

“Whiter Than Me?”: An Intersectional Analysis of Whiteness in Feminisms

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Resumo: No presente artigo, analisamos como a branquitude apresenta-se nos movimentos feministas, buscando compreender os processos de subjetivação e racialização de mulheres brancas por meio do diálogo com as epistemologias dos feminismos não hegemônicos e estudos críticos da branquitude. Analisamos as falas de quatro feministas brancas que foram entrevistadas de maneira a pensar os desdobramentos da branquitude nos contextos feministas hegemônicos, buscando entender o que ocorre quando feministas brancas estão dispostas a dialogar e refletir sobre sua condição racial. A discussão dos resultados mostra a importância de compreendermos as formas de ser mulher e os feminismos afastando-se de uma via essencialista e universalizante, reconhecendo que se faz necessária a horizontalização dos pensamentos e práticas feministas a partir da intersecção dos marcadores sociais da diferença.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia Social; teoria feminista; branquitude; gênero; interseccionalidade.

‘Mais branca que eu?': uma análise interseccional da branquitude nos feminismos

Abstract: This paper analyses how whiteness appears in feminist movements, in an effort to comprehend the subjectivation and racialization of white women through a dialogue with epistemologies of non-hegemonic feminisms and critical studies of whiteness. Four white feminists were interviewed and their statements were analyzed to consider the ramifications of whiteness in hegemonic feminist contexts, and to understand what occurs when white feminists are willing to dialogue and reflect on their own racial conditions. The discussion of the results reveals the importance of understanding ways of being a woman and feminisms with a distance from an essentialist and universalizing path, recognizing the need for horizontalizing feminist thinking and practices through the intersection of social markers of difference.

Keywords: Social Psychology; Feminist Theory; Whiteness; Gender; Intersectionality.

Introduction

*the abused
and the
abuser
- I have been both
(Rupi Kaur, 2015)*

There has been much discussion about the diversity and lack of similarity among feminist movements and how different possibilities of subjectivation of women generate tensions in the agendas of political practices and organizations. Thus, it is necessary to think of the whiteness that permeates the dominant discussions of feminist productions and activisms. Whiteness produces effects and divergences in the realm of a racialized gender structure in feminist movements, which makes it essential to reflect on racial movements in this field. The objective of this study is to understand how processes of subjectivation and racialization of white feminists take place and how the concept of whiteness contributes to considering hegemonic logics in this context.

Subjectivation processes can be understood to be constitutive of subjects who are permeated by the various forms of social, political and cultural relations by which they are forged. A logic that is not fixed or determinant thus follows, but that is constantly moving and transforming, and it is essential that we recognize the singularities and identity constitution of subjects, considering the production of markers of exclusion and invisibility in these processes (Amana Rocha MATTOS; Maria Luiza Rovaris CIDADE, 2016). Lia Schucman (2014b, p. 92) defines racialization as a symbolic process that consists in giving "social meaning to certain biological characteristics (normally phenotypical) on the basis of which those who are carriers (of the markers) are designated as a distinct collectivity". It is a social characterization process based on certain phenotypical traits, which organizes groups by racial markers of difference. Even if this categorization is a social construction, it racially determines populations.

It is not enough, however, to understand the impact the various social discriminations and exclusions that the racial-ethnic questions produce. By discussing the plurality of processes of subjectivation of women, the various feminisms, including those that are mostly formed by white women, must be "addressed as non-essentialist, historically contingent discursive practices" (Avtar BRAH, 1996, p. 114), which allows working together through anti-racist political articulations and feminist practices, in a conceptual analysis of issues of differences that are useful when conducting struggles and proposing agendas.

In this study, we interact with theories and practices of non-hegemonic feminisms and of racialized women¹ (bell hooks, 1984; Yuderkis ESPINOSA-MIÑOSO, 2014; Cherrie MORAGA; Ana CASTILLO, 1988) – produced mainly by black women; and with an intersectional approach. The proposals of these non-hegemonic and peripheral feminisms are located in opposition to a feminism that is raised as a normative reference – both historically and academically – a feminism that is predominantly white, cisgender, heterosexual and institutional. These proposals interact with the need to construct a political practice that considers the articulations of systems of domination and oppression (Ochy CURIEL, 2009).

Studies that register subalternized, racialized and sexed practices in struggle and resistance are fundamental to understanding oppressive relations, even within feminist movements. In this sense, intersectionality brings us an "analytical sensibility", as Carla Akotirene affirms (2019, p. 18), which allows us to rethink the methodologies as a political form of recognition and valorization of subjectivities, practices and daily living experiences that problematize the heteropatriarchal white cisgenderness.

Another field of interlocution is that of the critical studies of whiteness, which problematize the forms of (re)production and strengthening of racism, in which white people occupy a symbolic place that is not established by genetic issues, but by social positions and places that are constructed to maintain certain logics of privileges, advantages and rights as a function of racial phenotypes. In this sense, whiteness is understood as a mechanism of racial hegemony that maintains and reinforces the dimensions of privileges of a certain racial group – white people (Maria Aparecida BENTO, 2014).

What sorts of deconstruction or development are delineated when white women recognize their position of privilege through a racial perspective (and one that considers other social markers) in the realm of their feminist practices? Is there, in this process, recognition of their racial condition in intersection with the inequalities of gender experienced? To respond to these questions, the field of this research consists in semi-structured interviews conducted with four women who affirm they are feminists and self-described as white, who were open to reflecting on race, gender and feminist movements based on a perspective of privileges and their consequent advantages and rights.

The proposal of this text goes beyond one of diagnosis and seeks to understand how subjectivation and racialization occur for white people – in this case, white women in feminist contexts. The starting point is not an essentialist and universal idea of *white person* but understands that this logic is constructed through a hegemonic system of race and power that permeates the constitution of subjects² in different ways, through social markers of difference.

Processes of subjectivation and racialization: dialogs with non-hegemonic feminisms

The apprehensions about the racialization of white women in feminisms usually do not come from white feminists, because to recognize that one is privileged by her color and phenotypical

¹ The choice of the term "racialized women" encompasses the bodies of women and their readings in feminist contexts, having a premise of whiteness in these spaces. Racialization always takes place for women who do not fit into the universal logic of the subject – the white/ In general, white women do not recognize themselves as racialized peoples, and our proposal in this study is to think of the racialization of white people, given that the other forms of being woman, silenced and marginalized in feminisms are already racialized.

² "In the original English, the term subject does not have gender. However, its current translation in Portuguese is reduced to the male gender – o sujeito – without allowing variations in female gender – a sujeita – or various LGBTQIA+ genders – xs sujeitxs – which would be identified as spelling mistakes" (Grada KILOMBA, 2019, p. 15). Since this text refers only to the women interviewed, we decided to maintain the term in the female gender a sujeita.

condition is not an easy task for those who do not suffer racial discrimination and belong to a normative ethnocentric logic (hooks, 1984; ESPINOSA-MIÑOSO, 2017; Sueli CARNEIRO, 2003b; Donna HARAWAY, 1988). It is understood that there are intragender power relations in feminisms, produced at racial intersections (also permeated by markers of class, sexuality, generation, religion, and others) which are revised in concepts and practices developed through intellectual debate and practical and social intervention of feminisms.

There is extensive production from non-hegemonic feminisms that investigates how social markers permeate subjects in the production of knowledges and in practices of resistance, allowing us to understand and resignify the role of feminist discourses in the subjectivation and racialization of women (Kimberlé CRENSHAW, 1994; hooks, 1984; Maria LUGONES, 2011; Chandra MOHANTY, 2008).

In this sense it is necessary to turn to perceptions about new forms of being a woman, not only considering analyses of patriarchal and sexist relations for example. It is important to recognize nuances in disputes of knowledge and practices to be able to create spaces of horizontality and plurality (HARAWAY, 1988; hooks, 1994; Djamila RIBEIRO, 2017). As hooks affirms (1984, p. 14), "privileged feminists have largely been unable to speak to, with, and for diverse groups of women because they either do not understand fully the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression or refuse to take this inter-relatedness seriously."

Although feminists understand the need to develop analyses that encompass a greater quantity of experiences of different ways of being a woman, which are fundamental to the creation of alliances, the complexity and the logic of whiteness marginalizes movements. Processes of understanding and subjectivation of bodies of white feminists – which are said to be universal and essentialized – do not horizontalize or pluralize feminisms, reinforcing the hegemony of knowledge and producing epistemological distancings. A critical perspective, in most cases, emerges from people who have knowledge and experience both margin and center (AKOTIRENE, 2019; HARAWAY, 1988; hooks, 1984; 1994).

According to Brah (1996), problems that affect women cannot be analyzed in isolation, much less can they be universalized, that is, discourses of femininities assume specific meanings through different trajectories that cross not only issues of gender, but of race, class, sexuality, generation and other markers. As Haraway affirms (1988, p. 586), "There is no way to "be" simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (i.e., subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation, and class." And this search for the "wholly" and total position appears in many feminisms.

There is a heterogeneity of understanding of what "white women" and "whiteness" mean, and it will be through the concept of intersectionality that we recognize that privileges and oppressions constitute a social position, that is, positions without privilege do not erase racial privileges, but will modify the meanings and forms of subjectivation and racialization of people (Dieuwertje Dyi HUIJG, 2011).

In this sense, it is inevitable that we understand that people will be permeated by privileges in different ways. The objective of this study was not to produce individual guilt, given that each person recognizes privileges in different ways. The goal was to make visible and discuss the racial privileges that permeate the living experiences of the interlocutors, who are marked by other oppressions, in particular those of gender.

To discuss race and racism in the context of feminist movements allows us to think about how the practices of subjects are (re)produced and how the non-racialization of the "(white)woman" winds up legitimizing racist concepts of gender. To speak of and problematize racism demands reflection and understanding about the places that we occupy and about our practices, given that non recognition of the place of racial privilege enjoyed by white women becomes a form of racism, considering that it does not allow challenging intragender racial hierarchies (Geórgia Grube MARCINIK; MATOS, 2017).

According to Carneiro (2003a), differences and inequalities found in the female universe are not recognized by hegemonic feminisms, which consequently causes women who are victims of other forms of oppression – not only sexism – to continue to be silenced and made invisible. In resonance with hooks (1984, p. 162-163), we must "recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate the significance of feminist rebellion and the women (and men) who made it happen, we must be willing to criticize, re-examine, and begin feminist work anew, a challenging task because we lack historical precedents". Therefore, it would be more coherent to understand sexism and patriarchal relations in articulation with other forms of social relations in a given context. It is not possible to treat class, race, gender and sexuality separately, because one constitutes another (BRAH, 1996).

Intersectionality thus criticizes the essentialism of hegemonic feminism, in discussions proposed by racialized women, not exactly with academic objectives. However, the objective and purpose of the term must be considered (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CRENSHAW, 1994; 2002). "The intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism and any analysis that does not consider intersectionality is not able to have a correct consideration of the particular forms of

subordination of many women, particularly black women, who were the target of its concerns" (Conceição NOGUEIRA, 2017, p. 146).

To intersectionalize feminisms and gender studies is necessarily a practical task³ (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CRENSHAW, 1994). At the same time, it is important to think of racialized women as subjects who suffer oppression within feminisms, but who are also in a position of resistance in their practices and productions of knowledge. It is essential to value this (LUGONES, 2011).

It is necessary to discuss the concept of whiteness, specifically when used in reference to racial relations in Brazil, using as a background the historic construction of Brazilian social thinking, understanding its colonial and hegemonic process. One of the most important consequences of colonialism was the way that it constituted the former Latin American and Caribbean colonies: "homogenization with a Eurocentric perspective was the national proposal through the ideology of miscegenation, which aspired to Europe a form of 'improving the race'" (CURIEL, 2007, p. 98, our translation).

Carneiro (2011) affirms that what should be past remains in Brazilian colonial history through new practices, in a social organization that insists in affirming it is democratic, but that simultaneously maintains gender relations that have been hierarchized by race since the slave period. This colonial violation against subalternized subjects, mainly Black and Indigenous women, allied to the idea of miscegenation,⁴ has repercussions on the constructions of our national identity.

Through a historic perspective, Luciana Alves (2010), Passos (2013) and Priscila Elisabete da Silva (2015) indicate that, even in the academy, the term whiteness is relatively recent – critical studies of US whiteness were brought to Brazil in 1990. It refers to a hegemonic system that has been consolidated by means of colonization, slavery, and various forms of oppression that involve race and gender. It also refers to social representations that emphasize the racial neutrality of whites, affirming their universality, and reducing racialized collectivities to difference, by phenotypical traits and skin coloring, articulating them to inferior moral and social values and stereotypes (BENTO, 2014; CARNEIRO, 2011; Iray CARONE, 2014). As Carone (2014, p. 23) affirms, the consequences of whiteness are inevitable: "the neutrality of color/race protects the white individual from prejudice and racial discrimination to the same degree to which the increased visibility of black[s] makes them a preferential target of frustrated discharges imposed by social life".

In this way, whiteness is directly related to social, political and economic prestige, which "links the modes of functioning of racism in Brazil to 'racial' hierarchies of other societies founded on European colonialism" (Vron WARE, 2004, p. 8). Whiteness understood as a system of domination, which has at its roots racial hegemony, can be understood as a category of analysis of a set of phenomena permeated by socio-cultural, economic and psychic relations (Liv SOVIK, 2009).

All people are affected by racism, whether they recognize their raciality or not. However, there is a gap between the privileges and the discriminations that this (re)produces. There is an urgent need to understand how power relations are constructed upon which racial inequalities are anchored. Whiteness is a system of power intrinsically linked to the processes of racialization and subjective constitution of white people as a hegemonic group of domination. As Sovik affirms (2009, p. 40), it is necessary to "analyze the silent articulation of white hegemony".

Bento (2014) maintains that racial discrimination has as its driving force the maintenance and conquest of privileges of one group over another. By seeing themselves as the standard and universal group of an entire society, white people symbolically appropriate this logic of racial privilege, strengthening the self-esteem and self-conceit of the group in which they are inserted, resulting in the legitimization of their economic, political and social supremacy. Sovik (2009, p. 36) continues in this direction, by affirming that "whiteness is not genetic, but a question of image", that is, race is a social construct that functions so that there is a normative centrality based on racial phenotypes and stereotypes, with its value demonstrated in a context of miscegenation, of mixture.

For all these aspects, the concept of whiteness is intrinsically related to the notion of privileges, rights and advantages. By proposing a debate about race and consequently about racism, beginning from critical studies of whiteness within feminist movements, we understand that these concepts have their genesis in social and ideological constructions (CARONE; BENTO, 2014; SCHUCMAN, 2014a).

³ "White and black feminists use the intersectionality approach to reveal hierarchies imposed by males, ignoring the fact that these subordinations operate in the old acquired system, not by the power relations propagated by gender" (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p. 82).

⁴ "The discourse of miscegenation, affirmed by the social thinking of the time, supported policies of whitening and of construction of a national unity. They were certainly two sides of the same coin. The process of miscegenation, as an ideology, gave political support to the thinking of the Brazilian elite of the mid twentieth century and was the base of support for racial policies in the country" (Ana Helena Ithamar PASSOS, 2013, p. 62).

“We are discussing what it is to be white, and what this whiteness does to provoke this racism”: notes from an intersectional activist study

To discuss feminist movements and how subjective and racial processes of white women permeate these movements is a complex task, given the invisibility of this reflection in our society that is racist in its structures, institutions and state.

To undertake the proposal, we adopted the idea of activist research (MATOS; Giovana XAVIER, 2016), using an intersectional methodology. According to Nogueira (2017, p. 139), an intersectional analysis is opposed to essentializations of various categories, that is, instead of supposing that all people inserted in a social group share the same living experiences, this perspective considers that, even in our similarities, we have specificities. Thus, it is necessary “to be attentive and theorize privileges and oppressions, not as fixed statuses, but as fluid and dynamic statuses, permeable to change either in oppressions, or in privileges” (NOGUEIRA, 2017, p. 151).

Activist, feminist and intersectional studies allow developing strategies to deconstruct social categories, analyzing their functioning and producing reflections that strengthen not only academic productions, but also ways of life that consider unequal living experiences (Michele BERGER; Kathleen GUIDROZ, 2009; NOGUEIRA, 2017). Berger and Guidroz (2009) affirm that the intersectional approach is a concept that crosses frontiers, produced by feminist activists who theorize social relations of power.

Considering the above aspects, when conducting the field research, we sought to understand the various possibilities of “being a woman”, beginning with the non-essentialization of white people and seeing the permeations presented by social markers of difference in an intersected and non hierarchical manner. To do so, the interviews with four women with different social markers were analyzed, highlighting the articulation between gender and race, without losing sight that other crossings are fundamental to the understanding of the hegemonic logics that stem from subjectivation and racialization of white people (CRENSHAW, 1994; 2002).

The four women interviewed belong to different generations, regionalities, social classes, professions, activisms and agendas, as can be seen in Table 1. The only delimitations that for the women chosen were that they declared themselves to be feminist, white, and willing to discuss their racial condition. After the reading and signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form, the interviews were recorded, with the authorization of those interviewed, and later transcribed. The names that identify the women are fictitious.

Table 1 – Main data collected during the interviews

| Name | Alice | Carolina | Amanda | Vanessa |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Age | 55 | 41 | 16 | 34 |
| Gender | Female | Trans woman | Female | Cis woman |
| Sexual Orientation | Heterosexual | Bisexual | Bisexual | Bisexual |
| Race | White | White | White | White |
| Economic situation | Middle class | Poor | Lower middle class | Middle class |
| Region of Origin | Midwest | Southeast | Southeast | Northeast |

Source: Prepared by the authors.

#ForAllToSee Table with seven lines and five columns. The first column includes the name, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, economic situation and region of origin. The second column describes the data of the woman interviewed Alice: 55, female, heterosexual, white, middle class, Midwest. The third column describes the data for Carolina: 41, trans woman, bisexual, white, poor, from the Southeast. The fourth column describes Amanda: 16, female, bisexual, white, lower middle class, from the Southeast. The fourth column describes the data for Vanessa: 34, cis woman, bisexual, white, middle class, from the Northeast.

Although all of the women identified themselves as white feminists, their processes of subjectivation and racialization were permeated by different social markers. To express this is part of intersectional research, proposing an analysis in which the logic of being a feminist, woman and white does not follow essentializations. The statements analyzed in this work present, in addition to central questions addressed in the interviews, other perspectives that involve discussions that are important to feminisms, such as maternity and transexuality. Even if not all of these themes are examined in depth here, they allow us to identify nuances and to complexify the processes of subjectivation of the participants in the study.

“To be a white feminist is perhaps less difficult”: intersections of race and gender in feminisms

Below, we discuss the field material obtained in the interviews conducted with the four white feminists. The analysis was divided into two lines of focus: (1) The processes of subjectivation and racialization of white feminists and (2) Whiteness in feminist movements. The analysis of the material was conducted in dialog with productions of non-hegemonic feminisms, intersectional feminisms, and with the critical studies of whiteness presented here.

The processes of subjectivation and racialization of white feminists

One of the main questions analyzed in this study refers to how white feminists construct their racialities, that is, how they see themselves as white people through their processes of subjectivation and racialization. According to Brah (1996, p. 105), “racialisation of white subjectivity is often not manifestly apparent to white groups because ‘white’ is a signifier of dominance but this renders the racialisation process no less significant.”. Thus, the women interviewed were first asked when they realized they were white, and then asked what it means to be a white woman for each one of them, proposing a reflection about how these processes of racialization develop:

Well, I realized I was white since the time I had the ability to know what color was, right? Like... what it is to be white, what it is to be black. [...] Because since the age of 8, I experienced with my friends the prejudice that they experienced [in school]. Even from my classmates who were black and had racist things done to them, so I knew very well how different it was that I was white, because I did not suffer this (Amanda).

I realized I was white for the first time in school. I think in the eighth grade, I don't remember. I think that I must have been 14, 15. [...] there was a black boy in my class, only one in my entire class. And I asked myself, “how come he is the only black person in this school?”. [...] that is when I realized that I was different from him (Carolina).

Considering these statements, it is possible to identify some issues that approximate the discourses of those interviewed. The first is the context in which they perceived a racial difference from people in relation to them. It was in school, a space of conviviality with other people, in which they noted the existence of a racial difference through skin color; the second is that to recognize oneself as white was possible in the perception of how another person, who was racialized, was seen in that context, with the difference transformed in discrimination, with an emphasis on a perception of privilege implicit in the statements.

Sovik (2009, p. 50) alleges that whiteness as a system of racial hegemony, “maintains a complex relation with skin color, the shape of the nose and type of hair. [...] Whiteness is an aesthetic ideal inherited from the past and is part of the theater of fantasies of entertainment culture”. In this sense, white people possibly understand they are racialized later, given that, for being the norm, they are not racially challenged.

One of the women interviewed affirmed that she realized she was white when she moved from Brazil to Europe. Racial perception is frequently narrated by white Brazilians in experiences abroad, given that in the country of origin they do not need to reflect on their racial condition, because to be white is to be the standard, and to have massive representation in places, a situation structured by cultural and historic racism. When this white person goes to a colonizing context, of a racial-ethnic construction that is different from Brazil's, she occupies a place of alterity, developing another racial perception.

I, in reality, realized I was more white when I went to Holland. [...] there they said “you're Brazilian? Do you feel Brazilian?” I said “what do you mean do I feel Brazilian?” I did not understand this question. [...] so that was how, it was by the contrast there, it was by the perspective that they had of Brazil, that here there are only blacks, and when there is someone like me, they think that I am not Brazilian, I think that shows a bit about how Brazil is. That my friend who is black, no one asked if she was Brazilian or not. Then this made me think a lot (Alice).

Alice also said that, since she was always interested in the question of race and through her relationship with black people she already understood the existence of racial differences. But it was only when she went to Holland that she realized how the interpretations of what it is to be Brazilian are contextualized. According to Bento (2014, p. 26), what stands out from the perspective of white people in discussions about race is “the silence, the omission or the distortion that there is around the space that the white person occupies or occupied, in fact, in Brazilian racial relations”. An absence of reflection predominates about their real role in social maintenances, inequalities, and experiences of race - after all, what is the need to reflect on this, if this has no negative repercussion on one's life? When Alice was bewildered by the fact that Europeans did not know there were people “like her” (white) in Brazil, her surprise was due to the erasure, by the other, of her identity as a Brazilian, but does not appear to challenge the racial hierarchization established in this discourse,

in which people "like her", similar to the Europeans, are not seen as natives of Brazil (differently from her black friend).

Some of the women interviewed did not explicitly address the issue of the intersection of gender and race in their reflections on being a white woman and affirmed, as Carolina said, that the *position of the white woman is a subjugated position. As much as rights are equal today, they are not. In practice they aren't (...) to be a woman is not easy, to be a white woman, a black woman, to be a woman is not easy.*

Carolina refers to rights in a curious form, because, by comparing the rights of women with the rights of men as a reference of those who have rights, she understands that there is the reproduction of a discourse that, in practice, does not occur and mentions that "equal rights do not exist". It is noteworthy that Caroline repeats this discourse when she universalizes "being a woman" by saying, that *to be a white woman, a black woman, to be a woman is not easy.* As hooks discusses (1984), white feminisms operate an essentialization of the category of woman, even if they denounce that the human sciences historically essentialize man as a universal subject.

Meanwhile, two of the women interviewed presented reflections that considered the intercrossing of being a woman and being a white person:

Well, for me, to be a white woman is like a white person, it is to be privileged, but being a white woman, in questions of race I am also privileged, but only for this. [...] I see myself as privileged, as white (Amanda).

I always ask myself what is the value of me saying white woman, right? [...]

Because since the privileges are all for me, why do I need to reaffirm this? But I believe that to call oneself a white woman is also to racialize, you know? It is to make an effort to not recognize myself as the center, but I recognize myself as a type of person (Vanessa).

The fragments above demonstrate the racial reflection of women based on "being a white woman", demanded by the racialization processes. The statements go beyond an understanding of the privileges associated to "being a white woman" and the rights and advantages that stem from this: the construction of this process must take place precisely through racial construction – a fact that is not frequently observed among white people. To affirm that one is a white woman is to recognize oneself as racialized, to understand her privileges and, based on this, seek to understand how her body occupies and is read in social spaces. Self-declaration as white is the first step to a problematization of whiteness – even if it does not guarantee that other steps will be taken. According to Kilomba (2010, p. 23), white people finally recognize the reality of racism from the moment that they recognize their own whiteness and/or racism: "Recognition is, in this sense, the passage from fantasy to reality".

Another important point is that white people undergo different processes of racialization, which are characterized by articulation with other social markers, like regionality and hierarchization of phenotypes, for example. According to Schucman (2014a, p. 139), among white people "there are characteristics of miscegenation that can be said to create hierarchies of this whiteness. In the subgroup that has European origin, there is a distinction between a 'white Brazilian and an 'original white'". It is also interesting to highlight how the understanding of a "white Brazilian" and an "original white" have changed during our colonial history, based on the issue of racial democracy and the project to whiten the Brazilian population (BENTO, 2014).

This is a complex aspect, which must be discussed. What makes a person white? There are, based on what is understood by the ideal model of whiteness, various forms of racializing as a white person, in part because we live in a country that underwent miscegenation, and which has historically been constituted under the myth of racial democracy (SCHUCMAN, 2014a; SOVIK, 2009). In the statements below, we see how the phenotypes shift in racial readings, revealing a diversity of possibilities of understanding oneself as racialized.

In the first example, Carolina was asked if she understood that there was a difference between being a white woman and a black woman:

Yes. Black men will want white women or black women who approach the standard of beauty that is a white standard of beauty. That blond woman, smooth hair, thin face, refined features, right? If she has strong ethnic-racial features, dark skin, a large nose, thick lips, she will have fewer privileges than a black woman who has fine features (Carolina).

The opposition that Carolina makes between "strong racial-ethnic features" and "fine features" stands out, approximating the fine features to a beauty standard (that is, whiteness). If everyone belongs to a race/ethnicity, why characterize "dark skin, large nose, thick lips" as "strong features" that are opposed to a standard of beauty? In this response, the interviewee mentioned the Brazilian actress Thais Araújo, who "has fine features", "she is white", and it was easy for her to move between the racial poles. In the next statement, from another interviewee, we see another example of how these phenotypical traits are triggered in discourse.

So I don't know what it means to be white. Today it has disturbed me more than any other thing. Because I go someplace where no one knows me and they say "look, a white woman". Here in Rio I was mugged, I went to the police station and the guy [police officer] said "you have to dye your hair, you are very blond, you look like a gringa". And it's complicated at times in some situations, understand? People who know me, ok, they already know me [referring to her interest in racial discussions], now where will someone who does not know me identify me? She's white, blond, middle class. As a white, middle class woman, perhaps, from the dominant elite. And you have to say, "look, it's not quite like that", [...] my family are not land owners, or of anything, my father is in the military, my mother is a housewife, a traditional family (Alice).

Alice raises the idea that to be close to a phenotypical standard of a "white European" person, of whiteness – to be blond, with light-colored eyes, and light skin – indicates privileges both of race and class. She says she is disturbed by the fact that people, without knowing her, characterize her as a person with privileges, only by her phenotype. By mentioning the assault, she experienced and the recommendation of the police officer that she dye her hair to not appear "so gringa", it is necessary to understand what it means to "dye one's hair" in this situation. To be "less different" from the person who assaulted her? To be closer to a "white Brazilian" person? The reading of her racial privileges by the police officer appeared to cause discomfort in the interviewee by reminding her of the deep racial inequalities, in which Alice occupies a privileged place. Also present in the statement of the police officer is a revision of the gender hierarchy. By recommending that the interviewee change her hair color, the police officer feels authorized, from the place he occupies as a man and representative of the law, to give an opinion about the appearance of the interviewee, indicating an individual responsibility for the mugging she suffered. Here we see intersections of gender and race that are revised in the narrative of an isolated event and its consequences.

Another notion that is dear to the analysis of the racial construction of the white person is the idea of privilege. To discuss privileges with white people who understand they are racialized makes the discussion more complex. Examine the following two statements.

I recall that once, as we were getting to know each other, she [her companion] said that she was a doctoral student [...], and I said that I was doing a master's and then she congratulated me, and said that it's very important that I am in this space, because of my life history [...] and then at one moment I said a sentence with "we", how it is important that "we are" [in the academy], something like that. And she immediately interrupted me. She said "look, I understand what you want to say, but I need to say that is not the case", and that upset me very much, you know, what do you mean? Both of us are struggling to be in this space and how come this "we" does not exist. And she was very categorical, she said, "look... it's not like that, because we live in a society in which for you, a white woman from the Northeast is a difficult path, and perhaps you won't complete it, but in my case, it's not just a path, there is the fact that I support myself, so that I can take this path, so in my case, it's a question of life or not", so this brought me this degree, you know, of privilege, but above all of implication, you know? (Vanessa).

I know [...] a white woman and a black woman, who lived close to each other. This white woman left her home and there was a police action around the houses, and she was not searched, but her black friend was searched [...] when the police invade the hillside, for example ... some white women get away, but black women, together with their partners, die there (Amanda).

The two fragments show us a racial sensibility in the way that white women are permeated by dimensions of privilege. In terms of the statement by Vanessa, it should be noted the importance of the interlocution with someone to whom she is affectively close to help her critically perceive something in daily life and her private experience. We see the problematization of the discourse of meritocracy, which is something dear to white people because it confers them countless naturalized privileges. In Amanda's statement, we see that the perception of a social reality marked by state racism allowed the interviewee to realize the different conditions that permeate the daily life of white and black women who live in territories marked by violence, establishing significant intragender inequalities.

All of the women interviewed mentioned personal situations or those of people close to them in which they explicitly perceived their privileges. However, as Ribeiro indicates (2017), it is important to go beyond the mere naming of privileges, and advance towards an understanding of the power relations that sustain them, and their confrontation, because it is not enough to recognize the privileges: the current political and social moment requires reflections that go beyond simple attributions.

Now, what do you do with this privilege, do you understand? How do you distribute it? It is one thing to recognize it, but then after you recognize, what do you do? I think that what you can do is to engage in struggle, understand? I am a person who is completely indignant about racism in this country (Alice).

The reflection that Alice presents us, "is it possible to distribute privileges?" refers to a recurring discussion made in feminist spaces that consider white privilege. How can white people distribute

privileges, and what would the effects of this be? We will return to this reflection later. Below, we see more precisely how these processes of subjectivation and racialization of white feminists, and the logic of whiteness, permeate intragender spaces in feminist movements.

Whiteness in feminist movements

We propose, in this second line of analysis, to cross the two large themes of this article: feminist movements and the racial and subjective construction of white women. From this perspective, four themes will be discussed: (1) what it is to be a white feminist, (2) the existence of white feminism in Brazil, (3) the existence of racism in feminist movements and (4) the role of white people in the anti-racist struggle. The choice of this route was designed to consider, by means of an overview of feminist practices and spaces, the whiteness of feminist movements based on the statements of white feminists.

We first ask, "what is it to be a white feminist?". Note that previously, two similar questions were raised, linked to the notion of raciality: "when did you realize you were a white person?" and "what does it mean to be a white woman?" The questions were organized in this way in the interview to understand how the women interviewed perceive the nuances involving this discussion:

To be a white feminist is, perhaps, less difficult. It continues to be difficult to be a woman, but once again, I mention the privileges, that my privileges in daily life, even if I receive a horrible catcall, ... much of the harassment is not aimed at my color, for example. So it is a bit lighter, perhaps, but to be a woman still [involves] considerable resistance (Amanda).

I don't know what it is to be a white feminist, I say that feminism is everything in my life, [...] feminism makes the difference. And the fact of being a white feminist perhaps has led me to many good things (Alice).

The women interviewed identified that the social marker of the white race relates to privileges within feminism and that gender logics are permeated in different ways when we racialize bodies. Thus, events such as harassment will be experienced differently – a fact that does not delegitimize their trajectories as women who see feminism as a form of resisting patriarchal oppressions. On the other hand, some statements indicate that the women interviewed do not identify positive aspects (in the sense of perceivable characteristics) in "being a white feminist". There is an understanding that privileges exist, but there is also difficulty in considering how to horizontalize intragender hegemonic relations. For example, Amanda, at a certain moment, said that *I am a white feminist, (...) but, (laughs), but at times I do not identify myself so much [with white feminists], (...) So, I belong more, at times, in some divisions and things that happen in this feminism, I don't fit in.*

Another question raised addressed the term "white feminism", which is highly used in the productions of racialized women in European and US contexts. Upon asking if there is a white feminism in Brazil, we had different responses.

I don't like this term! I don't see it like that [...] what would white feminism be? I think that in Brazil this is very linked to feminism of the left, the suffragettes, perhaps the issue of the vote, they were women who went to study in Europe, they came back and brought their ideas of emancipation. Now, after the 1970s and 1980s I don't see purism. Because to speak of white feminism is a form of purism. I know many whites, you take the names from the time of this relationship, great white feminists, there are few notable blacks, right? But today... I don't know, what would white feminism be today? Who is in the academy? White feminism perhaps would be this group of women who are there to discuss benefits for them (Alice).

The generational theme brings an important perspective to the analysis. Alice ponders that perhaps until the 1980s there was a white feminism because there were few black feminist references. Could this fact, on its own, indicate a majoritarian white feminism? Until the 1980s many black women in Brazil had raised ideas of emancipation, even with an intersectional perspective, such as Lélia Gonzalez and Beatriz Nascimento. This erasure of racialized women in Brazil already indicated the whiteness in the movements, perpetuated since the 1970s, when the feminist discussions gained strength in the country. At the same time, to declare that "to speak of a white feminism is a purism" appears to mark a counterpoint in relation to black feminism (or that of racialized women), for whom race is a principal characteristic. In this sense, Carolina reflects on white feminism through another perspective:

What exists is the predominantly white feminist movement, except for the exclusively black feminist movements, right. There is an exclusive black feminist movement and there is a feminist movement that does not necessarily have color, but is predominantly dominated by white people, where they are still learning to grant spaces to black people (Carolina).

Carolina immediately recognizes the predominance of white women in feminist movements. One expression used in the interview stands out, when she said that white people would be learning to "grant space" to black people. If, on one hand, her statement raises a process of change that has taken place largely due to the action of black women's movements, in which white feminists

see themselves challenged to think of their activism, on the other hand, the idea that there is a learning to “grant space” helps us realize how the bodies and subjectivities of white women occupy feminist movements. This recognition constitutes an important step for the advance of discussions that are not resolved by discussing only gender, but that must also consider the racialization of white women.

We then asked if there is racism in feminisms, and if the women interviewed can mention an example. Everyone affirmed that racism exists in feminisms, articulating the fact that, since we live in a racist society, it is very likely that we have racist feminists. However, they do not recall explicit situations of a discourse of hate or discrimination.

This country is very racist, and feminists are too, right? The relations are very authoritarian, I have worked with known feminists who are very authoritarian, it comes from a root that is difficult to break. So I think that there must be racist feminists, it is very difficult to not be racist (Alice).

What I have seen is something subjective? With us, trans people, it was quite incisive, very objective. It was a case of transphobia. Now, within the party, within the movement in which I have participated, there is truly an internalized racism (Carolina).

Finally, we asked each woman interviewed to speak about the role of white people in the anti-racist struggle. As mentioned previously, the purpose of the study was not only to discuss whiteness in feminist spaces but, beyond this, to understand how white feminists, who are at the front of political and identity struggles about issues of gender, perceive their responsibility when the racial issue is raised in intragender contexts. In this sense, when we asked “do you think that white people have a role in the anti-racist struggle? If yes, what is it?”, Amanda responded:

They do, because [...] the people who are most racist are whites, you see this since the colonial process, the Portuguese came here, took the place of the Indians and enslaved them, it all began from this process. So I think that, historically, socially, yes, white people have a process, there is an importance in this anti-racist process for these people to deconstruct themselves (Amanda).

The discourses of those interviewed about this theme were varied, but intersected to the degree that they agree that white people do have a role in the anti-racist struggle, mainly because *white people are in power. White people are elected, because of this institutionalized racism (Carolina)* and, therefore, they are the ones who maintain a racist logic. Carolina affirmed that, first, it would be necessary to perceive that racism exists: *Recognizing that it exists, that it is devastating, that people suffer, that people are prevented from developing their potential, to express themselves, is to recognize this. Then it is to participate in the struggles.*

Vanessa, in turn, commented on the commitment that white people should have to racial issues and to the anti-racial struggle: *And it seems to me that this involves study, it implies becoming sensitized, and taking some time in your life to try to understand these things, to assimilate [them], or to expose yourself to them. To leave your comfort zone, what you have believed all your life.* Here, the interviewee proposed a dialogue with other white people so that, collectively, there would be an understanding about how whiteness triggers privileges in a system structured by racism, because white people usually make no investment or effort to position themselves in relation to the racial question (CARNEIRO, 2011; CARONE; BENTO, 2014; SCHUCMAN, 2014b).

Those interviewed also mentioned more practical solutions in which it would be possible to be anti-racist:

And I think it is using the spaces that we have [...] To not fail to comment, to not accept reproductions [of stereotypes], that frivolous reproduction that people commonly have, criticisms, to go deeper (Vanessa).

It is to give more access, education also helps a lot, because when they are able to have access to education, education is often precarious. [...] So, it is to improve education, to offer more opportunities, more access, to teach from early on to learn the differences, to respect everyone. It is these things (Amanda).

I am calling on my black sisters to occupy the same spaces that I occupy. Because I, as a white woman, I know that I move in public spaces with greater facility than black women [...] How many black women do you see in concerts that are not free, in theater? [...] So I take them by the hand and drag them (Carolina).

In these statements we perceive that there are distinct perspectives of anti-racist practices raised by those interviewed. Amanda and Carolina placed themselves in a position of “facilitating access” by black people to education, culture, and other areas. There is a recognition of their privileges as whites, but there is a positioning aimed towards action from black women, and not to challenge white people in situations of racism, as Vanessa raised.

In her interview, Carolina spoke about how to try to support the struggle of black women:

I can't be leading, I can't be at the front, I can be there behind helping. [...] Call someone, meet with someone, but the formation of the roundtable, who will be called, what will be the issue, it can't be me! Damn, I'm white! Whiter than me? Impossible, hard to find (Carolina).

The reflection on what it means to be anti-racist is an important issue for us to understand the dimensions of privilege and the consequences in the maintenance of the essentially racist structure in which we are inserted. In the statements of Amanda and Carolina, the strategies are aimed at black people – and this can erase the responsibility and protagonism of white people in the reproduction of racism in society. In a more restricted manner, Amanda said one route would be the education of small children, so that they understand the oppressive logics: *it ranges from raising children to understand (...) that their friend has a different color than they do, if he is white, right? That she is equal to him, that there is no difference, and also explain (...) what it is to be black and what it is to be white from early on, also, for them to know the difference and not think that she is an ET, an extraterrestrial.*

In all four interviews there were more frequent examples of antiracist practices that allowed giving “opportunities” to racialized people than examples of actions to be taken by white people. As Bento (2014, p. 44) points out: “as if the white person was not the essential element of this analysis, as if racial identity did not have strong ideological, political, economic and symbolic tones that explain and, simultaneously, make bare the silence and the fear”.

There are various ways for white people to support the struggle against racism. According to Nogueira (2017, p. 139), the “politics of alliances, considering negotiable and provisory categories, can be a political response, and the theory of intersectionality a theoretical response”. It is important that white people know how to listen when the issue is racism and simultaneously talk with other white people about an issue that, for many, is uncomfortable and complex.

Most of the women interviewed reported that it is necessary to horizontalize relations, to divide space and to understand their “place of speech” in the anti-racist struggle. Ribeiro (2017, p. 84) affirms that “to speak from places is also to break with this logic that only the subaltern speak from their locations, causing those who are inserted in the hegemonic norm to not even think”. To know one’s “place of speech” and to understand how white bodies, in their materiality, organize the spaces that will determine who will be validated and who can speak is essential for “thinking of hierarchies, questions of inequality, poverty, racism and sexism” (RIBEIRO, 2017, p. 84).

Moreover, it is not enough only to understand the “place of speech” of white people from an ethical position: we must have a notion that the participation of white people in the anti-racist struggle calls on them to reconsider their bodies and how they can horizontalize their privileges, both material and symbolic, so that markers of difference, such as race and gender, can have less impact in the production of social inequalities. The confrontation of racism takes place only when the practitioners or beneficiaries of this system are also committed to this cause.

From this perspective, Bento (2014, p. 44) suggests that “reading biographies and autobiographies of white people who have undergone similar processes of development of identity offers whites models for change. To study anti-racist whites can also offer blacks the hope that it is possible to be allied to whites”. Finally, it is important to reinforce that it is essential that those who are in a privileged social group be able, from this place, to sensitize themselves and deconstruct hierarchized relations of power – whatever they are, with large or little impact – that subalternize racialized people (RIBEIRO, 2017).

Some considerations

The whiteness of feminist movements presents multiple faces. The objective of this study was to understand the processes of subjectivation and racialization of white feminists, through intersections of race and gender. We analyze the statements of the women interviewed to help consider the consequences of whiteness in hegemonic feminist contexts, seeking to understand what takes place when white feminists are willing to enter in dialogue and reflect on their racial condition. The discussion of the results indicates the importance of understanding the forms of being a woman and the feminisms, avoiding an essentialist and universalizing bias, recognizing that it is necessary to horizontalize feminist thinking and practices based on the intersection and decolonization of social markers of difference.

A movement of white people who have recognized their own privileges has been observed, nurturing the concept that this is sufficient to debate racial relations. Based on the results of this study, in dialogue with productions of non-hegemonic feminisms, we understand that it is necessary to go farther and to construct, by means of everyday and institutional practices, a commitment to the anti-racist struggle.

It is essential to understand the heterogeneities that permeate the bodies of women, without seeing them as fixed and stable, so that feminist movements can create strategies to confront racism, given that this also promotes an hierarchization of gender. Without this, through the logic of

whiteness, hegemonic feminist movements will continue to be tools for the maintenance of racial power, in this case, intragender.

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BACKGROUND

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