
Academic Feminism and Exclusion in Brazil: Bringing Back Some of the Missing Voices

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Abstract

By investigating the constitution of gender and feminist studies in Brazil as part of the larger ‘feminist discursive field of action’ (Alvarez 2014), we claim that throughout its development and particularly in its struggle with mainstream academia and science governance to contest its scientific marginalisation, this portion of the feminist field ended up producing some other exclusions of its own. Thus, and unintentionally, it contributed to perpetuating part of the marginalisation that is characteristic of hegemonic modes of thinking and knowledge production. More specifically, besides attaching itself to rather reductive notions of what its political subject is (femaleness/womanhood), it also did not create the conditions and the space within which voices articulated from the far margins, such as that of Black women, could flourish. Along these lines, we claim that in the Brazilian context, one of the ways for gender studies and research to continue to be asserted as scientifically and socially useful and relevant is to continuously confront the exclusions that it itself produces. Therefore, a commitment to radical inclusion, which in our article appears through the acknowledgment of Black feminist knowledge production in Brazil, appears as an important and effective means to reassert gender studies’ social usefulness.

Keywords

Academic Feminism, Brazil, Inclusion, Exclusion, Black Feminist Voices

1 Introduction

Academic feminism has become an established field and critical assessments of it are now commonplace everywhere. From teachers who resent the fact that their students are introduced to feminism through academic texts rather than politics to activists who understand feminism's entrance into universities as a kind of betrayal of its radical transformative political project (Wigeman 2002), multiple voices have risen to question the decision of challenging women's exclusion from the academy by becoming part of this very same structure.

While in Brazil many of these questions resonate, our article focuses on a different challenge posed by the institutionalisation of feminism. We are concerned with the process through which academic feminists challenge educational institutions and ultimately hegemonic forms of knowledge production and dissemination for their exclusionary tendencies towards women. It is our contention that, in confronting these patterns, Brazilian academic feminists took a contradictory path that reproduced exclusionary forms of interaction already present within broadly conceived feminism. Such a course, as we demonstrate by taking up Black feminist contributions, generated forms of feminist knowledge that did not respond fully to the needs of women occupying very different and even unequal social positions. In other words, Brazilian academic feminism unintentionally built itself upon exclusions, as most of its debates were constructed in the absence of Black women's voices, amongst other groups. Black feminists, in intervening in these debates, not only challenged the consequences of such exclusions for feminist knowledge production, but also pointed to their relation to larger structures of oppression prevalent in Brazilian society. In doing so, they affirmed the societal usefulness of feminist studies which consists, in our view, in providing a critique of exclusionary social arrangements from the perspectives of race, gender and class.

To show how the process described above unfolded in recent Brazilian history, we start by highlighting the first steps taken by feminist academics towards the establishment of academic feminism in the country, within what Alvarez (2014) has called 'the feminist discursive field of action'¹. Next, we not only identify the Black feminists' critique of the restrictive character of the research agenda then proposed by those who entered the academy, but also discuss what we see as their four major points of contention, namely patriarchy, paid domestic work, sexual and reproductive rights, and the implicit subject of feminism itself. In the third section of the article, after establishing that only very recently has race been incorporated

1 All the sources in Portuguese used and cited in this article have been translated into English by the authors.

into the women's and gender studies' agenda in Brazil, we examine the three large and interrelated factors responsible for this ongoing shift: first, the democratisation of access to higher education; second, the positive reception of intersectionality as a scholarly concept and third, the profound transformation in the discourses about oppression.

In summary, it is our contention that in order not only to enter academia, but also to be recognised as equals within this specialised space, feminist academics adopted a "tightrope strategy" (Costa 1994, p. 402). Such a strategy, which was deemed successful, consisted in finding a point of equilibrium between the advantages and disadvantages of institutionalisation through a minimal formalisation that would serve as a shield against criticism from more established fields. We argue, however, that an unintended effect of this plan of action was the reproduction of fissures and exclusions that not only already characterised feminism at large, but also became more accentuated in the academic intervention. Particularly, issues of race were neglected, if not dismissed altogether, by feminists who successfully established themselves as recognised researchers.

In conclusion, we claim that one of the ways for feminist studies and research to continue to be asserted as scientifically and socially useful and relevant in the Brazilian context is to steadily acknowledge and confront the exclusions that it itself produces. This means a commitment to radical inclusion that is a necessary consequence of such a critique, which we embrace in our article through the recognition of Black feminist knowledge production.

2 Academic Feminism in Brazil: Axes of Conflict, Exclusion and Solidarity

Various feminist scholars, such as Teresa de Lauretis (1986), Joan Scott (2008), Sonia Alvarez (2014) and Cecilia Sardenberg (2007), to mention but a few, have shown that the institutionalisation of feminism in academia is a process full of contradictions and marked by a permanent crisis of identity. Since the establishment of the first women's studies programmes in the United States in the 1960s, there has been a constant attempt to establish the connections between feminist activism, political consciousness and the production of knowledge that is academically validated. And despite its continuous institutionalisation, academic feminism still faces strong criticisms about its validity.

On the one hand, there are critiques from those who see academic feminism as excessively politicised and of this very reason has little scientific value. On the other

hand, there are feminists who consider the institutionalisation of feminism as one of the factors that contributed to distancing academics and activists. In addition, the latter also believe that institutionalisation diminished feminism's emancipatory potential, as the traditional academic model of production and validation of knowledge gradually tamed the former (Messer-Davidow 2002). Derrida (1987, p. 190) pointed to the fact that, by institutionalising themselves, women's studies programmes would risk becoming "just another cell in the university beehive".

Even though originally directed at the North American and European contexts, Derrida's critique also resonated in Latin America, as Costa and Sardenberg (1994) have shown, prompting a diverse range of debates about the successes and limits of women's studies as an academic-political project. Amidst disputes, it is faithful to claim that Latin American feminists regard academic feminism as a political-analytical space, with a twofold dimension. First, the establishment of academic feminism is for them a response to the vindication, vocalised by historically marginalised social groups, that there should be more representation in science and research. Second, academic feminism is also a space to produce knowledge and political reasoning with relevant impact on the university curriculum (Miranda 2003), opening it up for gender and intersectional politics and policies.

The publication of Heleieth Saffioti's PhD dissertation in 1967, titled *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes: Mito e Realidade (Women in Class Society: Myth and Reality)*, is often seen as a landmark of the institutionalisation of academic feminism in Brazil. Saffioti's work, which was strongly influenced by a Marxist perspective and with a focus on women's work, domestic violence and patriarchy, has become highly influential among feminists, setting the tone for much of the research carried out in the awakening of academic feminism in the country.

The institutionalisation of feminism in Brazil, led mostly by white middle-class women, embodies some of the dilemmas and contradictions highlighted by Derrida (1987). In the struggle to establish themselves in the universities and have their epistemic and scientific relevance acknowledged by their peers, many feminists started occupying the position of "guardians of the law" (Derrida 1987, p. 190). Such a position contributed to their reluctance in including other voices, which, in and of itself, generated other forms of exclusion and marginalisation as we attempt to demonstrate in this article.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Brazil went through a period of profound social and political transformations that not only both directly and indirectly affected the social status of women but also significantly altered the university structure. A reform of the higher education system took place in

1968. Despite being led by the dictatorial government,² this reform created the conditions that enabled some higher education institutions, particularly the public ones, to connect teaching and research activities.³ Lifetime chairs became extinct, departmental structures were created and academic careers were institutionalised, determining that entry and progression in professorship positions would be based on the criteria of academic titles rather than personal relationships with state bureaucrats. The government also instituted a graduate national policy, strengthening the role of federal and state development agencies and the organisation of the first master's and PhD programmes in the country.

In the social realm, there was an expansion of the migratory flux to large urban centres in the southeast, an increase in urbanisation, higher levels of schooling, diffusion of the means of communication, greater participation of women in the workforce and a reduction in the reproduction rates. These transformations altogether profoundly altered traditional gender relations and created new demands from different social groups, particularly women (Costa 1994).

The expansion of higher education meant not only that the number of female students increased almost to the same levels of male students, but also that this new contingent of women in the universities could qualify themselves for insertion in the academic field, particularly the social sciences (Costa 1994). For Costa (1994, p. 403), before the 1970s, women's studies were in a kind of a limbo in Brazil, with very few relevant contributions, mostly concentrated on topics with more legitimacy within the social sciences, such as work, development and population.

The emergence in the 1970s of more systematic studies about women is a direct consequence of the changes taking place, on the one hand, in the realm of social life and the structure of the universities, as described above, and on the other hand, the expansion of feminist political mobilisation. Feminist activism played a fundamental role at this moment in the direction of the types of research conducted, which concentrated their efforts in "giving visibility to women, recovering their presence in history, and, within social life, in unveiling androcentrism as a vice for scientific knowledge, therefore conferring legitimacy to the new field of studies" (Costa 1994, p. 404).

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- 2 After a military coup against democratically elected President João Goulart in 1964, Brazil lived under a civil-military dictatorship until 1985. For more on the dictatorial rule in Brazil, see Skidmore (1988).
 - 3 Ironically, the civil-military dictatorship was also responsible for implementing some legal reforms, such as laws allowing for divorce and for married women to own property, which contributed not only to the improvement of women's legal status in Brazilian society, but also to their entrance into the workforce. For more on this issue, see Htun (2003).

We understand the process of institutionalisation of academic feminism in Brazil as a part of the larger development of ‘the feminist discursive field of action’, as Alvarez (2014) argues. To ground this claim, we first need to clarify that Alvarez’s analytical category, ‘the feminist discursive field of action’, emerged within her project of contesting the adequacy of the social movement in its classical sense⁴ for describing Latin American feminism. Alvarez’s research agenda is committed to mapping a feminist field she sees as “large, heterogeneous, polycentric, multifaceted and polyphonic, [...] extending well beyond the organisations or groups that belonged to the movement *strictu sensu*” (Alvarez 1998, p. 265, original emphasis). For describing such a thing that cannot be understood as a social movement, Alvarez (2014, p. 16) coined the term “discursive field of action”, a permanent formation of late/decolonial modernity.

As such, the discursive fields of action describe much more than mere collections of organisations focused on a specific issue; they in fact congregate “a vast array of individual and collective actors as well as social, cultural and political places” (Alvarez 2014, p. 18). These dynamic discursive fields of action are historically configured and reconfigured, which means that “both their more politically and culturally visible sectors, as well as the nodal points articulated within them, vary throughout time” (Alvarez 2014, p. 18). As Alvarez describes them, the development of the feminist discursive fields of action can be captured in three different moments:

- “1) a first moment of ‘centering’ and the configuration of ‘feminism in the singular’;
- 2) a second moment of ‘decentering’ and pluralization of feminisms and gender mainstreaming (flux or vertical transversality); and 3) a third moment, the current one, in which we see what I call ‘*sidestreaming*’, the horizontal flux of discourses and practices of plural feminisms to various parallel sectors in civil society, and the resulting multiplication of feminist fields.” (Alvarez 2014, p. 16–17, original emphasis)

We propose to understand the first decade of institutionalisation of academic feminism in Brazil as a period of ‘centering’, characterised by an attempt to delimitate the boundaries of what both the object and the subject of such a feminism would be. According to Bandeira (2000, p. 17), the feminist movement of the 1970s, formed in its majority by white middle-class women, became a prisoner of the temptation

4 In the classical sense of the term, a social movement is “derived from the social struggles that have been developing since the nineteenth century and that afterward is reformulated with the paradigm of the ‘new social movements’ in the 1980s, but in the two instances denotes massive protests on the street, visible, palpable and constant mobilizations, etc.” (Alvarez 1998, p. 265).

of equality: a certain way of being a woman (Western, white, heterosexual and middle class) prevailed. From this woman defined in the singular, an intra-gender solidarity, based exclusively on biological identity, was envisioned and defended. Differences and inequalities among women coming from diverse social places, religious experiences, racial backgrounds and sexual orientation, to mention only a few, were dismissed altogether. It was against this temptation of equality that Brazilian Black women insurrected within, and counter to, hegemonic feminism. They claimed that the struggle for democratising social relations had to go beyond the search for equality between men and women, because such a demand alone would not guarantee a sorority among the latter.

For this reason, the relationship between Black and white feminists, in academic and activist spaces alike was, from the very beginning, characterised by several controversies and disputes around a political grammar not attentive enough to the intersections of gender, race and class. A close reading of the works of important Brazilian Black feminists, such as Lélia Gonzalez, Luiza Bairros, Matilde Ribeiro, Sueli Carneiro and Jurema Werneck, among many others, reveals a shared perception that prevalent feminist demands did not touch upon issues deemed crucial to Black women at the time. Moreover, they also identified that white feminists did not recognise the centrality of race and racism in Black women's lives. Indeed, as acknowledged by Corrêa (2001), there was an explicit lack of reflection on the relationship between race and gender. If feminism enabled women to constitute a political subject that gave voice to their struggle and allowed them to enter the academic space, this unified and universal identity was quickly destabilised by Black feminist voices.

Nonetheless, we argue that this destabilisation only very recently started to affect feminist interventions in the Brazilian academy. It is our contention that this late response to the marginalisation of Black feminist voices is a result of the "tightrope strategy" (Costa 1994, p. 402) adopted by feminists who first occupied academic spaces. While they were fearless in denouncing the marginalisation of women by hegemonic forms of knowledge production, they were also blind to other structures of oppression, such as racism, and their influence on academic structures and careers. By not paying attention to the critiques developed by Black feminists outside the walls of universities and research centres, academic feminists turned out to reproduce the same kind of exclusions that characterise Brazilian society at large and hegemonic academic spaces particularly. Addressing such a shortcoming is, in our view, crucial for reasserting the social usefulness of feminist studies, which is certainly linked to a steady critique of various exclusions produced by entrenched systems of oppression, such as patriarchy and racism. One of the

ways of tackling this issue, in the Brazilian case, is to take seriously some of the most salient controversies developed by Black feminist scholars, as we do below.

2.1 Black Women with and against Patriarchy

The concept of patriarchy, which was very influential for the political mobilisation of women in the 1960s and 1970s, continually extrapolated the limits of activism in the next few decades with its incorporation of different studies about women. According to Costa (1998), radical feminists defined patriarchy as a sexual system of power that perpetuates itself through marriage, family and the sexual division of labour. Some authors, such as Piscitelli (2002), point out that feminism sought in patriarchy an explanation for the origins of women's oppression. However, academic reflections about this concept left behind some of its central components, making it almost empty of meaning, a mere signifier of masculine domination.

For Black feminists, the concept of patriarchy, albeit useful, is ahistorical, generalist and essentialist, and therefore incapable of accounting for the experience of Black women in multiracial societies structurally marked by racism, such as Brazil. The testimony of Luiza Bairros, an important Brazilian Black feminist, sheds light on some of these divergences:⁵

“When we began to dialogue with the white feminist movement, there was, on the part of white feminists, a great misunderstanding of the questions facing black women. In retrospect I see that, for example, the feminist discussion of patriarchy as a system that promotes the superiority of men over women was a very important thing. But black women never absorbed this analysis of patriarchy as being ‘*the analysis*’. For black women discussing the issues of women, the starting point was always racism. And as racism is a system of oppression that seems, in my opinion, to affect a much larger sphere than patriarchy itself, I mean to say this: it wasn't enough for us, in that time, to just analyze the question of how oppression expressed itself as man over woman, because we understood that the black man was also disempowered within society. So actually, this thing of the black men's machismo was not exactly equal to the machismo of white men, in that the black men's machismo was subordinate, undervalued by the racism of the white man.” (Bairros cited by Rodrigues 2006, p. 159, original emphasis)

In this context, while for white feminists the focus of the struggle should be the value accorded by the systems of explanation for existing social inequalities between

5 The quotation originates from an interview with Luiza Bairros conducted by Cristiano Rodrigues (2006) for his master's thesis.

men and women, and thus maintaining the centrality of patriarchy as the main source of women's oppression, Black feminists understood things differently. For them, racism was a more comprehensive category to explain the subaltern position they occupied and, in fact, still occupy, in Brazilian society.

Albeit still marginalised in relation to mainstream feminist scholarly production, Black feminist critiques on the concept of patriarchy ended up contributing to its reformulation within the debate taking place among a few other Brazilian feminists. Such a conclusion can be drawn, for example, from a reading of Saffioti's – a white feminist – definition of patriarchy,

“as one of the schemes of domination-exploitation that make up a symbiosis in which the capitalist mode of production and racism also participate. [...] It can, therefore, be used to designate another conception of gender relations (symbiosis patriarchy-racism-capitalism), which is distinct from approaches that borrow dualistic positions such as of Weber (1964) and Rubin (1975).” (Saffioti 1992, p. 194)

The idea of a patriarchal racism, which can be found in the works of Gonzalez (1979, 1988), plays an important role in explaining how, in Brazilian society, the interconnections between the whitening ideology and the myth of racial democracy generated a sophisticated form of racism. By sustaining the harmonious coexistence amongst whites, Blacks and indigenous peoples, this sophisticated form of racism obliterates the power asymmetries that mark social interactions between these distinct racial groups, thus naturalising various forms of oppressions. For Gonzalez (1984, p. 228), the myth of racial democracy is particularly cruel for Black women because its patriarchal-racist ideological system of domination (Gonzalez 1988) highlights the specific forms in which gender inequalities intersect racial inequalities in ways that position Black women at the very bottom of the Brazilian social pyramid. Nonetheless, and despite its explanatory capacity, the notion of patriarchal racism continues to be an overlooked category in feminist analyses of the forms of oppression and domination that characterise social relations in Brazil.

2.2 Black Women and Paid Domestic Work

One of the effects of patriarchal racism, frequently alluded to by Black feminists in different moments during the past four decades, are the intra-gender asymmetries characterising the entrance and participation of Black women in the formal workforce.

In 1985, the year when the UN Women's Decade ended, Sueli Carneiro and Thereza Santos published the book *Mulher Negra (Black Woman)*, which continues

to be to this day one of the most complete works on the social condition of Black women in Brazil. The authors argue that despite the many studies on the condition of Brazilian women published during the Women's Decade, "the variable race was not considered in a systematic manner in such theoretical engagement, particularly in a way that Black women could benefit from the studies in question" (Carneiro and Santos 1985, p. 39).

Relying on the statistical data collected by the census from the 1950s until the 1980s, Carneiro and Santos (1985) show the underprivileged socioeconomic position occupied by Black women in comparison with that of white men and women. The authors also provide a basis to understand the conflicts and tensions that exist between Black and white women within feminism. For them, white women were the only ones who benefited from the professional and educational diversification that happened between the 1960s and 1980s in Brazil, thus obtaining advantages in terms of access to education, integration in the job market and higher salaries. Therefore, "the mentioned inequalities between Black and white women anticipate the political and ideological tensions that derive from them, putting whites and Blacks in a political contradiction most of the time, despite their shared female condition" (Carneiro and Santos 1985, p. 40).

In 2016, a study conducted by the Brazilian Ministry of Labour and the Institute of Economic Applied Research reinforced the claims put forth by Carneiro and Santos more than 30 years earlier. According to this study, paid domestic work in Brazil is an almost exclusively female job (92 per cent of domestic workers are women). Paid domestic work is the occupation of 5,939,240 Brazilian women, making up to 14 per cent of the female employed workforce in the country. There is a caveat, though: Black women are the majority of the workers in this sector; more specifically, they are 61 per cent versus 39 per cent of white women. The reason for this overrepresentation is the precariousness of the activity. Black women have lower levels of education – a medium of 7.6 years of schooling, in comparison with 9 years of schooling for white women – and until 2014, when a constitutional amendment was passed, 70 per cent of the domestic workers did not have their labour rights secured (Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas Aplicadas 2016, p. 28).

These data and information, long highlighted by Black feminist scholars and activists, point not only to a crucial source of inequality amongst women, but also perhaps to something even more politically relevant. White women active in the workforce, including academics, benefit from the low-paid domestic work of Black women. In very simple terms, in order to break through the glass ceiling in various careers in the job market, white women lean on other women, particularly Black women (Fraser and Gutting 2015). In such conditions, in which Black women can identify their white counterparts as their immediate exploiters, it is hardly an easy

task to envision an agenda of solidarity and shared goals. Contradictions of this kind are the ones that Black feminist voices highlight when exposing the veiled dimensions of paid domestic work in Brazil.

2.3 Black Women and the Contestation about Health, Sexual and Reproductive Rights

The public debate about reproductive health, race and gender in Brazil is not only very complex but also extremely contentious. However, it is a fundamental debate to consider if one aims at understanding the particularities of what many Black feminists have named patriarchal racism in the country.

The Brazilian government adopted, in the 1970s and 1980s, the surgical sterilisation of women both as a means of demographic control and as a contraceptive method. Due to the indiscriminate use of sterilisation in the mid-1980s, 27 per cent of the women who made use of some kind of contraceptive method had been surgically sterilised (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística 1986). The rates for the same procedure were flagrantly lower in European countries during the same time frame: 6 per cent in France, 7 per cent in the United Kingdom and 4 per cent in Italy, which points to its being abused in Brazil. In this scenario, anti-racist activists urged Black women not to subject themselves to birth control, because they understood that the state was engaged in a bio-political strategy aimed at exterminating the Black population. White feminists, on the other hand, advocated the complete deregulation of any practices of birth control.

In 1993, *Geledés*, a leading Black women's non-governmental organisation in the country, organised the *National Seminar on the Reproductive Policies and Rights of Black Women* as part of the preparatory events for the UN *International Conference on Population and Development* to be held in Cairo the following year. Fifty-five participants, all of them connected to women's organisations, Black organisations, universities and public health services, attended the seminar. The seminar released, as its closing document, the *Itapeverica da Serra Declaration (National Seminar on the Reproductive Policies and Rights of Black Women 1993)*, which faulted the Brazilian government for treating reproduction as a public issue and the means of sustaining life as a private matter (Ribeiro 1995; Roland 1995, 2000). The final document asserted:

“The state has basically come to treat reproduction as a public issue, and the means of sustaining life – housing, health, education, food and work – as a private matter. Understanding this role reversal is crucial at this juncture in preparation for the *International Population and Development Conference III* [...]. *Reproductive freedom*

is essential for those ethnicities that are discriminated against. Therefore, we must fight so that reproductive decisions are made in the private realm, with the state guaranteeing reproductive rights and ensuring healthy conditions for sustaining life.” (*National Seminar on the Reproductive Policies and Rights of Black Women* 1993, p. 3, authors’ emphasis)

The debate initiated during this seminar surpassed the frontiers of activism and became a theme for academic investigation as well as institutional political scrutiny, with the establishment of parliamentary inquiry commissions on the racial character of sterilisation in the country. In addition, since the seminar, most non-governmental organisations and Black women’s collectives have enhanced their health programmes for Black women, receiving funding from an array of agencies as diverse as the Brazilian Ministry of Health, the International Women’s Health Coalition, the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the United Nations, among others, to develop their projects (Roland 2000).

In 1996, the Ministry of Health sponsored a roundtable on the health of the Black population. However, no consensus was reached on the need to create programmes focused specifically on Black people’s health. The only exception was the *Sickle Cell Anaemia Programme*, a disease with proven greater impact on the Black population, which presented sufficiently compelling statistics to justify it as a public health priority (Roland 2001; Maio and Monteiro 2005; Rodrigues 2010). In 1997, the federal government established the *Programme for the Health of the Black Population* that nonetheless turned out to be a failure from the very beginning because it received neither an allocation of resources nor a defined set of guidelines (Roland 2001).

In 2004, under the first Worker’s Party administration, the Ministry of Health and the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality signed a commitment with the intent of implementing a national health policy for the Black population. As part of this agreement, the Technical Committee on the Health of Black People was created with the task of systematising proposals for the promotion of racial equity in healthcare access.

The First Seminar on the Health of Black People, which produced the document *National Health Policy for the Black Population: A Question of Equity*, followed the creation of the Technical Committee. The document emphasised the need to expand Black people’s access to the public health system, the importance of including race/colour on birth and death certificates, and the need to develop policies that could meet the particular health needs of specific ethnic and racial groups (Maio and Monteiro 2005).

In 2006, the National Health Council approved the *National Health Policy for the Black Population*. Amongst the programme’s guidelines, there were distinguishing intrinsic factors of certain diseases prevalent among the Black population from fac-

tors resulting from social exclusion, such as poverty and lack of education. Further, the programme asserted that there is institutional racism within the public health system in Brazil that negatively affects the care provided to the Black population (Rodrigues 2010).

This other layer of inequality amongst Black and white women, despite being highlighted in both Black feminists' texts and more recently in specific public policies, has also not received the necessary attention from mainstream feminist intervention in the academy. Sexual and reproductive rights are an extremely relevant topic for feminists in Brazil, a country that still criminalises abortion in most situations. However, until race is fully integrated into an intersectional approach to sexuality and reproduction, we will continue to provide a partial and exclusionary account of what the needs and issues confronted by women are.

2.4 Feminist Theoretical Production, the Politics of Translation and the Production of 'Implicit Subjects'

The core of Black women's critiques of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s is the marginalisation and ultimately the neglect of Black women's political actions. According to Ribeiro (2006), both in feminist discourses and theoretical production, Black women appear as neglected subjects because:

"Historically, society has absorbed in a more efficacious manner the demands of white women as part of a 'natural process'. Race is still a taboo; the struggle against racism, for racism's subtlety and masking, has not succeeded as a relevant social theme." (Ribeiro 2006, p. 803–804)

Azeredo (1994), when discussing the reception and diffusion of feminist theories coming from the global north amongst us, reaches similar conclusions. She attempts to understand the reasons why, in such an unequal and multiracial society that has been deeply marked by the experience of slavery, race and racism remain largely ignored by feminist theoretical production and practice. While comparing the American and Brazilian feminist scholarships, Azeredo argues that in Brazil the debate on race has been almost entirely left for Black women to do, as if only they have been marked by race.

The first groups (and a nucleus for women's studies) which were established in the country in the 1980s were inspired by the American model of women's studies programmes (Azeredo 1994). However, this inspiration was only partial. A critique of racism within the feminist movements and academic circuits as it had taken

place in the United States and was expressed in various books⁶ was not present here. Following Azeredo's critiques (1994), we argue that the reception and diffusion of the theories developed by Black, Latina and African feminists as well as women of colour has happened late and only partially in Brazil. The focus on translations is important, because we understand feminism as a multi-located practice, and the politics of translation as essential to engender "epistemologies and feminist, anti-racist and postcolonial political alliances" (Alvarez 2009, p. 744).

While imported white feminists stormed academia, greatly influencing the scholarship theorising women's role in Brazilian society, the impact of the intersections of gender, race and class along with the specific forms in which racism and sexism affect Black women had, for a long time, been practically forgotten by Brazilian academia, and only recently have gained some attention (Rodrigues 2006). This is reflected by the fact that on the one hand there are thousands of academic publications on women, gender relations and feminist movements, but on the other hand there are very few works on Black women within the feminist debate.

The lateness characterising the translations of non-white feminists in Brazil may be explained by the disparity in terms of participation in the academy: there are very few Black women occupying positions in the universities. In a study about gender and racial inequalities in the access to academic positions, Silva (2010, p. 27) reveals that from a total of 58,618 university professors with a PhD until 2005, as Table 1 shows, only 251 were Black women:

Table 1 Professors by Sex and Colour/Race

Colour/Race	Female	Male	No Information	Total
Asian Brazilian	345	503	0	848
White	15,854	21,662	1	37,517
Native Brazilian	52	92	0	144
Black	251	374	0	625
Brown	1,312	2,114	0	3,426
No Information	5,830	9,457	771	16,058
Total	23,644	34,202	772	58,618

Source: Original compilation by the authors based on Silva's work (2010, p. 28)

6 Such as bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981), Angela Davis's *Women, Race & Class* (1981), and Cherrie Moraga's and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981).

The organisation of the Brazilian educational system is in itself one of the factors responsible for this absence of Blacks, men and women alike, in colleges and universities: primary and secondary schooling as well as higher education can be public and tuition-free, or private and paid. However, private primary and secondary schools tend to be of a better quality than public ones, even though the latter have more enrolment capacity than the former. In higher education, there is an inversion. On the one hand, public institutions federally funded or financed by state governments are very prestigious and conduct most of the research in the country; however, access to them is extremely competitive. On the other hand, private institutions are responsible for the majority of the enrolment, dedicating very little funding or personnel for research. The strong interconnection between race and class meant, until very recently, that very few Blacks could access a university. As they could not afford private primary and secondary schooling, ending up in low-quality and poorly funded public schools, they could not effectively compete for a place in public universities. Such an unequal and unjust scheme has only recently started to change, with the adoption of affirmative action in the higher education system, as we show in the next section.

It is thus not by chance that seminal texts, such as Angela Davis's (1981) book mentioned earlier in footnote 6, have only recently been translated and started to circulate amongst a larger audience. Until the mid-2000s, very few articles dealt specifically with the interrelation between gender and race both in *Revista Estudos Feministas (REF)* and *Cadernos Pagu*, the two major Brazilian feminist journals. One exception was a special issue of *REF*, published in 1995. The *Dossier Black Women* was organised by Matilde Ribeiro, and featured articles written by Lourdes Siqueira, Matilde Ribeiro, Luiza Bairos, bell hooks, Maria Aparecida Silva Bento, Márcia Lima, Rebecca Reichmann, Edna Roland, Maria Aparecida da Silva, Ângela Gilliam, Onik'a Gilliam and Sueli Carneiro.

In the dossier's introduction, Matilde Ribeiro claims that her initial proposal intended to encourage the propagation of empirical research or theoretical arguments about the interconnection between gender, race, racism and political participation. However, after a year of conversations with Brazilian researchers, she realised such a project was doomed to fail because there was not enough research being carried out at that time on such topics. As a result, she ended up inviting a group of Black and white activists and scholars to contribute to the dossier. For her, there was a necessity to intensify the studies about gender and race and, most important, to break away from the taboo that only Black women are responsible for disseminating works on these issues (Ribeiro 1995). The dossier was an important step in this direction.

Alongside the scarcity of empirical and theoretical studies on the intersectionality between gender and race, there is also little systematisation of the ones available. The works produced by authors situated in different disciplinary fields, covering issues that many times juxtapose one another, often do not follow up on previous research or further and critically engage with themes already debated. There is also, perhaps due to the restricted circulation of translations and the lack of deeper engagement with certain themes, a deficiency in terms of theoretical strength (Rodrigues and Prado 2013).

The aforementioned lack of systematisation and continuity of the studies can be explained by various factors. Among them, we highlight the following. First, the limited presence of Black women and representatives of other social minorities in the Brazilian universities. Second, the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the reflections that continuously happen within social movements and the academic analyses about those very social movements. Third, the almost complete absence of Portuguese versions of African-American, European and Latin American Black feminist writings. The lack of a collective effort for translating these works is a symptom of the partial influence American women's studies had on their Brazilian counterparts.⁷ And finally, the very absence of discussion among feminists about the impact of racism on women's lives that contributed to the marginalisation of the life experiences of Black women in the Brazilian academy.

3 Bringing Back the Missing Voices? Towards a Multi-vocal Feminism in Academia

There are no doubts that feminism has had a profound impact on the Brazilian academy, propelling important studies about women and gender relations in the country, while also stimulating the adoption of legislation and public policies with a gender perspective. In addition, the proliferation of outreach and online specialisation

7 It is important to clarify that here we are not romanticising American women's and gender studies programmes as fully inclusionary spaces. However, as we look at their Brazilian counterparts, it is hard to dismiss how deeper exclusions mark the latter. In our view, this can be explained by a socio-political fact. American feminism started dealing with its problems of exclusion a long time before the establishment of its academic arm. Therefore, when it entered the universities, American feminism brought with it the racial tensions and contentions that existed within the movements. In Brazil, the issue of exclusion, despite being constitutive of our society, was raised in a vocal way much later on, when feminists had already occupied spaces within the academy.

programmes on gender studies offered by various universities in different regions of the country, as well as the establishment of the first graduate programme on *Interdisciplinary Studies on Women, Gender and Feminism* at the Federal University of Bahia and, more recently, the first department and undergraduate programme in the same university, are evidence of the scope of that impact.

Nonetheless, until recently race had not been adequately incorporated into the studies on women, gender, and feminism in Brazil. Such a scenario has been slowly changing since the beginning of the 2000s. It is our contention that the confluence of three larger factors contributed not only to the inclusion of race as a category of analysis in recent feminist studies, but also to an expanded dialogue with Black feminist thought. They are, first, the democratisation of access to higher education, second, the positive reception of intersectionality as a concept and third, the profound transformation in the discourses about oppression.

The first government of the Worker's Party, starting in 2003, significantly increased the number of state measures for promoting gender and racial equality. In this context, the debates about the adoption of affirmative action in the public higher education system, which had started during the preparation for the third United Nations *World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* (the so-called Durban Conference), acquired a new footing under Lula's presidency.

Various universities started implementing different formats of affirmative action programmes in their selection processes. The quota system for students coming from the public educational system was the most-adopted model, followed by the one that established the ethnic-racial criteria with the reservation of vacancies for Black and indigenous students. In 2012, the universities maintained by the federal government had their affirmative action policies unified by the *Federal Act* n. 12.711, which established the reservation of vacancies for students coming from the public education system as well as Black, Brown, and indigenous students coming from low-income families.

The policies of affirmative action in the higher education system along with other measures of inclusion in its private counterpart dramatically changed the face of the Brazilian universities. One of the impacts of the greater participation of Black students can be observed in the emergent research and activism issues. New research centres on gender and race have been created in different universities, courses on Black feminist thought have been offered in undergraduate and graduate programmes, and special issues on topics such as 'intersectionality', 'intersectional feminism', and 'racism and sexism' among others have been published in important scientific journals. Finally, even if in a dispersed and informal manner, the works of relevant Latin American, American and African Black fem-

inists have been translated and discussed in study groups and feminist collectives throughout the country.

The quite positive reception of the concept of intersectionality among us has also contributed to a larger incorporation of race as an important category of analysis by feminist studies. In the Anglo-Saxon context, intersectionality has a long history that goes back to Sojourner Truth's famous speech *Ain't I a Woman?* (Truth, 1989 [1851]), continues with the Combahee River Collective's statement (Combahee River Collective 1986), and finally reaches Crenshaw's famous formulation originally published in 1989 (Crenshaw 1989). In Brazil the research agenda on the relationship between race and class is relatively old, starting long before the seminal studies of Gilberto Freyre (1933). The 1950s, when a field of inquiry known as the *Sociology of Race Relations* began to develop more systematically, were particularly prolific at producing studies with such an approach. Works on the interweaving of race, gender and class, however, were rare and peripheral until the 1980s. Ruth Landes' book, *The City of Women* (1947), which concentrated on the woman-centred dimension of Bahia's *candomblé*, along with Virginia Bicudo's master's thesis, defended in 1945, which concentrated on the racial attitudes of Blacks and Browns in São Paulo, are great examples of research with a perspective that later would be considered intersectional but which were completely neglected at the time of their appearance.

In the 1980s, Lélia Gonzalez (1988) and Sueli Carneiro (2003), important Black intellectuals and activists, tried to articulate in a more systematic way race, class and gender in their theorisation, at the same time when the term 'intersectionality' was coined in the United States. Carneiro (2003, p. 119) stated, for instance, that Black women had to "blacken" the agenda of the feminist movement and "sexualize" that of the Black movement, all at once. In so doing, they would promote a diversity of ideas and political practices within both movements while also claiming themselves as new political subjects and producers of knowledge.

Lélia Gonzalez (1988), however, critiqued the dominant paradigms in the social sciences and academic feminism for their failure to acknowledge and reflect upon the trajectories of resistance of Black and indigenous women in Latin America. Her writings can also be seen as 'decolonial' insofar as Gonzalez sought to subvert both stylistically and linguistically textual forms considered canonical in the humanities. She adopted a hybrid language, representative of a mestizo identity or, as Patricia Hill Collins (1986, p. 514) would put it, made a creative use of her "outsider within" status. Gonzalez (1988, p. 76) herself calls this hybridism "pretuguês", that is, an assemblage that marks the Africanisation of the Portuguese spoken in Brazil. She also coined the concept of "*amefricanity*" to refer to the shared experience of

Black people in the diaspora and the indigenous people's struggle against colonial domination (Gonzalez 1988, p. 76, original emphasis).

The writings of Carneiro and Gonzalez, although original and forerunners of the intersectional paradigm that would become very influential in the 2000s, had little impact in academia in the 1980s and 1990s. It is our contention that four factors contributed to this. First, the marginal position that both intellectuals occupied within the Brazilian academy at the time. Lélia Gonzalez only became a university professor shortly before her death while Sueli Carneiro has dedicated herself more to activism and to strengthening *Geledés*, the most important Black women's non-governmental organisation in the country, which she co-founded in the 1980s. Second, academics in more hegemonic fields of the social sciences and humanities often see Gonzalez and Carneiro's writings as excessively activist. Third, the geopolitical division of labour in the system of knowledge production creates a situation in which concepts coined in the global north have greater recognition than those developed in the global south. In the case we examine, this means that the pioneering ideas of Gonzalez and Carneiro would never achieve the same visibility and legitimacy that intersectionality enjoys now in Brazil, which does not mean the latter concept undoubtedly has a strong explanatory quality. Finally, as we mentioned earlier, the greater participation of Black students in the universities (considering that they would be more interested in carrying out research on the intersectionality of race, class and gender) is a relatively recent phenomenon.

One last aspect that we highlight in order to examine this growing inclusion of race in feminist studies is the transformation of a certain political grammar of hierarchies and forms of oppression. In the 1970s and 1980s, the hegemonic debate within Brazilian feminism had as its central axes class and sex/gender. Other issues, race included, were considered secondary in a political agenda aimed at achieving equality between men and women, restoring democracy in Brazil, and engendering public policies that would reduce socioeconomic inequalities.

The impact of post-structuralism in the Brazilian academy in the 1990s and of queer theories more recently, combined with a number of other social processes, contributed to dislocating the analytical axis from class-gender to the triad racism-sexism-homo/lesbo/transphobia. While this triad of oppressions still demands a better operationalisation, it is often deployed in different spaces of political intervention and as such has prompted an academic debate that attempts to establish connections and intersections among these different axes of social hierarchisation.

The juxtaposition of the three factors we have just analysed allows us to claim, along with Alvarez (2014), that a process of side-streaming is now taking place within Brazilian academic feminism, which for us has the capacity of expanding

the political and social usefulness of feminist studies. That is to say, the fact that gender is migrating or sometimes infiltrating various academic fields and political mobilisations means that it can prompt intersectional politics and policies which in turn contribute to building a more just world. Nonetheless, it is still too early to answer whether such developments will take place, and whether the pluralisation and analytical-theoretical dislocations created by Black feminists will succeed in bringing subjects and themes historically neglected within feminism to centre stage.

4 Conclusion

Inclusion and exclusion has haunted feminism since its inception, and it is no different when we look at its development in Brazil. In this article, we attempted to show that in its establishment within the academy, Brazilian feminism, while contending the exclusion of women, produced and reproduced some other exclusions of its own. This is highlighted by an extensive review of Black feminist intervention, which calls attention to a number of ways that an intersectional approach to race and gender uncover deeper forms of inequalities running through Brazilian society.

While we acknowledge the advances made by feminist scholars in their struggle with mainstream academia, we also identify the shortcomings of a strategy that builds upon a unified and non-existent subject of knowledge. Therefore, it is our contention that in the Brazilian context one of the ways for women's and gender studies and research to assert its scientific and social usefulness and relevance is to continuously confront the exclusions that it itself produces. A commitment to radical inclusion, which in our article appears through the acknowledgment of Black feminist knowledge production in Brazil, is shown to be an important and effective way to reassert feminist studies' social usefulness.

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