CYBERFEMINISM AS A TOOL FOR CONFRONTING GENDER INEQUALITIES: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BLACK WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conceptualize cyberfeminism as a tool for providing visibility to Black Feminism. Accordingly, we present the gender and racial issues involved, along with cyberfeminism and its potential to alter the position of Black women in the world, through the use of media by Black Feminism.

Keywords: Cyberfeminism; Intersectionality; Patriarchy.

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to conceptualize cyberfeminism as a tool for providing visibility to Black Feminism. Accordingly, we present the gender and racial issues involved, along with cyberfeminism and its potential to alter the position of Black women in the world, through the use of media by Black Feminism.

It is undeniable: women suffer discrimination in Brazil (and in several other countries around the world), and this reality is exponentially aggravated when analyzed from the perspective of Black and poor women. Women receive lower wages than men for performing the same paid work; they are constantly questioned if they do not perform femininity and subservience; women are harassed daily for something as simple as walking down public streets; women repeatedly have their sexuality repressed. In short, there is a lengthy list of situations and contexts that confirm this initial assertion.

The role played by social movements in recent decades has been of significant value, expanding the range of social and political demands toward the constitution of a new citizenship and contributing to the publicization of existing social inequalities. Unfortunately, they have not yet eliminated the social distances that mark and differentiate the dichotomy and contradictions of class, nor have they promoted significant ruptures, such as those proposed by the feminist movement to transform the processes of male domination over women. Thus, the power relations that permeate gender relations still aim to subordinate and aggress women, particularly Black women (Ferreira, 2007). Since:

> "Unfortunately, the racial issue is still part of the daily life of the Black population [...] in Brazil, and whenever we are remembered, we are remembered in a subordinate or inferiorized manner. Those who feel the negative sentiment towards their skin color, features, or culture know that when someone names you by your skin color, they are racially targeting a specific ethnic group. Therefore, we understand that biologically we do not have multiple races, as Hitler defended during the Holocaust against the Jews, but culturally, Black people worldwide are racialized" (Borges; Fernandes, 2018, p.80).

The following text is divided into four parts: The gender issue and its intersections in society; The Black woman: the most excluded among the excluded; Feminism as a pathway to overcoming gender inequalities; and Cyberfeminism as a tool for visibility. The study was conducted through extensive bibliographic research.

THE GENDER ISSUE AND ITS INTERSECTIONS IN SOCIETY

For Bauman (1999, p.18), "civil liberty depends on patriarchal law." In the history of Humanity, we have the social contract as the personification of freedom, but the sexual contract, on the contrary, is configured as a history of subjugation. Thus, the original contract creates both freedom and domination—obviously, it concerns the freedom of men and the subjugation of women. Therefore, civil liberty is far

from being universal; it is a masculine attribute, dependent on patriarchal law (Pateman, 1993). Moreover, it should be emphasized that:

> "Patriarchy ceased to be paternal a long time ago. Modern civil society is not structured around kinship and paternal power; in the modern world, women are subordinated to men as men, or as fraternity. The original contract [...] creates modern fraternal patriarchy" (Bauman, 1999, p.18).

Thus, regardless of the society, time, or space in which we are situated, over the centuries, one specific hierarchy has always been of utmost importance in all human societies: that of gender, in which "the patriarchal right of men over women is presented as a reflection of the very order of nature" (Bauman, 1999, p.35). Society develops based on the understanding that we are born with moral ideas just as we are born with our eyes, mouth, and nose. This assertive ignorance in determining our practical behavior causes us to consider as natural that which, in reality, is a human invention, a historical construction (Souza, 2018). Hence the essential need to raise awareness among the population so that they realize that:

> "None of this is merely an individual decision. Our positive or negative conception of others is permeated by social evaluations that function as the fundamental spark for any individual affection. That is why reconstructing the genealogy of the moral hierarchies that govern us is so important and fundamental for understanding an individual and their social world" (Souza, 2018, p.41).

Not by chance, over time, stereotypes about the female role have been reproduced, which are responsible for the construction of exclusionary discourses such as the one that claims politics is not for women. This contributed to keeping women in domestic spaces. Thus, intricate webs of customs continue to reproduce, responsible for weaving distinct daily experiences in the social structure as a whole (Ferreira, 2007).

Consequently, we have the social identity of women, as well as that of men, characterized by distinct role attributions expected by society. As a result, women's spheres of action are well defined, with child socialization being one of the tasks traditionally assigned to women, who may even delegate this task to another family member or someone hired for this purpose. However, even this permission is limited, as it is legitimized only when the woman needs to support herself or to supplement her husband's income. On the other hand, if the woman belongs to the dominant classes, she is exempt from the legitimization of the need to work, being allowed to enjoy an idle life, at least regarding the manual labor involved in raising children. Thus, beyond the hardships inherent in being a woman, there is also the social class variable in the constitutive elements of the female sex (Saffioti, 1987).

The analysis carried out thus far seeks to understand how the narratives of naturalizing sociocultural processes of discrimination against women and other categories end up constituting the

shortest and easiest path to legitimizing male superiority, as well as that of whites, heterosexuals, and the wealthy, in a process defined by the naturalization of discrimination based solely on sociocultural grounds (Saffioti, 1987).

Accordingly, we recognize that women work more, regardless of whether they are Eastern or Western, homemakers or hold paid jobs. A Pakistani woman, for instance, spends 63 hours per week on domestic tasks, and even when analyzing Western homemakers with their modern appliances, they still work only six hours less. Unfortunately, this is not a reality that shows signs of equal participation between genders in the coming years, as men are unwilling to spontaneously renounce a system in which half the world's population (of which they are not part) works for free. This would mean more competition in the workplace and more work at home for these men (Wolf, 2019).

In the context of historical development, these structures of domination are not altered solely through legal changes, even while recognizing their importance. Since discrimination is legitimized by the dominant ideology, especially against women, there are situations in which even justice agents tend to render their judgments under the system of ideas that justifies the current state of affairs. In this scenario, we witness—and will continue to witness—the police, the justice system, and society as a whole transforming the female victim into the defendant, even after her death. Moreover, generally, female education is directed toward socializing the role of the victim, a masochistic component of this female education that undermines, at its core, the possibilities of being a woman and inculcates the acceptance of suffering as the destiny of her existence (Saffioti, 1987).

When we analyze the Brazilian scenario, until recently, we had as the nation's highest representative none other than a consummate executor of necropolitics[2], Jair Messias Bolsonaro. He was not in power by chance; he corresponded to the expectations of social strata afflicted by the changes implemented by the Workers' Party tenures. A segment of the population sought to restore gender hierarchy, the dominance of heterosexual marriage, religious moral conduct, and education founded on authority. Thus, although the Workers' Party tenures opened important spaces for the feminist agenda, part of the country seeks the comfort of being under essentially male ministries, signaling that the "bye, darling" was not uttered frivolously. The key point is to realize that this rhetoric is not conservative, but reactionary (Abranches et al., 2019).

Civil society, by adhering to patriarchal prescription, aims to subordinate women to men not only in the private sphere but also in the public. Consequently, we see current assaults on women's rights, clear instances of political violence against them. This violence permeates the censorship of gender debates in

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[2] The origin of the term comes from the work of the Cameroonian philosopher, political theorist, historian, and intellectual Achille Mbembe. The term "necropolitics" emerges as a question of whether the State does or does not have a "license to kill" in the name of a discourse of order. Available at: https://www.politize.com.br/necropolitica-o-que-e/. Accessed: 05/12/2025.

schools and the exclusion of gender perspectives from public policies, a situation that indicates the complicity of the State in perpetuating the inequalities and violence that mark women's daily lives in Brazilian society (Biroli, 2016b). These situations denote women's exclusion from public life, indicating that it is men who hold the instruments capable of giving meaning, weight, and importance to women's experiences in the public sphere (Biroli, 2016a).

BLACK WOMEN: THE MOST EXCLUDED AMONG THE EXCLUDED

When analyzed broadly, male supremacy permeates all social classes, also manifesting itself in the field of racial discrimination. Thus, at the bottom of the "pecking order" is the woman, and in Brazilian society, it must be emphasized that the lowest position is occupied by poor Black women. Therefore, all forms of discrimination foster greater exploitation, not only regarding gender issues but also concerning racial discrimination (Saffioti, 1987).

Mbembe (2014) expresses that race is more than a concept; it was and continues to be a colonial project aimed at dividing the highly melanated African population into non-humans to transform them into slaves. However, even with the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, the perpetuation of processes of economic, social, and cultural extermination is still identified, carried out through a necropolitical project at the core of the countries that were colonized.

This situation is perceptible when analyzing the existence of a "let-die" policy, materialized by the number of unemployed Black individuals or those working in so-called sub-jobs, or even by the absence of hospitals or health centers in the peripheries of major cities, where the Black population is the majority. It can also be observed in the state's neglect of Black youth, who lack access to leisure, culture, or the arts (Borges; Fernandes, 2018). That said, this division by race, created by Europe, transformed Black men and women into subhumans, as "that (or even that thing which) is seen when nothing is seen, when nothing is understood, and especially when nothing is desired to be understood" (Mbembe, 2014, p.10). And, should they aspire to ascend to the position of human, they must do so by abandoning their culture, language, and even their origins, in order to absorb white culture, which is characterized as human culture (Borges; Fernandes, 2018).

Undeniably, the base of the social pyramid is composed of poor Black women in this nation, which already indicates a certain level of advantage for better-positioned women who can count on their labor—even if poorly paid—to navigate the sexual division of labor (Biroli, 2016b):

> "Black women [...] have been the ones who care for white families. This structural advantage in the relationship between Black and white women allowed the latter to acquire education and seek career opportunities, which they otherwise could not have achieved, within the context of a conventional heterosexual relationship, where women are expected to take care of the home and family" (Hanchard, 2001, p. 155).

For these reasons, feminist political theorists and activists bring forth the political critique of social exclusion, arising from a clear problem of selectivity within political democracies, which privilege men not only due to their male condition but also because of their position in class and race relations, condemning Black women to the stratum of the most excluded among the excluded (Biroli, 2016a).

FEMINISM AS A PATHWAY TO OVERCOMING GENDER INEQUALITIES

The narrative that has guided us thus far serves as the foundation for understanding that the common basis of social movements' struggles—particularly the feminist movement—is the denial of women's right to participate in political life and the impediment to their full exercise of citizenship. These circumstances deny women the possibility of being seen and heard, which contributes to the limitations of the private life to which they have been compelled (Ferreira, 2007).

In response to this dehumanization to which women are subjected, an ideology of struggle emerges in search of ways to alter this secular reality—feminism manifests itself. Here, it will be interpreted as a social, philosophical, political, and ideological movement that seeks to liberate from oppressive patriarchal patterns through female empowerment (Melo, 2020).

> "Empowerment stems from the traditional shift in superiority regarding life choices, goods, and opinions of one individual over another, leading to disempowerment in the effort to dismantle the privileged position that a subject enjoys in relation to another subject" (Campos, 2014, p. 108).

To that end, let us keep in mind that we feminists are made, not born. Therefore, a woman must choose to adhere to feminist politics. The first time women organized in groups to address issues related to sexism and male domination, they were clear in identifying that women were as socialized to believe in sexist thoughts and values as men. The only difference was that they did not benefit from this situation. Thus, it would not be possible to change the foundations of patriarchy without first working hard to change themselves; it was necessary to create consciousness (Hooks, 2019).

Thus, feminism, as a process of learning to be a woman, acted both in awakening these women to their potential and in breaking with the historical situation of subjugation. The coexistence among these women and the exchange of experiences allowed them to identify with one another, as well as to realize that oppression affected them daily, whether in public or private spaces (Ferreira, 2007).

> "Feminism and being a feminist are associated with ruptures in the social structures that have barred women from their right to citizenship. Being a feminist implies being committed to the historical struggle of women, adopting postures of indignation and contributing to questioning conservative practices that exclude women from decision-making processes and deny their contribution to the construction of democracy"(Ferreira, 2007, p.71)

However, from the outset, it is evident that privileged white reformist women sought the power and freedom they perceived men of their class enjoyed. The resistance to patriarchal domination in their homes allowed them a connection through which they could unite across classes with other women also saturated by male domination. However, only privileged women enjoyed the luxury of imagining that working outside the home would be sufficient to provide them with enough income to become economically self-sufficient, whereas working-class women already knew the reality in which their wages were insufficient to liberate them (Hooks, 2019).

> "These women, who joined feminist groups composed of diverse classes, were among the first to recognize that the vision of a politically based sisterhood, in which all women would unite to fight against patriarchy, could not emerge until the class issue was confronted" (Hooks, 2019, p.68).

And it was this insertion of class into the feminist agenda that brought to light the intersections of class and race. At the core of this institutionalized social system of race, sex, and class, Black women occupied the base of the pyramid. Initially, feminist movements were mostly composed of white women with high educational levels and working-class origins, but the voice of experience belonged to Black women, for they knew the costs of resisting domination by race, class, and gender. They understood the meaning of fighting to change someone's economic situation (Hooks, 2019).

> "By drawing attention to the need for transformation in both men and women, feminism proposes to society a collective re-discussion about its life project and political project. By acknowledging that women's problems have deeply rooted social and cultural foundations, feminists point to new horizons. "[...] it is not enough to change the law [...] if there are no efforts to modify behaviors toward women" (Ferreira, 2007, p. 57).

Throughout the 1990s, Latin American feminisms expanded their field of action, involving new cultural, political, and social arenas. Movements intersected, and organizations of Black, Indigenous, and rural women grew significantly, broadening the parameters of the movement's agenda. This proliferation of feminist perspectives has generated positive outcomes in public policies and, gradually, has been instilled in the popular imagination and culture, leading to the erosion of ideological resistances that persist in relation to feminism by more progressive sectors of Brazilian society. Unfortunately, however, it has also sparked considerable backlash from more conservative sectors (Lima, 2019).

In this context, we recognize Black Feminism as a movement of women who operate both in the sphere of gender discussion and in the anti-racist struggle. It is, therefore, a movement of theoretical construction by Black women, through political and intellectual analysis, focused on social change and acting within the ideological field in which they are inserted. It means Blackening feminism so that Black women engaged in Brazilian feminism can truly feel represented, in both fact and law, since feminism with a white and Western identity is insufficient, in both theory and practice, to integrate the different

expressions necessary for constructing a multiracial and multicultural feminism. To this end, the insertion of Black women in universities influenced not only the birth of Black Feminism but also fostered reflections and engagement in political activities (Lima, 2019).

CYBERFEMINISM AS A TOOL FOR VISIBILITY

A relevant factor in the analysis undertaken here concerns the media, which serve as perpetrators of stereotypes of Black female representation. Starting from the assumption that the media not only present the social representations already embedded in the social imaginary but also act as agents that operate, construct, and reconstruct at the core of the logic of production within systems of representation—due to their central role in crystallizing images and meanings about Black women (Lima, 2019): "The right to a positive image has been one of the battle lines of Black feminism since its inception. [...] It treats stereotypical image or representation as a form of violence comparable to domestic and sexual violence." (Lima, 2019, p. 55).

Currently, within the context of feminism's dissemination, we observe the expansion of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as strategic and indispensable tools for the activities of contemporary feminisms, which are characterized by horizontal discourses, with plural and heterogeneous practices, articulated with various civil sectors (Lima, 2019).

As a result, this reality of technological innovations stemming from the globalization process of capitalist relations has enabled the widespread use of electronic devices, social networks, among other tools, for the dissemination of knowledge, thereby allowing facilitated access to diverse content. This is a turning point in history, as it enabled the transition from passive communication/information—where individuals were merely recipients of information with no means to express their critiques and reflections—to the communication/interaction found in digital social network interfaces such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram (Borges; Fernandes, 2018).

It is along this trajectory that the discussion of cyberfeminism gains prominence as a means of providing visibility to Black Feminism. For this study, we interpret cyberfeminism as a heterogeneous, multifaceted, and active philosophy that seeks female empowerment and the rupture with patriarchal structures through feminist network practices. This is an important movement because: "Digital social networks allow the multiplicity of voices to echo, expanding reflections and debate, as well as serving as a means to deconstruct the singular discourse present in the mass media" (Borges; Fernandes, 2018, p. 76).

These new technologies and other communication tools offer feminisms the opportunity to create and expand narratives that contest the previously dominant discourse. These narratives enable the emergence of diverse and infinite subjectivities, as means of reinventing identities (Lima, 2019).

Although initially "the blog was the primary tool for discussion utilized by feminisms operating on the web" (Lima, 2019, p.59), it is now common to access digital social networks and encounter forms of interaction and collaboration regarding global events. We now have a space for co-creation and active participation, developing what can be termed a culture of sharing and participation. Thus, networked digital engagement assumes that people always have something to contribute; they are engaged and experience the movement not as mere spectators but as authors (Borges; Fernandes, 2018).

> "This generation, present in schools and digital social networks, consists of individuals whose life stories are interconnected through their daily online and offline relationships. They are students with a cultural conception of gender, race, politics, and religiosity constructed in the space-time of their lives both inside and outside of school" (Borges; Fernandes, 2018, p. 76).

Social networks, blogs, and the decentralization of content production enabled by the internet have opened avenues to contest epistemic racism and the lack of positive representation of Black individuals in the media. For a long time, the discourse restricted to mainstream media fueled the negation of the Black population either through absence or through pejorative representations, impacting the subjectivities and self-esteem of these citizens through the dissemination of stereotypes and discourses that distort and negatively mark women, Black people, bodies, and sexualities (Lima, 2019). That is, these networks represent a path to overcome:

> "Cultural domination (being subjected to interpretive and communicative standards associated with another culture, alien and/or hostile to one's own); concealment (becoming invisible through the communicative, interpretative, and representational practices authorized by one's own culture); and disrespect (being routinely defamed or disqualified in public cultural representations through stereotypes and/or everyday interactions)" (Fraser, 2006, p. 232).

Thus, by mobilizing reflections on issues related to racism and sexism, based on personal experiences, daily situations, and media cases, Black women have the opportunity to use internet tools as a means to engage in the development of productions that confront the epistemological foundations of ethnocentric orientation, constituting counter-hegemonic discourses in the quest to give visibility and voice to Black and female experiences. These self-produced narratives have achieved immeasurable reach, forming a genuine network of information and sharing (Lima, 2019).

The strength that digital social networks constitute is akin to the weavings made by weavers—so intricately intertwined that we witness, for example, the case of Brazilian doctor and influencer Victor Sorrentino, who was arrested in Egypt accused of harassing a salesperson. He posted a video of the incident on his social media. The case gained notoriety when the initiative "Fala UP," a collective focused on feminist issues in Egypt, provided details of the event. A hashtag, which can be translated as #HoldTheBrazilianHarasserAccountable, became one of the most commented topics on the country's

Twitter (now X) (CNN Brasil, 2021). On that occasion, more than 2,000 activists in Brazil and Egypt joined forces to denounce the video posted by the doctor (Globo G1, 2021).

Under the banner of cyberfeminism, we see feminist collectives mobilizing strategies that seek to articulate aesthetics, politics, and communication through digital technologies as means for women's emancipation and empowerment. These Black feminist women are not merely seeking a space for sharing and exchanges, but fundamentally a space that provides forms of participation and intervention in the political agendas of society. That is, a space for participation and visibility of these minorities that is not possible through traditional avenues (Lima, 2019).

(NON-)CONCLUSIVE LINES

In our reality, while official history was being taught, a significant part of the Brazilian population was simply unaware of the real history, marked by persecutions, torture, and murders—that is, filled with acts of cruelty perpetrated against those who rose against the regime. The fact is that social life cannot be reduced to the decisions made by the powerful; it is also constituted through personal actions and, above all, through collective decisions practiced in everyday life. What has become clear is that real history is forged by anonymous men and women through daily struggle, while only official history is made by 'great' men—a history that does not portray the daily political-social struggles (Saffioti, 1987).

Therefore, as long as Brazilian society does not embrace the racial issue in its entirety—reflecting, evaluating, and developing ways to raise public awareness about the deeply rooted racial discrimination in this country—Brazil will hardly achieve full democracy. It is urgent to rethink our nation-building, which, throughout its history, has destined the Black population to the worst quality-of-life indicators while grounding itself in the concept of racial democracy. It is hoped, therefore, that workplace discrimination, domestic violence, low political representation, among other issues, can be reviewed through public policies aimed at eliminating this structural racism (Lemos, 2015).

> Here, we leave for discussion the thesis that true democracy can only be established when the trio of patriarchy-racism-capitalism is dismantled. As long as patriarchy and racism are considered merely as ideologies—and not as the power relations they actually are—it will be impossible to achieve racial and sexual democracy. In the same way that patriarchy and racism merged with capitalism, they can also survive it (Saffioti, 1987, p.94).

In this dimension, cyberfeminism significantly contributes by going beyond the mere practice of sharing for sharing's sake on digital social networks, as the circulated information surpasses the function of informing about what is happening in the world—it seeks to affect and generate modes of feeling for those involved in the shared events. Thus, the gender, race, and class issues shared within these networks affect individuals who identify with them, and these affectations can cause commotions, indignations,

and, most often, generate virtual mobilizations that activate multiple voices materialized in the offline world (Borges; Fernandes, 2018). Not by chance:

> "Feminism has never been so deeply embedded in Brazilian society and has never been so present in the streets. Women, especially the younger ones, seem increasingly aware that their place is anywhere and that occupying spaces in politics is fundamental to making their experiences count and to giving political meaning to their needs and interests" (Biroli, 2016a[3])

There is no doubt that the 21st century will be feminine. For now, there are still indications that patriarchy, segregation, and inequality prevail. It is certainly true that we are witnessing multiple crises: social, economic, political, ethical, environmental, cultural, crises of identity, of belonging, of choice, and of lack of choice. But these crises and their interactions will not paralyze us. Diverse approaches will be necessary to confront these issues, but each advance is a victory. The most important thing is knowing that the key to achieving the desired victory is the coordination of efforts and struggles, so that victories do not cancel each other out (Wapichana, 2019). And these individuals who, on their own, already recognize the relevance of content creation, of the perception that the media is each of us—all these singularities to which we have access and with whom we can interact—constitute the anthropological mutation we need (Borges; Fernandes, 2018).

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[3] Online article without pagination.

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