

# ***Preto and negro, pardo, mestiço and mulato***

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The words that designate the darkest colour, *negro* and *preto*, which are defined either in terms of the absence of light or the fusion of all colours, have been present in the Portuguese language since the thirteenth century. Indeed, it is easy to understand how a colour that absorbs rather than reflects beams of light has become an obvious metaphor for all that is dark and sad, whereas *branco* (white) has become the symbol of happiness and purity. When we consider the labelling of skin colour, *black* also presents itself as a contrast to *white*. However, due to the heterogeneous nature of skin tone, the Portuguese language soon found itself having to search for new lexicon in order to fill the gaps in colour terminology. In this paper, I will attempt to identify the ways by which try these new words have emerged from pre-existing concepts, using online corpora to analyse such meanings and in doing so, outline the semantic history of *preto*, *negro*, *pardo*, *mestiço* and *mulato*.

## **1. *Negro and preto***

The Latin noun NĪGER has been found documented in all Romance languages, with the exception of Sardinian. As well as designating the colour Black, metaphorical uses of the word also stretch back several centuries, either being

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assigned to ‘sadness, mourning’ or to ‘dark skin’. When referring to ‘dark skin’, *negro* has been found in 15<sup>th</sup> century Spanish texts (Corominas 1991, s.v. *negro*); the French *nègre*<sup>16</sup>, Italian *negro*, English *nigger*, and German *neger* (which have same meaning) are all borrowings from the Spanish.

The etymology of *preto* seems to be more problematic. Corominas (1991, s.v. *apretar*) suggested a first form *\*apetrar*, from late Latin APPĒCTŌRARE (< PĒCTUS). The understanding of ‘brown skin’ (Portuguese *preto*, old Spanish *prieto*<sup>17</sup>) may come from the idea of ‘dense, thick’, as an equivalent to ‘dark’.

*Negro* and *preto* have been present in the Portuguese language since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. As adjectives, both words designate something which is ‘dark coloured’ (either as tangible entities or *irrealia*) and such usage may be observed in the *Historia Troyana* (14<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>18</sup>:

mandou trager dous carneiros negros (*two black sheep*), fl. 14rb  
et os ollos avian grandes e pretos (*black eyes*), fl. 49vb

as well as in medieval songbooks<sup>19</sup>

Per meus negros pecados, tive ùu castelo forte e dei-o a seu don[o] (*black sins*), B 1592  
/ V 1124.

Here, *negro* retains the Latin connotation of ‘gloomy, sinister’; the same goes for *preto* and this is evident in the description of justice in *Boosco Deleitoso* (the late 14<sup>th</sup>, early 15<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>20</sup>. Once again, the black colour is related to pain and the white colour (*alva*) to pleasure:

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<sup>16</sup> *Nègre* is documented on the 16<sup>th</sup> century (*Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*, s.v. *nègre*).

<sup>17</sup> The Nebrija’ dictionary gives *prieto* as a synonym of *negro*: “*prieto* aquello mesmo es que *negro*” (Corominas (1991, s.v. *apretar*).

<sup>18</sup> Ed. Pichel (2013).

<sup>19</sup> In *Dicionário de dicionários do galego medieval - Corpus lexicográfico medieval da língua galega*.

<sup>20</sup> In *Corpus do Português*.

[a justiça] a sua vistidura he de duas colores ha color preta demonstra a tribulaçõ e ha door que ha justiça faz padecer aos maãos. E a color alua demonstra ho prazer e o gualardõ que ella da aos boõs (*justice' clothing has two colours: the black colour stands for the pain that the wicked will suffer and the white colour represents pleasure, which is the reward for the virtuous*).

Contemporary dictionaries (I will use *Infopedia*, an online dictionary commonly used as a reference dictionary for contemporary European Portuguese) keep both meanings. Here, *negro*, as well as *preto* (adj.), is described as something 1. defined by the absence of colour; 2. dark coloured; 3. dirty; 4. gloomy; 5. sad. 6. mournful. The definition for *preto* is almost exactly the same<sup>21</sup> due to the fact that *negro* and *preto* are seen as synonyms. As a noun, both *negro* and *preto* can refer to an individual who is dark skinned, but in this case, *preto* is considered to be pejorative.

However, a diachronic analysis reveals an important difference: whilst as adjectives, both *negro* and *preto* apply, as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, to 'something dark' or 'sad', as nouns and as a means of labelling skin colour, the dictionaries<sup>22</sup> only record *negro* in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and *preto* in the 18<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, an on-line corpus<sup>23</sup> survey shows that it is possible to find evidence of the adjective *negro* referring to skin colour or race even before the 15<sup>th</sup> century:

Ca sse o senhor a cousa quiser demãdar por sua & for mouil & uiua assy come seruo deue dizer o nome del se o souber & se he barõ. ou molher. ou mãço. ou uelho. ou brãco ou negro (*the master should tell the servant's name and whether he is male or female, young or old, white or black*), *Terceyra Partida de Afonso X*, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century;

E, em sayndo el rey da claustra, vyo viinr huu clerigo que era muy negro de sua color. El rey, por que o vyo assy negro, preguntoulhe por o nome de seu padre e elle lhe disse que avya nome Çolleyma. (*the king saw a clergyman who was black; his father's name was Çolleima*), *Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*.

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<sup>21</sup> In Brazilian portuguese *preto* also means something 'tricky', 'hard' (*Infopedia*).

<sup>22</sup> Machado 1977; Cunha 1986; Houaiss 2001, s.v. *negro*, *preto*.

<sup>23</sup> *Corpus do português*.

Interestingly, in these texts, it is always the adjective *negro* which is used when referring to skin colour, never *preto*. We only find the latter used with this meaning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century:

O pay era preto e gentil-homem de bom corpo, mayor que o do filho. (*the father was black*), *Chronica dos Reis de Bisnaga*.

A survey in the *Corpus do Português* (a database of Portuguese texts stretching from the 1300s to the 1900s) reveals a significant difference between the occurrences of *preto* and *negro* (for the colour of the skin): not only is *preto* a later word, it also appears less frequently than *negro*, particularly after the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

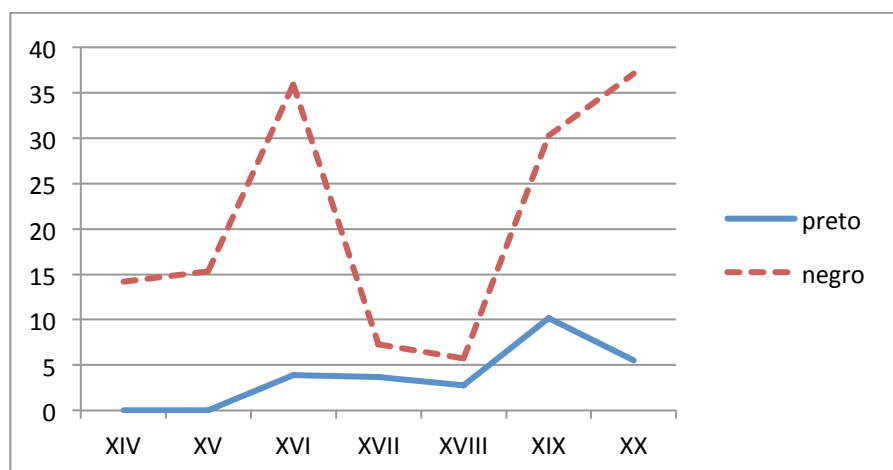


Fig. 1: The frequency of *preto* and *negro* (skin colour) in the total of forms referring to black colour in the *Corpus do Português*<sup>24</sup>.

Rafael Bluteau, one of the first lexicographers of Portuguese, defines both *preto*<sup>25</sup> and *negro* as synonymous in their designation of the colour black (*Vocabulário Portuguez e Latino, 1712-28*)<sup>26</sup>:

<sup>24</sup> In *Corpus do Português* there are references to *preto* and *negro* with other uses (such as toponym or anthroponym) that were not taken into account in this distribution.

<sup>25</sup> *Preto* is also the name of a coin, precisely because of the colour (there were white and black coins): “Preto. Antiga moeda de Portugal. Quando ElRey D. Duarte mandou bater

preto. Negro. Ater, atra, um. ou Niger, gra, grum.

negro. Cor negra, ou tinta negra. He hu dos dous extremos das cores, & he opposto ao branco (*black color or black ink, as opposed to white*).

When referring to clothing, the colour black (*negro* or *preto*) appears in association with penitence and, in general, with sadness and mourning:

A cor negra era antigamente propria das vestes dos Monges (...) que professavão vida penitente (...) A razão foi, porque a cor preta he mais propria da humildade do estado Monastico, & se significa nella a tristeza; pela qual razão se accomoda aos tumulos, exequias, & representações funebres (*in the past the clothing of the monks was black due to it being suitable for humility; black signifies sadness and is suitable for funeral rites*);

Negro. Infausto. Desgarciado. Da cor negra, que he a mais escura de todas, tomamos motivo para chamarmos negro a toda a cousa que nos enfada, molesta, & entristece, como quando dizemos, Negra ventura, negra vida, & c. (*we call everything that makes us sad, black*).

By the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Bluteau's dictionary, *negro* and *preto* have already become synonyms when identifying skin colour:

Negro. Homem da terra dos negros, ou filho de pays negros. Preto tambem se chama o escravo Preto. Servus niger. Pretinho. Negrinho. Pretinho, tambem val o mesmo que pequeno escravo. Preto. Servulus niger (*black man, son of black parents, slave*).

It should be noted that the negative connotations that later extended to skin colour, and which were already present in Latin, are regarded as a mischance:

Quem negro nace. nũca sera branco (*those born black will never be white*), Jerónimo Cardoso, *Dictionarium latinolusitanicum & vice versa lusitanicolatinum cum adagiorum*, 1570;

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huma moeda, que chamáraõ Reaes brancos, parece que mandou bater outra moeda, a que chamou Pretos "(Bluteau, *Vocabulário Portuguez e Latino*, 1712-1728).

<sup>26</sup> All quotations of ancient dictionaries are taken from *Corpus Lexicográfico do Português*.

Ainda que negros, gente somos, & alma temos (*we are black but we are people and we have a soul*) Bluteau, *Vocabulário Portuguez e Latino*, 1712-28.

Apparently, the black skin colour was considered a punishment from God, and in this instance, Bluteau offers us some hypotheses (which were circulating at the time) for the origin of black skin:

Attribuem alguns esta cor preta à força do Sol nas terras que estes povos habitão; mas debaixo da Zona Torrida, onde perpendicularmente arde este Planeta, ha homens tão brancos, como na Europa (...) Para evitar os inconvenientes desta controversia, se responde que esta negridão dos corpos foi castigo do Ceo (*some think that the color is caused by the heat of the sun but below the torrid zone there are also white men; some say that this colour is a punishment from heaven*).

As a result of Portuguese expansion overseas, the figure of the African slave became increasingly frequent from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, mainly as a character in theatre. For example, in Garcia de Resende's *Cancioneiro Geral* (1516), and as depicted in Fernão da Silveira's lyrics (44)<sup>27</sup>, we see the figure of an African King who is present in order to celebrate the wedding of Prince Fernando (1490):

A mim rei de negro estar Serra Lioa,  
lonje muito terra onde viver nós,  
lodar caitbela tubao de Lixboa  
falar muao novas casar pera vós.  
Querer a mim logo ver-vos como vai,  
leixar molher meu, partir muito sinha,  
porque sempre nós servir vosso pai,  
folgar muito negro, estar vós rainha.  
Aqueste gente meu taibo, terra nossa  
nunca folgar, andar sempre guerra,  
nam saber qui que balhar terra vossa,  
balhar que saber como nossa terra.

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<sup>27</sup> The numbering of the compositions is the one in the edition of Dias (1990-93).

Se logo vos quer mandar, a mim venha  
fazer que saber, tomar que achar,  
mandar fazer taibo lugar, Des mantenha!  
E logo meu negro, Senhora, balhar.<sup>28</sup>

In *Vida e Feitos d'el-rey Dom João Segundo*, Garcia de Resende describes the dance accompanying the song and from this, we learn that such 'africans' were played by men painted in black ("dozentos homens tintos de negro muito grandes bayladores")<sup>29</sup>. However, in the verses written by Anrique da Mota, which present us with a clergyman who loses a wine barrel only to then accuse his slave (797), the subject has already become a black slave (*negra*):

(Fala com a sua negra).

— Oo perra de Manicongo,  
tu entornaste este vinho!  
Ûa posta de toucinho  
t' hei-de gastar nesse lombo!  
.....  
O siso será calar  
pera nam buscar desculpa.  
Pois a negra nam tem culpa,  
pera que lha quero dar?  
.....  
a negra fica convosco  
com que vos confortareis.

A few years later the theatre texts by Gil Vicente have several black characters:

(*Vem um Negro cantando na língua de sua terra*)

Negro: que inda que negro só

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<sup>28</sup> Teyssier gives a fairly complete analysis of this song (2005:276-8) and describes the 'língua de preto' (2005:275-305).

<sup>29</sup> Ed. Verdelho 1994, p. 334.

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Vénus: Cúyo eres negro coitado?

Negro: A mi sá negro de crivão

agora sá vosso cão

vossa cravo murgurado.

Cativo como galinha

quando boso água querê

logo a mi bai trazê

e más o feixe de lenha.

.....

Negro: Faze-me branco rogo-te homem (*Frágua d'amor*, 1524);<sup>30</sup>

(*Vem um Negro de Beni e diz:*)

.....

Negro que faze folia

.....

Frade: Este Negro chilra mais

que salmonete em figueira (*Nao d'amores*, 1527);

.....

Clérigo: Se topares lá em fundo

um negro põe-te a recado

porque é um perro malvado

o maior ladrão do mundo.

.....

Gonçalo: Dize Negro és da corte?

Negro: Já a mi forro nam sá catibo (*Clérigo da Beira*, 1529-30).

Gil Vicente always used the word *negro*, never *preto*. Therefore, it appears that, in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the former was the only Portuguese word that existed to denote black skin colour. However, Venus, a Spanish-speaking character from *Frágua d'amor*, also used the word *prieto* ("Vénus: Prieto vienes de Castilla?"). Due to the fact that many writers of Portuguese literature were frequently exposed to the

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<sup>30</sup> All quotations of Gil Vicente's plays are taken from *Teatro de Autores Portugueses do século XVI*.



Spanish language, it is plausible that *preto*, with the meaning of 'skin color' was a Spanish loan. In any case, by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *preto* was already in use with reference to skin colour, as we can see in the following description in *Crónica da Companhia de Jesus* (Simão de Vasconcelos, 1663)<sup>31</sup>. In this text, we also come across another concept, that of 'miscegenation':

... a mulher branca, de branco pare branco, e de negro mulato; seja quente, ou fria a disposição do ventre. Donde se tira manifestamente, que nao está somente no ventre a virtude do grau do frio, ou calor necessário; senao na virtude seminária, que depende de ambos os generantes porque se ambos têm virtude fria, geram branco; se ambos cálida, geram preto; e se um fria, outro cálida, geram mulato de cor entremeia, nem perfeitamente branca, nem preta (*white woman with white man generate white children; with black man mulatto, neither white nor black*).

## 2. *Pardo, mulato and mestiço*

Portuguese has an early word, *pardo*, meaning 'dark', that has been documented since the 12<sup>th</sup> century: "uno poldro colore pardo" (Machado 1977, s.v. *pardo*). *Pardo* was a fairly common form in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries and designated anything with a dark hue<sup>32</sup> and in particular, a kind of fabric ("hũas opas vermellas dobradas de panno pardo", 1414).<sup>33</sup> As a result, it quickly adopted the new meaning of 'dark skin or of undefined tonality' and later, 'mestizo, mulatto'. In fact, we can find *pardo* used as a reference to skin colour as early as the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as in *Miragres de Santiago*:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In *Corpus do Português*.

<sup>32</sup> *Pardo* was also used as a name for the leopard. According to Corominas (1991, s.v. *pardo*), *leopardus* could have been understood as *leo-pardus*, thus *pardus* would have been seen as an adjective referring to the dark-colored patches that distinguish the leopard from the lion. Then, *pardo* came to designate the color of horses and other animals, and finally any dark object. A resemblance to *pardal* (sparrow, from Greek *párdalos*) may have contributed to this semantic evolution. However, Viaro (2011:186) suggested the evolution PALLIDUM > \*paldo > *pardo*. In the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries *pardo* (and *pardilho*) was also a kind of dark and mixed fabric (Houaiss 2001, s. v. *pardo*).

<sup>33</sup> Maia (1986:104).

<sup>34</sup> In *Corpus do Português*.

Et demais ainda tomou toda a terra [...] que tinã os mouros, a terra dos serranos et dos pardos et dos castelãos.

Although is not exactly clear who these *pardos* were, the diary of Fernão de Magalhães', written in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, presents 'gente parda' as a synonym for 'dark-skinned people':

tendo andado mays de mil leguas achou perto da linha duas ilhas não grandes pouoadas de gente parda de cabelo corredio gêtios, saluagês, nus sem uestido nem pollicia algũa<sup>35</sup>.

Around the same time, João de Barros' *Décadas da Ásia (Década Segunda, Livros I-X, 1553)*<sup>36</sup>, showed that being *pardo* was apparently a reason for contempt:

Dinis Fernandes de Melo, filho bastardo de Gonçalo Vaz de Melo, o qual, posto que naquele tempo era pouco conhecido e estimado, por ser homem pardo nas cores (*Dinis Fernandes de Melo, bastard son of Gonçalo Vaz de Melo, was little valued because of the colour of his skin*)

In Gil Vicente's plays, the character of *Maria Parda* would probably have been dark-skinned, just like the *parda mujer* in *Frágua de Amor*; by that time, in Anrique Lopes' *Cena Policiano/Auto do Estudante*<sup>37</sup>, *pardo* and *mulato* had become synonyms:

Teodósio: Quem canta ao som d'almofaça?

Inofre: É o mulato de Licardo.

Teodósio: Dai a Deos, bem canta o pardo.

*Mulato*, from Latin MŪLUS+ATTUS (the suffix that applies to young animals) is, in both Portuguese and Spanish, the term that initially referred to the offspring

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<sup>35</sup> In *Corpus do Português*.

<sup>36</sup> In *Corpus do Português*.

<sup>37</sup> In *Teatro de Autores Portugueses do século XVI*.

produced through the breeding of a donkey and a horse. Corominas (1991 s.v. *mulo*) claims that the Portuguese word *mulato* is a loan from Spanish, from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The word travelled, from Spanish or from Portuguese, to Italian (*mulatto*)<sup>38</sup> and then to French (*mulâtre*)<sup>39</sup> and English (*mulatto*). When referring to 'mule', *mulato* occurred in some of Gil Vicente's plays, such as with a Spanish-speaking character Julião (*Tragicomédia de Dom Duardos*):

Julião: ...ha de heredar  
una burra y un pumar  
y un mulato y un molino

and also with Portuguese speaking characters (*Farsa do Clérigo da Beira*)

Filho:...é cousa perigosa  
andardes à caça a pé.  
Clérigo: Se beato immaculato  
m'emprestasse o seu mulato  
mas nam sei se quererá.

Retaining the same meaning, the word *mulato* appears in the first Portuguese lexicography, written by Jerónimo Cardoso, who in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (*Dictionarium latinolusitanicum*, 1570), translates *mulato* with the word *burdo*: "mulato filho de asno e de egoa. Burdo, onis" (*cub of a donkey and a mare*). In the following century, Barbosa (*Dictionarium lusitanico latinum*, 1611) still defines *mulato* in terms of the animal ("Mulato filho de cavalo, e asna. Burdo, onis"), as does Bento Pereira in his *Thesouro da lingua portugueza*, 1697 ("Mulato, besta. Buido, onis").

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<sup>38</sup> *Mulatto* occurred in Italian in a translation by Ramusio of a Portuguese document dated 1525; latter, in 1580, Pigafetta also used this word (Corominas 1991 s.v. *mulo*).

<sup>39</sup> *Mulâtre* (*mullatre*, *mulastre*, *mulate*, *mulat*) is documented in French since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, meaning a 'person born from the union of a white with a black'. It is a loan from Portuguese (*Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*, s.v. *mulâtre*).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bluteau's *Vocabulário* also retains the same meaning: "Mulato é a besta, o macho asneiro, filho de cavallo, & burra". Bluteau even highlights some popular proverbs concerning this animal:

Caminho largo, ou mula, ou mulato (*long walk, mule or mulatto*);

O mulato sempre parece asno; quer na Cabeça, quer no rabo (*the mulato always appears to be a donkey, be it with his head or with his tail*).

Nevertheless, in the writings of Cardoso, Bento Pereira, and Bluteau, the word *mulato* can also be found applied to a human being:

Hybrida(ae). Ho homem mulato (*mullatto man*), Cardoso, *Dictionarium latinolusitanicum*, 1570;

o mulato, ou filho de natural, & estrangeiro (*son of a native and a foreigner*), Bento Pereira, *Prosodia in vocabularium bilingue, Latinum, et Lusitanum digesta*, 1697;

O filho de pay Europeo, & mãy negra, chama-se Mulato (*a child of a European father and black mother is a mulatto*)<sup>40</sup>, Bluteau, *Vocabulário Portuguez e Latino*, 1712-28.

Bluteau demonstrates quite clearly the metaphorical twist on the original meaning:

Este nome Mulato vem de Mú, ou mulo, animal gèrado de dous outros de diferente especie (the word 'mulato' comes from 'mulo', an animal generated from two animals of different species).

Therefore, ever since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *mulato* has not simply been restricted to animals, but has also referred to an individual born from two different species, thus combining the notion of mixing both species and colours.

As for the word *mestiço*, traditionally it was employed in the Spanish and Portuguese overseas dominions to indicate crossbreeding. From the late Latin MĪXTĪCIUS, 'born of a mixed breed' (< MIXTUS, p.p. MISCĒRE, 'to mix, to merge'),

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<sup>40</sup> According to Corominas (1991 s.v. *mulo*), in the 16th century *mulato* meant 'son of European and Moorish' or 'black and Indian'; it was only in the 17th century that this word was applied to 'black and white'.

documented in Saint Jerome (c. 347-420) and Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636)<sup>41</sup>, *mestiço* has occurred in Portuguese texts since the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup> Jerónimo Cardoso (1570) and Agostinho Barbosa (1611) translated *mestiço* with the words *Hybris, idis, Ibrida, ae*; the original meaning of 'mixed' was initially a reference to the result of crossing species<sup>43</sup> as observed in Bento Pereira' *Prosódia*, 1697:

Lycopantheros, Animal mestiço de lobo, & onça (*crossbred of wolf and jaguar*);  
Leopardus, Leopardo, animal mistiço de pardo, & leoa (*crossbred of leopard and lion*).

Corominas observed that the meaning of 'dark skin' was a loan from Spanish *mestizo*, first documented in 1600. Yet, Machado (1977, s.v. *mestiço*) claimed that this word had already been in use in a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Portuguese text:

Habitã mais naquella prouincia do Malabar dous generos de mouros, huus naturaes da terra a que elles chamã Nayteas que sam mestiços (*Moors who are mestizos*), João de Barros, *Décadas da Ásia: Década Primeira*, Livro IX, 1552.

Either way, Bluteau, in his *Vocabulário* (1712-28), already identifies *mestiço* as a reference to any type of animal (rational or irrational) that results from the crossing of species:

mestiço. Diz-se dos animaes racionaes, & irracionaes. Animal mestiço. Nascido de pay, & mãy de diferentes especies, como mú, leopardo, & c.

Homem mestiço. Nascido de pays de diferentes nações. V. g. Filho de Portuguez, & de India, ou de pay Indio, & de mãy Portugueza (*rational or irrational animals born from parents of different species; child of Portuguese and Indian*).

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<sup>41</sup> Corominas 1991 s.v. *mecer*.

<sup>42</sup> Machado 1977; Cunha 1986; Houaiss 2001, s.v. *mestiço*.

<sup>43</sup> The French *métis* (adj.) is documented in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the sense of 'mixed', 'of low birth', and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, meaning 'animal generated from two different species' (*chien mestis*); in the 17<sup>th</sup> *metice* (adj. and n.) already means 'person born of a white man with an Indian'. *Metice, mestice* were common in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries and are, probably, an adaptation of the Portuguese or the Spanish word. Ancient Provençal had *mestiz* (adj. 'of low birth', 'mixed blood', 'bad', 'vile' and n., 'bastard of low birth'), from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century (*Le Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé*, s.v. *métis*).

Bluteau's *Vocabulário de sinonimos e phrases portuguezas* (1728) adds a pejorative dimension to this word, associating it with the concept of 'fake, adulterated': "Mistiço, ou Mestiço. Bastardo. Adulterino. Illegitimo. Não castiço (*bastard, illegitimate*).

### 3. Closing remarks

Although *negro* has always been the word of preference to designate non-white skin (probably because it can encompass any skin which is dark), by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese felt the need to introduce new lexicon. As shown in figure 2, the only word in the 14<sup>th</sup> century that was used to designate a non-white skin colour was *negro*; in the following century, *pardo* became an available option for dark skin colour; in the 16<sup>th</sup>, *preto* emerges (as an alternative to *negro*) but also the mixed skin colours, *mestiço* and *mulato*.<sup>44</sup>

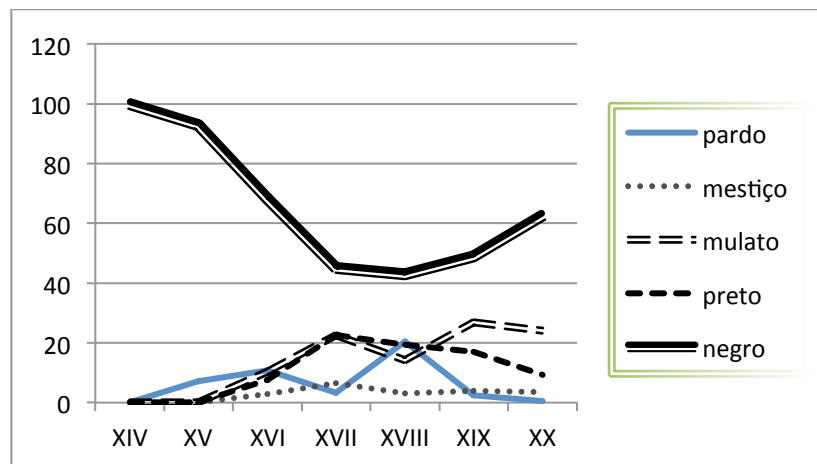


Fig. 2: The frequency of *preto*, *negro*, *pardo*, *mestiço* and *mulato* (referring skin color) in *Corpus do Português*.

The variety of cultures with which the Portuguese came into contact in the 16<sup>th</sup> century must have stimulated this need to specify colors and backgrounds. Hence, aside from the terms *preto/negro*, *branco*, *pardo*, *mulato* and *mestiço*, there were

<sup>44</sup> All these words are still in use, for skin color (*Infopedia*).

other newer words, such as *crioulo* and *caboclo*, which also found themselves listed in Bluteau, 1712-28:

O filho de pay Europeo, & mãy negra, chama-se Mulato (*European father and black mother*);

O filho de pay do Brasil, & mãy negra, chama-se Curiboca, ou Cabocles (*Brazilian father and black mother*);

O filho de pay, & mãy, negros, chama-se Crioulo (*black father and mother*).

It was no longer sufficient to simply refer to a 'mixture of species'; rather, it had become necessary to specify the exact type of mixture. This desire for specification was possibly due to the fact that *negro* was perceived as an excessively broad term. The Portuguese already knew the colour black (*negro*) and could use it to qualify Africans with whom they had had contact ever since the early period of the Christian 'Reconquista'. But from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when the expansionist overseas movement resulted in new intercultural contacts, skin colour could no longer be reduced to a binary colour system: black and white. Therefore, the need to give names to different skin tones, in particular the 'mixed' skin, led to a common strategy for extending the lexicon: using words that already existed and to which known realities have been assigned, and give them new meanings, adapted to new realities. This is what seems to have occurred in this particular semantic field: the particular adjective that qualified a color started being applied to the skin color of an individual and, later, named the individual itself.

<i>negro</i>	dark color, somber, sad (13 <sup>th</sup> )
	↓
	skin color (14 <sup>th</sup> ) → black man (15 <sup>th</sup> )
<i>preto</i>	dark color, somber, sad (13 <sup>th</sup> )
	↓
	skin color (16 <sup>th</sup> ) → black man (17 <sup>th</sup> )

*pardo* dark color, (12<sup>th</sup>)



mixed fabric, mixed skin color (15<sup>th</sup>) → person of mixed race, n. (16<sup>th</sup>)

*mestiço* mongrel animal (14<sup>th</sup>) → person of mixed race, adj., n. (16<sup>th</sup>)

*mulato* mule (16<sup>th</sup>) → person of mixed race, adj., n. (16<sup>th</sup>)

The element which supports this extension of the meaning for *negro* and *preto*, is indeed colour. On the other hand, the new meaning for *pardo*, *mestiço* and *mulato* was not only based on colour but also on the very concept of intersection; mixing materials, cross-breeding, and also the crossing of colours.

With regard to the naming of skin colour, *negro* and *preto* are clearly opposed to *branco*; but, as the world is not simply 'black and white', the colour of the skin cannot be exclusively reduced to these two colours, especially with the new intercultural contacts brought about with beginning of Portuguese overseas expansion. Hence the need for more specific words such as *pardo*, *mestiço* and *mulato*; words that already existed but which had previously designated other realities. New experiences arise from already existing concepts, and indeed, the same applies to lexicon. In essence, if we go back to the roots of words and study their etymological chain, we may reach simpler forms and more 'primitive' concepts.

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