importance of Black individuals as both social and individual political actors based on the experiences of Black women (Gonzalez, 2018; Oyěwùmí, 2021).

In various spheres of knowledge, whether in the realms of management, psychology, or sociology, organizations have often been perceived as race-neutral entities. However, this perspective coexists with the argument that organizations are indeed racialized. Moreover, racialized organizations legitimize the unequal allocation of resources, where whiteness serves as a credential, and those with the greatest agency often assume a white identity (Ray, 2019). In light of this context, we pose the following questions: Where is our racism situated? How does racism manifest itself among the entities and individuals responsible for Belo Horizonte's Carnival? What measures are necessary to dismantle this structure? Lastly, what is the physical and emotional toll endured by a Black woman who challenges this structure?

Nonetheless, organizations that do not conform to the racial-neutral paradigm, such as Afro carnival blocks, face neglect. There is a noticeable lack of interest in the emergence and sustainability of these organizations, and as a consequence, their founders, whether male or female, must persuade public political actors and agents, typically white, heterosexual, and Christian men, of the necessity of these organizations for societal progress. However, within this arduous process of persuasion and persistence, feelings of exhaustion inevitably arise due to the heightened effort required to demonstrate the viability and success of these projects and organizations.

FROM COLLECTIVITY TO INDIVIDUALITY: THE EXHAUSTION CAUSED BY RACISM

The prevailing comprehension of structural racism often leads to a 'depersonalization' of racism: the notion that we, as individuals, are not racist, but our institutions, social systems, and the rules governing our society are. While this perspective represents a simplified understanding of structural racism, it has been extensively explored and disseminated through television and news media (Sodre, 2023), complicating our ability to discern the role of individuals in perpetuating racism.

The concept of structural racism, as we currently recognize it, has been evolving since at least the publication of *Discrimination and Racial Inequalities in Brazil* by Hasenbalg in 1979 (Hasenbalg, 1979). Hasenbalg characterized racism as a form of social stratification that underpinned post-abolition class societies (Figueiredo, 2015). This notion of structural racism suggests that economic, political, legal, and institutional aspects, as

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2

well as our individual subjectivities, are all permeated by racism within our society (Vainer, 2023). Presently, scholars like Almeida (2018) and Oliveira (2021) have been at the forefront of debating and expanding upon the concept of structural racism.

Oliveira (2021) contends that racism transcends merely prejudiced behaviors often perceived as deviations. Consequently, the concept of structural racism underscores that prejudices, discriminatory actions, or acts of racism are inherently linked to the societal structure. By interlinking the concept of structural racism with the socio-historical totality inherent in the dynamics of social relations within flexible accumulation capitalism, Oliveira (2021) examines the functioning of the capitalist system in Brazil and the distribution of power structures. This perspective allows for an understanding of the mechanisms that normalize and naturalize prejudiced behavior.

In contrast, Almeida (2018) recognized that the individualistic perspective of racism is fragile and restricted, endorsing analyses of racism that lack historical context and reflection on its tangible consequences. Consequently, the subjective experiences of Black individuals facing racism are often overlooked (Kilomba, 2020). Consequently, a limited focus on the individual dimension of racism can result in moralistic phrases such as 'racism is wrong,' 'we are all human beings,' and 'I have Black friends.' It also fosters an obsession with the legal component. When racism is viewed primarily through the lens of individual behavior, the injustices stemming from racism often occur under the banner of legality and enjoy moral support from political and religious leaders, who are regarded as 'good citizens' and 'righteous individuals.' Almeida (2018) terms this phenomenon as 'structural racism.'

Taking a collective perspective on racism, Gouvêa and Oliveira (2020) explore the concept of 'new eugenics,' a means by which dominant groups uphold the existing order. This phenomenon aligns with Bento's (2022) concept of the 'narcissistic pact of whiteness,' which secures privileges for white individuals, even within the workplace. Bento (2022) underscores the prevailing silence surrounding white privilege and racism in Brazil, a direct consequence of the 'pact of whiteness.' This pact leads many white individuals to perceive themselves as allies against racism rather than as participants in it, owing to their deep investment in narcissism (Fanon, 2018).

Bento (2022) elucidates how manifestations of white supremacy within work and educational environments sustain the privilege of individuals racialized as white within organizations. Concurrently, the 'pact of whiteness' fosters environments like schools and workplaces that are more welcoming to whites while becoming less accommodating for Black individuals.

Bento (2022) further emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging how the legacy of slavery exerts influence on broader societal dimensions. Organizations often construct narratives about themselves without taking into account the diversity of the population they engage with. Consequently, they define and regulate a uniform modus operandi, encompassing not only processes, tools, and value systems but also the profiles of employees and leaders. Nonetheless, there are no explicit regulations dictating how those racialized as white will uphold their privileges and marginalize the Black population. The mechanisms of exclusion and privilege maintenance subtly persist within the common rules of institutions, establishing eligibility criteria that perpetuate injustice against those systematically denied opportunities, access, or a voice.

Drawing from Bento (2022), discussions, we recognize that the pact of whiteness encompasses a set of mechanisms and behaviors entrenched in social and cultural structures that favor whiteness at the expense of other racial identities. It alludes to the inclination of white individuals to reap the benefits of systemic privileges, often unconsciously, while reinforcing and perpetuating white supremacy.
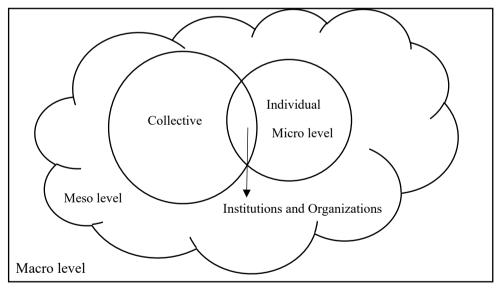
Focusing on individuals racialized as Black and considering the current discourse on structural racism perpetuates a system that deems Black individuals as inferior. Organizations are still grappling with an enigmatic and self-reinforcing protective system that obscures our comprehension of work environments that blend merit with idealized conceptions of white masculinity. This system simultaneously prevents us from pinpointing the processes and subjectivities within organizations governed by a racist logic (Almeida, 2018; Bento, 2022; Fanon, 2018; Gouvêa & Oliveira, 2020; Hasenbalg, 1979; Mobasseri et al, 2023; Oliveira, 2021).

In the realm of administration, Gouvêa and Oliveira (2020) argue that studying whiteness enables a critical examination of power structures and racial privileges entrenched within organizations, ultimately aiming for greater equality and racial inclusion. For the authors, despite organizations portraying themselves as neutral spaces where differences ostensibly do not matter, the objective reality unveils a profound disparity. In Brazil, organizations replicate social structures marked by racial criteria, evident in the unequal distribution of resources.

Additionally, the examination of whiteness within the field of administration allows for a deeper understanding of the specificities of Brazil. The nation's history is deeply marked by enslavement and the social construction of race, factors that profoundly influence labor relations and the distribution of power within organizations. Indeed, recognizing these unique aspects can pave the way for the development of strategies and policies aimed at fostering

inclusion and racial equity within corporate settings. It is equally imperative to broaden the discourse on race and white privilege. Delving into discussions surrounding whiteness sheds light on the silence surrounding white privilege and the racism encountered by Black individuals. Consequently, it is crucial to acknowledge that the positions held by white individuals within organizations are, to a significant extent, a result of intricate race dynamics that perpetuate inequalities (Gouvêa & Oliveira, 2020).

Ray (2019) notes that scholars in organizational theory often perceive organizations as race-neutral bureaucratic structures, while scholars of race and ethnicity have frequently overlooked the role of organizations in shaping the social construction of race. Therefore, organizations serve as racial structures founded upon cognitive frameworks that enable, restrict, or impede social groups' access to specific resources. These organizations: (a) amplify or diminish the agency of racial groups, meaning that some possess greater power to act than others; (b) legitimize the unequal allocation of resources, resulting in different levels of access for whites, Blacks, and individuals of mixed race; (c) consider whiteness as a credential, with the majority of those racialized as white occupying top positions within organizations; (d) often racialize the dissociation of formal rules in organizational

practices, leading to stricter rules for individuals racialized as Black.

This article contends that attributing the racialization of institutions solely to their structures can limit efforts aimed at individual transformation. Individuals within institutions are also shaped by and perpetuate racism. While institutions are comprised of individuals, who are often socialized within the framework of white supremacy, conceiving racism solely through its collective dimension legitimizes the notion that individuals are not as racist as their institutions, which is problematic. While recognizing that racism has a collective dimension encourages white individuals to engage in dialogue without directly labeling them as racist and thereby avoiding offense to their 'honor' and 'integrity,' it invites them to reflect, which is notable. However, the challenge lies in the fact that many of these individuals do not perceive themselves as racist to the same degree as their institutions. This acceptance allows for the assertion that an organization is racist, yet it becomes fragile and contentious to attribute the same label to any of its leaders. These leaders often fail to recognize their own racist attitudes or to challenge these structures within their organizations. Figure 1 illustrates the interplay of these dimensions

Figure 1. Interconnected dimensions of racism.
Source: Developed by the authors.

Both the collective and individual dimensions of racism encompass macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis within the phenomenon. Institutions and organizations find themselves at the crossroads of these dimensions, serving as a complex arena where various categorizations of racism converge, often without a clear identification of its

agents for pedagogical or awareness-raising purposes. At the macro level, we can consider environmental contexts such as the nation, state, and city. The meso level involves legal contexts encompassing laws, rules, and regulations. Finally, the micro level delves into personal aspects, including biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.

The concept of 'depersonalization of racism' can be comprehended as the notion that racism is not solely entrenched within broader social structures and institutions at the macro and meso levels, encompassing economic, political, and legal power, as well as individual behavior at the micro level. Racism is also intricately connected to the construct of collective subjectivities that have historically occupied positions and statuses of power, as illustrated in Figure 1. This phenomenon gives rise to institutions and socialization practices that directly or indirectly confer advantages or disadvantages based on race (Almeida, 2018; Bento, 2022; Fanon, 2018; Gouvêa & Oliveira, 2020; Hasenbalg, 1979; Mobasseri et al, 2023; Oliveira, 2021).

(Re)Existing in the gaps: Race and gender

When discussing us, as Black women, we must consider intersecting social categories. Crenshaw (1990) elucidates the concept of intersectionality, which encompasses the several ways in which race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and other categories interact to mold the multifaceted dimensions of people's life experiences. Collins (2022) argues that an intersectional analysis transcends traditional notions of oppression that often treat oppressions in isolation, overlooking the intricate interplay between them.

By embracing intersectionality, we delve into the complexities of identity and its relationship with power (Crenshaw, 2002). For Crenshaw (2015), race, gender, and class accentuate how being Black, female, and economically disadvantaged compounds the experience of oppression (Gonzalez, 2020). In a similar vein, Lorde (2019) explores the intersections of her identity as a Black, lesbian, and feminist woman, offering a critique of dominant power structures. She posits that oppressions based on race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identities are interconnected and should be addressed collectively. Lorde underscores the significance of individual voices and personal expression in the struggle against oppression, encouraging women to reclaim their identities and unite in solidarity. For Lorde (2019), intersectionality is not just a theoretical concept but an experienced reality for many women. She emphasizes the importance of amplifying the experiences and perspectives of marginalized women and listening to their narratives, which enriches and widens the feminist movement as a whole. In this context, Collins (2022) explores how intersectionality provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of those occupying marginalized and subaltern positions in society. She examines how intersectionality can be applied across various domains, including politics, education, health, and social justice, to challenge power structures and promote equality and justice.

In a society like Brazil, where racism and sexism are formidable pillars of the dominion ideology, Black people, particularly Black women, are relegated to second-class citizenship, as asserted by Gonzalez (2020). To perpetuate and solidify their dominion over non-white individuals, the colonizing minority had to impose dogmatic assimilation of the other within the Brazilian community (Walsh, 2007), encompassing language, religion, aesthetic values, and customs (Guerreiro Ramos, 1995).

Regarding Black women specifically, Arnaldo Xavier, a Black poet from northeastern Brazil, coined the term 'matriarchy of misery' to describe how we, as Black Brazilian women, have historically navigated a landscape marked by exclusion, discrimination, and social alienation. Thus, by asserting our existence despite these conditions, our role as leaders and resistors in communities throughout the country is also about liberating ourselves from oppressive social circumstances (Carneiro, 2011). Similarly, in her poem *É Tempo de Nos Aquilombar* ("It's about time we gathered as a quilombo," in free translation), writer Conceição Evaristo underscores the significance of '*aquilombar-se*,' that is, to gather as a quilombo, in an act of resistance and solidarity. To achieve this, it is imperative to ensure the participation of women, particularly Black women, in positions of power, adopting a perspective aligned with the concept of *Aquilombamento* Policy (Alves, 2020).

Furthermore, within the academic realm, Collins (2022) underscores the importance of an intersectional perspective in the production of academic knowledge and research practices, emphasizing the necessity of incorporating the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals in the knowledge-building process.

(Re)Existing in the gaps: Culture and ancestry

Despite the 'historical fate' imposed on Black women, there are spaces that diverge from those founded on exploitation, where these very women, drawing from their culture and ancestry, take center stage. Culture, being a lived experience, allows the marginalized to rediscover a previously devalued way of life, filling them with awe and ecstasy at each reconnection. This simultaneous state of grace and resistance among the marginalized underscores the passionate nature of cultural resurgence; as Fanon aptly notes, "plunging into the abyss of the past is the condition and source of freedom" (Fanon, 2018, p. 89). Morales (1991) highlights that Black people, since the era of enslavement, have harnessed their cultural and ethnic expressions to navigate social spaces within dominant sectors. Deprived of physical territory, Black individuals embarked on a symbolic journey in the diaspora, rooted in the knowledge associated with the

worship of numerous deities and the institutionalization of festivals, dramatizations, dances, and musical forms (Simas & Rufino, 2018).

Festivals serve as one of the primary instruments of resistance against the erasure of differences, exemplified by Afro-diasporic cultural manifestations, with Afro Carnival blocks prominently featured. These entities can be defined as carnival groups dedicated to preserving Black culture, where Blackness becomes a lived experience in the day-to-day life of the block, extending beyond just the Carnival season (Silva, 2007). Gonzalez (2020) underscores that the vitality of these organizations lies in the fact that Afro and/or *Afoxé* blocks engage in activities throughout the year, not limited to Carnival. Their members consistently convene to discuss, reflect, and innovate.

A. Nascimento (2019) argues that "ensuring the human dignity of Afro-Brazilian people, who have suffered centuries of degrading and oppressive treatment, forms the ethical foundation of *quilombismo*" (Nascimento, 2019, p. 291). Afro blocks contribute to this mission by fostering Black consciousness and the resilience of our people, prioritizing the "responsibility to revive Black consciousness, which has been violated, distorted, and attacked in myriad ways". (A. Nascimento, 2019, p. 104). Indeed, Afro blocks can be viewed as African diasporic movements with connotations of ethnic and political resistance (B. Nascimento, 2021).

When discussing cultural resistance, it is vital to acknowledge the central and pivotal role of Black women. Indeed, as Gonzalez (2020) elucidates, "Black women are responsible for shaping a collective Black Brazilian cultural consciousness" (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 307). Since the colonial period, Black women have played a proactive role in resistance movements, as noted by Bush (1984). Beyond contributing to the broader resistance of enslaved individuals, Black women played a crucial role in passing on the spirit and tradition of resistance to their offspring through music and oral traditions. Historical circumstances heightened Black women's inclination to devise ways of survival for themselves, their families, and often, their men too (Carneiro, 2011). Yet, even after emancipation, these women continued to enrich the cultural life of the Black community. Consequently, Black women within a community frequently shoulder the responsibility for both their material and spiritual well-being (Groot, 1986).

Concerning this 'spiritual well-being,' Black women's role in providing religious support during enslavement is particularly noteworthy, as they fortified the resolve of men with amulets, herbs, and rituals (Groot, 1986). In the immediate aftermath of abolition, these same women became the linchpins of their communities. They offered moral support and sustenance to their families and remain instrumental in preserving and propagating Afro-based religions, such as Candomblé, primarily led by them (the *ialorixás* or mothers of saints). Indeed, the emergence of the *babalorixá* (father of saints) within the Candomblé structure would not occur until the 1930s (Gonzalez, 2020).

Many economically disadvantaged Black women play a crucial religious and cultural role. For instance, the pioneering Afro-block *Ilê Aiyê* was founded by Antônio Carlos dos Santos, a.k.a. *Vovô do Ilê*, in Salvador's Curuzu neighborhood, at the residence of a Black woman, Mãe Hilda, number 233 (Gonzalez, 2020). As the author aptly notes, being both Black and a woman in Brazil subjects one to the most severe forms of oppression, with numerous injustices hanging overhead. However, these very women are the ones fighting for their rights and leading movements to enhance their communities.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. Data collection primarily relied on semi-structured interviews. This type of interview entails establishing key points of interest for exploration while allowing participants greater freedom of expression. Minimal interventions are made when participants veer off the predefined topics. Such an approach not only facilitates the gathering of data but also values the wealth of experiences and insights participants can offer on the subject. Additionally, it fosters a cordial atmosphere that promotes effective communication (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

While the semi-structured interview served as the primary means of data collection, it is important to note that these interviews were conducted within the context of ethnographic research. Between 2018 and 2021, one of the authors undertook an ethnographic study with an Afro block based in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The co-founder and president of this block is a Black woman, referred to here as 'Zuri.' To maintain the research subject's anonymity, we have chosen not to disclose the identity of the Afro block created by Zuri. The interview with Zuri spanned 6 hours, 2 minutes, and 59 seconds, taking place over two days in August 2021. The ethnographic method enabled us to observe the phenomenon under analysis in its full operational context. It is worth highlighting that the data analysis was conducted from an intersectional perspective. As Bueno and Anjos note, "the development of intersectionality as both a praxis and a theoretical paradigm has been instrumental in creating an analytical framework aimed at comprehending the dynamics of identities" (Bueno & Anjos, 2021, p. 362). Within this context, it is essential to underscore that Black feminist thought not only addresses epistemological questions but also extends the methodological discourse. By interlinking social categories,

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6

it provides a lens through which to grasp the intricate social complexities experienced by Black women.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The tenacious Zuri

Zuri, a young Black woman, holds a prominent role as the co-founder and president of an Afro block. She is not only the creator and inaugural president of the Association of Afro Blocks of Minas Gerais, Abafro, but also one of the driving forces behind *Kandandu*. Furthermore, she is the mastermind behind drafting and presenting the festival's project to the government. Zuri's multifaceted talents extend to cultural production, backed by a bachelor's degree in literature and a graduate degree in editing and proofreading. She possesses a keen awareness of the significance of occupying spaces and firmly believes that she holds a unique and influential position, whether within her Afro block or in Belo Horizonte's Carnival scene. As Zuri aptly puts it, "You don't see me boarding a [Carnival] float and waving goodbye. It's about the space I occupy, and it's not a minor one — it's a space I claim" (Zuri). Oyěwùmí (2021) asserts that gender and race form the foundation of social hierarchies. By declaring her right to her occupied space and emphasizing that it is not a lesser one, Zuri challenges these established social hierarchies.

Zuri's identity serves as a critical lens through which we can comprehend how the identity of Black Brazilian women intertwines with the notions of persistence and the reclamation of historically denied spaces. Throughout her discourse, Zuri underscores "the space that I [Zuri] occupy" within the organization and, by extension, within our society. Both Gonzalez (1988) and Guerreiro Ramos (1995) underline the deep-rooted connection between Brazilian society and racism. Gonzalez (1988) acknowledges that Brazilian cultural neurosis finds its quintessential symptom in racism, while Guerreiro Ramos (1995) reinforces the notion of "a social pathology of white Brazilians" (Guerreiro Ramos, 1995, p. 177) within the context of Brazilian society. Guerreiro Ramos (1995) regarded the disparity in self-esteem among Black individuals, as well as collectively within Brazil, as a pathological issue.

Beyond her role as the Afro block's president, Zuri also serves as the general coordinator for most of the block's projects. She actively engages in personnel management and the planning of the block's inter-institutional relationships. By sharing her work with others, Zuri reaffirms not only her position within the organization but also her own identity. She places a high value on the space she occupies: "Production is indispensable; without it, we've got nothing. Without production, there's no Carnival float, no parade, no

costumes. Without production, there's no one, and there's no way to accomplish what we do. So, it's not a minor role — it's the role I hold" (Zuri). This statement underscores the significance for Zuri of asserting that her role and work are no less important. Structurally (Almeida, 2018), racism tends to relegate Black women to subordinate roles and positions, such "as the fieldworker (*eito* worker) and the domestic servant (*mucama*)" (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 38).

Interestingly, although Zuri and her husband Jafari co-founded the Afro block, she explains that Jafari is the creative force behind the block, overseeing all the artistic and technical aspects, including arrangements for the Carnival float, sound, and costume design. In contrast, she assumes responsibility for production. Indeed, Zuri's words exemplify her dedication: "You can easily find me handing out water to people. I've even received criticism from those who argue that, as a leader, I shouldn't be carrying water anymore. They want to see me in a different light. To which I replied: 'But I firmly believe that people should see me carrying a crate of water, yes, because that's the reality. I step off the parade and hop onto the big red bus [in Belo Horizonte, red buses are known for serving the residents of outlying neighborhoods]'" (Zuri).

Despite the fact that all decisions concerning the Afro block are made jointly by her and her husband, Zuri emphasizes that the conscious choice to place a Black woman at the helm of the Afro block was deliberate on both their parts. This decision arose from Jafari's understanding that, within the established structure, a Black man discussing an Afro block and Carnival is more in line with expectations. In a racist and sexist society, where Black women are, as Gonzalez (2020), contends, still considered second-class citizens, having a Black woman leading an Afro block carries significant symbolism. Zuri elaborates on this, stating, "You become this figure who carries these biases — being Black, being a woman, being young, not having a master's degree or holding a position of authority. So, you're constantly battling for respect from your peers" (Zuri).

Simultaneously serving as the head of an Afro block and in a leadership role, Zuri also played a pivotal role in founding Abafro. She meticulously documented meeting minutes, initiated projects, arranged gatherings, and engaged in negotiations with the city of Belo Horizonte on behalf of the association. Zuri attributes her election as the association's inaugural president to her active involvement in these capacities, a position she held for nearly three years. The peak of her activity on behalf of Abafro, working closely with the city on behalf of the local Afro blocks, occurred between 2017 and 2018. During this time, Zuri's primary objective was to secure the city's recognition of the association and its acknowledgment of the representation of a group of Black people whose voices needed to be

heard. Zuri was a consistent presence in spaces dedicated to Carnival, particularly street blocks and parades, despite her limited influence in these arenas. Although Abafro achieved numerous milestones under Zuri's leadership, she recalls this period as extremely exhausting, as she and Jafari had established their Afro block only a year earlier. Reflecting on those days, Zuri states, "The [name of the Afro block] was founded in 2016, and in 2017, we established Abafro, fueled by my unwavering commitment to these two organizations" (Zuri).

In the initial stages, Zuri and Jafari were derogatorily referred to as "brats without a master" by other members of the city's Afro blocks. Zuri clarifies that this derogatory term was employed because they had established an Afro block without a lineage in Candomblé and lacked expertise in percussion. Furthermore, they were not part of a movement that unfolded in Belo Horizonte during the 1980s and 1990s, which sought to elevate the status of percussion. Despite their lack of affiliation with this movement, Zuri and her husband, driven by a vision to create an Afro block for the uninitiated, embarked on this endeavor. In essence, their goal was to establish a block for individuals not versed in Candomblé, although religiosity was not a prerequisite for membership, nor were they initiated into Black culture. Zuri believes that if people, especially Black individuals, remain disconnected from Black culture, it is a result of systemic barriers: "'So you don't know how to play or perform capoeira?' 'No, I don't, because the system denied me that opportunity'" (Zuri). Thus, these "brats without a master" initiated a movement aimed at fostering collective learning opportunities for those unfamiliar with Black culture.

While Zuri's work on behalf of the city's Afro blocks remains of paramount importance, she underscores the pervasive sexism within the percussion scene, which is predominantly male-dominated. This, according to her, often led to her proposals being met with a certain level of disdain. Indeed, she claims, "You're battling for respect from other blocks, striving for recognition from public authorities, advocating for your ideas, vying for respect within your block, and seeking leadership within your ensemble, within your own community, so to speak, within your own turf. It's amazingly challenging; it was arduous, and it took a heavy toll on me, both personally and even physically" (Zuri).

When a Black person engages in a struggle, not in the physical sense but symbolically, as Zuri rightly points out, their body becomes an integral part of that fight. She explains, "Our territory is our body, our weapon is our body, our cause is our body, our argument is our body. So, you invest yourself personally in the struggle; there's no way it can be impersonal." In a colonized society that systematically overlooks women, particularly Black women,

individuals like Zuri find themselves subjected to profound tensions. As she aptly notes, "The convergence of racism and chauvinism results in a form of social suffocation for Black women, with detrimental consequences across all aspects of life" (Carneiro, 2011, p. 127).

While Zuri encountered intersectional discrimination (Crenshaw, 2015), even from fellow leaders of Afro blocks, she harnessed cultural and ethnic expressions to negotiate her place in social loci (Morales, 1991). Thus, by (re)existing in the gaps, Zuri, alongside her husband Jafari, breathed life into an Afro block. Notably, their Afro block became the sole representative in Belo Horizonte's Carnival, parading through the city center, thereby challenging the expectations of those from peripheral backgrounds. Zuri and Jafari chose to assert that Black territory encompasses the Black body itself by occupying the city center.

Although Zuri's experiences align with Carneiro's (2011) assertion that history demonstrates how Black women have historically relied on themselves not only for their survival but also for the survival of their communities, she underscores the strength of collective action, or as we term it, the power of *aquilombamento*. She asserts, "We were only able to get here because we united. That's the essence. We weren't afraid, and we rose together" (Zuri). Ultimately, if *aquilombamento* challenges us to progress further (Alves, 2020), Zuri aims to unite all of Belo Horizonte's Afro blocks in one place on one day. What was once Zuri's dream is now embodied in *Kandandu*. In our analysis, we recognize that Zuri's actions are both a struggle and an act of survival (Muzanenhamo & Chowdhury, 2023).

KANDANDU: BLACK WOMEN'S IDENTITY, RACISM, AND BELO HORIZONTE'S STREET CARNIVAL

As per the city of Belo Horizonte (Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte, 2020) records, *Kandandu* became an integral part of the city's Carnival festivities calendar through the collaborative efforts of Abafro, Belotur[1], and civil society. This is not untrue, as this project can only come to fruition with the support of Belotur. Yet, to make this support truly effective, it was imperative to confront the underpinning racist and sexist structures by generating tensions in them. Notably, Zuri took up the mantle of this confrontation. In addition to being one of the project's creators, she authored and ardently advocated for its recognition as a proposition advancing the rights of Black individuals.

Although structural racism and institutional racism are often used interchangeably, Almeida (2018) argues that in sociology, institutions and structures refer to distinct sociological phenomena. In the individual conception,

racism is perceived as a pathology or abnormality — a matter of ethics at the individual or group level, subject to rectification through criminal sanctions and civil penalties. In this view, there are no racist societies or institutions; rather, there are racist individuals who act independently or in groups, often through overt discrimination driven by racial bias. Conversely, the institutional conception posits that racism transcends individual behavior, stemming from the mechanisms within institutions that, even indirectly, confer advantages or disadvantages based on race. In this context, indirect discrimination, where the unique circumstances of minority groups are disregarded under the guise of 'racial neutrality,' is more prevalent. Importantly, indirect discrimination does not entail explicit intent to harm, underscoring the significance of Zuri's stance in illuminating the social system's resilience by revealing the conflicts inherent in social life and, above all, resistance.

Zuri, along with her husband, envisioned the possibility of uniting all of Belo Horizonte's Afro blocks for joint performances. Their initial motivation stemmed from a personal desire to partake in the parades of other Afro blocks in the city. This endeavor faced challenges, as several blocks scheduled their parades on the same days and times. Additionally, Zuri and Jafari believed that collective action would amplify the influence of Belo Horizonte's Afro blocks in their dialogues with public authorities. Based on this premise, they extended invitations to meet with several leaders of the city's Afro blocks.

In 2016, approximately six block leaders convened. Zuri recalls encountering resistance and initial hesitancy in securing participants for the first meeting. She explains, "I'd call and say, 'Hi, this is Zuri from the new Afro block. Bless you. Your block has been around for I don't know how many years, and we were thinking, what if...' We faced some rejections; even [the name of an Afro block] was initially reluctant; they said they had to discuss it. But that's exactly what I was doing, fostering dialogue" (Zuri). Despite encountering resistance from her peers, Zuri successfully gathered the leaders of *Magia Negra*, Samba da Meia Noite, *Afoxé Bandarerê*, *Fala Tambor*, *Tambolelê*, and *Angola Janga* Afro blocks. This gathering catalyzed the inevitable proposal to formalize their collaboration as a collective entity. It was within this context that Abafro (Association of Afro Blocks of Minas Gerais) was conceived.

Upon the establishment of the association, their meetings became more frequent, eventually leading to discussions within a smaller, core group comprising the Samba da Meia Noite, *Magia Negra*, *Afoxé Bandarerê*, and *Angola Janga* Afro blocks. At this juncture, the idea of uniting all of the city's Afro blocks for a shared performance day had gained substantial traction, and they collectively embarked on drafting the project that would later become

known as *Kandandu*. Each member of the association began to leverage their respective connections with public institutions to facilitate the presentation and realization of the project. Given that Zuri's Afro block was the newest and lacked existing contacts or access, Zuri willingly took on the task of drafting the project. She remarked, "It's a project that I had the honor of writing, and it's one of the things I'm most proud of having accomplished. I composed the project for Abafro, not for [name of the Afro block]" (Zuri). With the project in hand, their next step was to seek institutional support from the municipal government.

Under Zuri's leadership, the association initiated its quest by approaching the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (Seppir), which initially provided them with a meeting space for Abafro but eventually conveyed its inability to allocate financial resources to the project. However, despite signaling financial constraints, Seppir facilitated Abafro's introduction to the Culture Foundation. During this period, Zuri recollected numerous scheduled meetings with the foundation staff, which often resulted in no-shows or attendance by interns with no decision-making authority. Zuri recalled that when questions or concerns arose, the interns would respond with statements such as "We're unsure, but we've recorded the question to present it to the relevant parties, and we'll provide the answer in the subsequent meeting" (Zuri).

According to the concept of structural racism, an institution concerned with racial issues should actively adopt internal policies aiming to (a) foster equality and diversity in its relationships, (b) eliminate barriers to the advancement of minorities into leadership positions, (c) establish continuous forums for deliberation and assessment of institutional practices, and (d) promote the acknowledgment and resolution of racial and gender conflicts. From this perspective, racism is not confined to representation but rather extends as a political and historical process. However, Zuri's steadfast resolve compels individual actors and public agents to question those responsible.

As time passed, no representative from the Culture Foundation, aside from interns, attended their meetings. Some of the Black men within Abafro, as per Zuri's account, expressed their disillusionment, stating, "You know what, I don't want this either. What they're offering us is something we can achieve without relying on the city of Belo Horizonte. I don't need the city's endorsement to do what I'm already doing." Consequently, with the male members of the group relinquishing their pursuit, Zuri embarked on an independent quest for support. On one occasion, she received a modest sum of R$50 from the leader of *Fala Tambor*, another Black woman herself, to cover her transportation expenses while she sought support to make *Kandandu* a reality.

When Zuri informed the other members of Abafro about the ongoing situation, the male members often responded, "You're a fool for keeping going there; you don't have to deal with this nonsense; it's a joke." During this period, Abafro, with a social media page and an email address both created by Zuri, received an email from the Municipal Secretariat for Culture, stating that there were funds available for the Black Art Festival (FAN). It suggested that they could be able to include *Kandandu* in some way and expressed a desire to discuss it. Once again, Zuri visited the secretariat to learn more about this proposal. It was during this visit that the interns who attended to her informed her that the Secretariat of Culture could not provide financial resources but was willing to offer the structure of 'Fanzinho,' a FAN-related initiative focused on children, as part of the *Kandandu* project.

In response to the Municipal Secretariat of Culture's offer, Zuri presented the needs of the Afro blocks, such as a dressing room and a stage. Unfortunately, none of these requirements would be covered, as Fanzinho's structure primarily consisted of a tent set up in a public park in the city, along with sound equipment. When Zuri insisted that at least one dressing room be made available for the Afro block members to change, she was told, "We can give you the contact [of the person in charge] so you can ask the Municipal Park to use their bathroom as a dressing room." The association declined this offer, but Zuri believed that she could gain some insight from it. She explained, "Something told me I was going to gain something from it. At every meeting I attended, the interns talked a lot. Sending interns was perhaps a move to devalue what we were doing because interns couldn't make decisions on their own, and I understood that. However, due to their lack of a strategic overview, the interns inadvertently shared information that piqued my interest. They would disclose information that higher-ranking individuals would not. So, I collected these tidbits from each meeting, such as, 'No, this money can't be used because it's already been allocated for making posters for such and such a space,' and I would think, 'But such and such a space is a private one.' It was things like that, I kept track of them, saving little comments every day" (Zuri).

Through conversations among the interns, Zuri discerned that public resources were directed toward specific institutions, individuals, or spaces — predominantly white spaces. This revelation underscores how the pact of whiteness operates — a complex and multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in systemic structures of power and privilege. Zuri demonstrates how this pact ensures privileges and distinct opportunities for those within the sphere of whiteness, while the Association of Afro Blocks of Minas Gerais, represented by Zuri, encountered obstacles even in establishing a basic dialogue with the public agents responsible for cultural promotion in Belo Horizonte. Consequently, it becomes evident that organizations are not race-neutral bureaucratic entities, as warned by Ray (2019).

In this context, while we acknowledge in this article how the cultural policies of Belo Horizonte implicitly employ political and economic power to challenge the validity and cultural significance of the festive activities of the Afro blocks, we must also consider that specific individuals within the culture department are influenced by subjectivities that reinforce the narcissistic pact of whiteness. The preponderance of white, normative men in privileged positions within Brazilian politics is not coincidental. Therefore, individuals with greater decision-making authority could potentially be allies in dismantling these subjectivities that perpetuate the narcissistic pact of whiteness, provided we recognize that their own subjectivities are tainted by racism.

It is imperative to examine the various subjectivities affected by racism. For instance, Gouvêa and Oliveira (2020), highlight the challenge of addressing whiteness within the field of administration. Discussing the structural aspects of white privilege, which contribute to oppression, necessitates acknowledging one's role as part of the oppressive system, even as the oppressor. Understandably, this can be an uncomfortable realization for some individuals, as it entails a process of reevaluation and a deeper understanding of their life history and collective struggles.

Rather than solely attributing racism to institutions, it is crucial that we acknowledge the agency of individual subjectivities that engage in prejudiced behaviors, discrimination, and racist acts. This recognition can prompt the field of administration to reconsider professions and work environments that conflate merit with idealized perceptions of white masculinity (Mobasseri et al, 2023) and how they reward or acknowledge their members.

When Abafro declined the structure proposed for Fanzinho, the Municipal Secretariat for Culture responded with an email criticizing the association's inflexibility in negotiations. Zuri was struck by the fact that this email was not only sent to Abafro but also copied to each Afro block that had endorsed the project and numerous others unrelated to the association or the Afro blocks. The email even criticized Zuri's use of the term 'reuse materials,' which, according to them, should not be seen negatively, as those familiar with cultural production recognize it as a customary practice. Similarly, the fact that the Afro blocks did not accept reuse demonstrated ignorance and immaturity on their part. Zuri summarized that the email emphasized the immaturity, naivety, and even a childish attitude in the proposal she had presented and advocated for.

Zuri clarified that Abafro's rejections of the offered structure were not based on the idea of reusing materials but rather on the continuous provision of inferior resources.

While the Afro blocks were offered the modest Fanzinho structure, Praça da Estação[2] had a stage equipped to host concerts by predominantly white artists from other states, who were there in exchange for fees to perform in the city. Even the provision of chemical toilets for the Afro blocks faced unnecessary obstacles. Feeling personally affronted by the email from the secretariat, Zuri requested permission from the other Abafro members to draft a response:

"I wrote my opinion and crafted my response regarding the perceived immaturity of the situation, particularly the assertion that we were immature and unaware of how public funds operate. I was relatively new to the role of a producer, but I had invested time in studying it. I wouldn't approach this endeavor without a solid understanding of its viability. So, I added the things I had learned, you know? I expressed my regrets if my stance came across as immature, but I held the belief that if a private institution could secure a grant from them to produce posters for private events, there was no reason why a cultural event couldn't enjoy the same access. If a certain organization could host an event on the Santa Tereza Overpass with the desired setup, we couldn't fathom why we couldn't do the same. If certain organizations or individuals could organize specific events in various locations using funds from the public grant, why couldn't we and the Afro blocks do the same? So, I started to add all the things I had grasped. If everyone can do all these things using public funds, why can't I? Why can't Afro blocks? All I wanted was to understand that; that's all I told them. Then I concluded by saying: 'Given this situation, the Afro blocks do not require the support of the Secretariat of Culture, as it appears it has no interest in aiding this popular cultural expression, as it already appears committed to their preferred individuals and legal entities'" (Zuri).

All of the assertions Zuri made in her email were rooted in her observations during prior meetings, where she often encountered only interns awaiting her. In response to Zuri's email, Abafro received an invitation to attend another meeting at the Municipal Secretariat of Culture, but this time, there were no interns present. Upon her arrival, Zuri was taken aback by the expansive table reserved for the meeting, which, in her own words, hosted 'several important individuals.' In other words, the table was occupied by the key decision-makers within the city of Belo Horizonte's cultural public structure. Zuri recognized few, if any, individuals at the meeting, aside from a few male members of Abafro who had decided to rejoin the quest for support for *Kandandu* on this occasion. Although Zuri was largely unfamiliar with those in attendance, she was not a complete stranger. Upon reaching the table, she was asked, "So, you're the famous Zuri!"

After the introductions, Zuri was informed that her email had stirred their attention, prompting them to organize the meeting to collaboratively contribute to the *Kandandu* project. However, before delving into the project, they inquired about the authorship of the email she had sent. Zuri affirmed that she had composed it, and they persisted: "Yes, we know you sent it, but who drafted the email for us? Who wrote this email?" Zuri responded, "I did," to which the person insisted, "No, the email was written by a lawyer, right? Someone crafted the email for you." Zuri reaffirmed, "I did it," to which the individual remarked, "Wow, that email is quite impressive," and Zuri replied, "Thank you." He continued, "You should work with this," and Zuri countered, "But I am working with this. Am I not here working?" He acknowledged, "You're right. Shall we begin this meeting?" and Zuri concurred, "Yes, let's begin." (Zuri).

Subsequently, Zuri presented the *Kandandu* project to the assembled individuals, underscoring once more that the project was not solely for her or any specific individual but, rather, for the Afro blocks of Belo Horizonte. She emphasized that she was advocating for an event that celebrated Afro culture, and it was within this context that the bridge between Abafro and Belotur was finally established, facilitated by the then president of the Municipal Culture Foundation, who was also present at the meeting.

Now in communication with the then director of events at Belotur, Zuri presented the *Kandandu* project at the end of 2017, even though Belotur had already closed its plans for the following year's Carnival. Nonetheless, Belotur offered Abafro an electric trio for the Afro blocks to parade on an overpass called Angola, which was scheduled to take place well before the official Carnival season. After extensive deliberation and with Zuri even invoking legislation regarding the promotion of racial equality, she managed to secure the main stage of Belo Horizonte's Carnival, complete with the infrastructure typically reserved for large-scale events. This arrangement allowed *Kandandu* to be held on the first official day of the city's Carnival. A year after its inaugural edition in 2018, *Kandandu* gained recognition from the Ministry of Human Rights as one of Brazil's premier initiatives promoting racial equality. In line with the framework articulated by Jaccoud and Beghim (2002), *Kandandu* can be categorized as a public policy of the 'valuative action' type. These initiatives combat negative stereotypes and racial prejudices while acknowledging Brazil's rich ethnic diversity and celebrating the contributions of the Afro-Brazilian community. These actions aim to highlight the historical significance and contemporary impact of this community in shaping the nation. They are enduring in their scope and encompass not only racially discriminated populations but society at large, fostering an appreciation for ethnic and cultural diversity.

Through Zuri's agency, we discern the significance of comprehending racism from the vantage points of its

individual, institutional, and structural dimensions. Zuri challenges individual actors and scrutinizes institutional processes, thereby engendering tension within racial structures. However, for social scientists to grasp racism in its collective dimension rather than as isolated acts perpetrated by individuals or groups bestows upon us a heightened responsibility in the fight against racism and its practitioners. Our research findings underscore that an understanding of institutional, structural, and collective racism precludes reduction to mere labels and impedes efforts to pigeonhole these issues within the confines of the social framework. In essence, it amplifies the agency of white individuals while impeding the agency of Black individuals. Faced with this reality, white leaders increasingly take refuge behind their institutions' codes of conduct, rationalizing their actions and choices by asserting compliance with institutional rules. Utterances such as "my institution is racist" versus "I'm not racist" become commonplace when, in reality, institutions consist of individuals who have embraced these norms and continue to perpetuate them.

In the context of this research, what we term as 'depersonalization of racism' becomes evident in Zuri's struggle to secure institutional support for the *Kandandu* project. Individual behaviors and decisions that uphold these structures can be identified. Even so, although our analyses do not mention individuals by name, there are individual actions that can be pointed out. For instance, the decision to exclusively send interns, individuals lacking decision-making authority, to meetings was an action that marginalized and devalued the *Kandandu* project and the Afro blocks. Moreover, the suggestion to utilize a bathroom as a dressing room can be interpreted as an individual expression of disrespect and discrimination, as it disregards the needs and dignity of the Afro block members.

Hence, the initial resistance encountered by Zuri, the authorities' lack of commitment and respect, and the insufficient resources and support — these barriers can all be construed as expressions of structural racism in its depersonalized form, obstructing access to opportunities and resources for racialized groups.

We must bear in mind that although specific individuals engage in actions that perpetuate racism, they operate within a broader structure that not only permits but also often fosters such conduct. The challenge lies in striking a balance between critiquing individual actions and dissecting the institutional and structural racism that underpins them. This approach allows us to underscore both personal and collective racism, as well as systemic racism, in our analyses.

While attributing racist actions to specific individuals, especially in the absence of unambiguous evidence of their intentions, is a sensitive matter, we can focus on

how individual actions and decisions contribute to the perpetuation of institutional racism, often without conscious or explicit racial discrimination. For example, Zuri recounts various incidents of racist behavior attributed broadly to the Secretariat of Culture or simply "them." However, by challenging these structures, as Zuri did, several questions emerge: (1) When Zuri references the email received from the Secretariat of Culture, who sent it? Who was responsible for drafting and sending it? What were the motivations and objectives for sending it? (2) When Zuri was invited to a meeting with "several important people" from the Secretariat of Culture, who were these individuals? Did they make decisions at any point that detrimentally affected Zuri or the Afro blocks of Belo Horizonte? (3) When Zuri's email response is praised, and it's insinuated that a lawyer might have composed it, what role did this individual play, and what were their perceptions and behaviors? (4) Even though research is ethically bound to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of participants, it can refer to positions or titles of individuals who hold decision-making roles within organizations. Associating racist actions with specific positions and subjectivities can provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of racism within the analyzed institutions, avoiding unwarranted generalizations. This approach also aids in elucidating how racism operates within these institutions and how it is perpetuated by individuals occupying key roles within them.

FINAL REMARKS

In the pursuit of cultural rights, a Black woman took a proactive stance against the authorities responsible for organizing Carnival festivities in the city of Belo Horizonte. Her relentless efforts eventually secured a space for the city's Afro blocks, ultimately giving rise to *Kandandu*. However, Zuri's strenuous work exacted a heavy toll on her, both physically and mentally.

This article sheds light on how Black women's identities are often marked by the constant need for affirmation and persistence, a reality that can push them to the brink of exhaustion. Drawing from Black feminist thought, as articulated by Lorde (2019), it becomes evident that those of us for whom oppression is an ever-present reality have had to remain perpetually vigilant merely to survive. This vigilance begets a dual consciousness in Black women, who become well versed in the language and behaviors of their oppressors, sometimes adopting them as a self-preserving facade. As Collins (2022) aptly observes, while support from other Black women can assist in a Black woman's journey toward personal empowerment, the ultimate responsibility for self-definitions and self-evaluations rests squarely on her shoulders as an individual. This is a reality experienced by Zuri as she generated

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12

tensions among the agents responsible for the Carnival festivities in the city of Belo Horizonte in order to secure space for the Afro blocks.

Consequently, racism emerges as a fundamental constituent of our organizations. Moreover, we emphasize the significance of Black individuals as both social and individual political agents, underscoring the impossibility of overlooking the lived realities, particularly those of Black women. To truly understand the experienced reality of racism, the focus should shift from constructing individuals as isolated entities to examining how individuals can act as subjects within their social contexts (Kilomba, 2020). In this work, we witness Zuri achieving full subject status as she gains recognition, self-identification, and self-acknowledgment within her social context, operating at the political, social, and individual levels.

Among the theoretical contributions of this article, we first highlight the importance of Black empowerment as a force for societal change. Second, we emphasize the power of Black women's subjectivity, which emanates from their own experiences and those of their communities, as evidenced through the analysis of the Meeting of Afro Blocks at the BH Carnival: *Kandandu*. In terms of social contributions, we anticipate that this article will invigorate discussions surrounding the necessity of adopting a historical, geopolitical, subjective, and institutional lens for examining racism. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of affirmative policies aimed at ensuring citizens have access to the symbols and festivities of Afro culture.

Regarding contributions to the field of organizational studies, we underscore how the exploration of racism and whiteness enriches our understanding of social and organizational dynamics. It illuminates how these forms of discrimination manifest within organizations, whether by limiting access to resources or diminishing the agency of racial groups. Additionally, delving into discussions of whiteness prompts a critical examination of the position and privilege of white individuals in society and within organizations. Recognizing whiteness as a social construct is pivotal for dismantling the notion of neutrality and objectivity frequently associated with white culture. This, in turn, fosters a more equitable and comprehensive analysis of power dynamics within organizations, opening the door to a deeper and more critical comprehension of organizational structures.

NOTES

1. The city of Belo Horizonte interacts with the cultural producers involved in the city's Carnival through Belotur. Belotur, in turn, is the Municipal Tourism Company of Belo Horizonte, responsible for managing the Carnival festivities in the capital of Minas Gerais.

2. The Praça da Estação (Station Square) is located in the heart of Belo Horizonte, next to the subway station and close to many bus lines, making it one of the most easily accessible points in the city, especially for residents from peripheral regions. The square is also traditionally known for hosting large-scale concerts that take place in the capital of Minas Gerais. It is also the location where the main stage of the city's Carnival program is set up.

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13

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14

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