

Ethnic-racial and gender aspects concerning young African women attending university in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to understand the perspective of young African women, who attend university in Brazil through the Exchange Program for Undergraduate Students (PEC G), based on the concept of intersectionality. It will analyze narratives of students, who discuss their educational trajectories, the establishment of vital and professional projects, and their perception of Brazil's sociocultural context, emphasizing the intersection between ethnicity/race and gender. This study noted discrepancies between the representations of racial democracy in Brazil and the experiences of young African students. It also emphasized different possibilities for what it means to be a woman in the social context of racism, sexism and xenophobia in Brazil compared to in the students' countries of origin.

KEYWORDS

PEC G; intersectionality; gender; race; ethnicity.

ASPECTOS ÉTNICO-RACIAIS E DE GÊNERO NA INSERÇÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA DE JOVENS AFRICANAS NO BRASIL

RESUMO

O presente estudo discute a inserção universitária de jovens africanas no Brasil por meio do Programa de Estudantes – Convênio de Graduação (PEC-G), a partir do conceito de interseccionalidade. Procura-se problematizar as narrativas de estudantes sobre suas trajetórias educacionais, a constituição de projetos vitais e profissionais e a percepção do contexto sociocultural brasileiro, dando ênfase à intersecção entre etnia/raça e gênero. Este estudo observou discrepâncias entre as representações de democracia racial no Brasil e as experiências de jovens africanas universitárias, além de ter enfatizado elementos constituintes das possibilidades de ser mulher em um contexto social marcado por racismo, sexismo e xenofobia, de forma diferente de seus países de origem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

PEC-G; interseccionalidade; gênero; raça; etnia.

ASPECTOS ÉTNICO-RACIALES Y DE GÉNERO EN LA INSERCIÓN UNIVERSITARIA DE JÓVENES AFRICANAS EN BRASIL

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza la inserción universitaria de jóvenes africanas en Brasil a través del Programa de Becas para Estudiantes de Grado (PEC G), a partir del concepto de interseccionalidad. Se objetiva analizar las narrativas de los estudiantes acerca de sus trayectorias educativas, el establecimiento de proyectos vitales y profesionales y la percepción del contexto sociocultural brasileño, con énfasis en la intersección entre la etnia/raza y el género. El estudio observó discrepancias entre las representaciones acerca de la democracia racial en Brasil y las experiencias de las jóvenes universitarias, especialmente sobre los componentes de las posibilidades de ser mujer en un contexto social marcado por el racismo, el sexismo y la xenofobia, de manera diferente de sus países de origen.

PALABRAS CLAVE

PEC G; interseccionalidad; género; raza; etnicidad.

INTRODUCTION

The Undergraduate Student-Covenant Program (PEC-G) of the Brazilian Government supports students from developing countries with scholarships to attend universities in Brazil. This program is an initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education of Brazil, together with Brazilian universities and with a focus on countries with which Brazil maintains educational and cultural agreements¹ (Africa, Asia, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean). We will present the results of a research carried out with African young people in Porto Alegre (Brazil) linked to the PEC-G, through qualitative interviews of narrative character whose organizational axes were: educational trajectories; process of insertion in the Brazilian university life; their projects of life and profession.

Based on this context, this study had as general objectives to understand how these young women organized the narratives on their educational trajectories; how the vital and professional projects of these young women were constructed; how they perceived the sociocultural context in which they were inserted; as well as to understand the forms of organization of their identity discourses, especially for the ethnicity/race-gender intersection.

As a possibility to establish critical analyzes on hegemonic discursive aspects, some feminist studies use the perspective of intersectionality — a way of socio-historically locating the discursive manifestations that produce and reiterate systems of domination. Arising from reflections of North American black feminists in the 1970s and 1980s — the *Black Feminism* —, the theoretical proposal based on the idea of intersection sought to relativize the universalism of the term “woman” (Costa; Ávila, 2005, Piscitelli, 2008). The concept of intersectionality seeks to contemplate power axes (such as “race”, ethnicity, class, and gender) as constructs that seem to be crossed and re-signified in social relationships in a rhizomatic form.

The field of intersectionality analysis, which is derived from the tensions caused by *Black Feminism*, brings to discussion a multiplicity of social issues seen from an integrated perspective (Pocahy, 2011). In this sense, it does not comprise a sum of domination operators — or simply the recognition of oppressive systems that operate from the notions of gender, ethnicity/race, age, class, sexuality etc. —, but rather it questions the hierarchy of these axes related to asymmetric power systems. The perspective of intersectional reading allows, in this way, to identify the

1 Those selected must be at least 18 years old and, preferably, up to 23 years old. In Brazil, the exchange student takes the undergraduate course with no charge. However, they must prove they are capable of sustaining themselves in Brazil (with a minimum of US\$ 400.00 monthly for expenses); have completed secondary education, have a medical certificate of physical and mental health and, for students outside the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, they have to prove proficiency in the language. The selection for this program focuses on people who are in socioeconomic development programs and they must be committed to return to their country of origin. According to the Ministry of Education of Brazil, PEC-G offers opportunities for higher education to citizens of developing countries with which Brazil maintains educational and cultural agreements.

particularities and tensions certain groups are subjected to, as well as to understand the plurality of discursive agencies that give rise to social categorizations.

For Moore (2000), “race”, ethnicity and gender are examples of important aspects of human social life, in continuous intersection, and they are also markers of significant social differences. The positioning of people in relation to ethnical, racial or gender aspects, at the intersection of different discursive forms, appear in the formation of the subjectivation process, both individual and collective ones. They exist, therefore, as a set of subjectivities, which may converge or contradict each other, but which situate a particular person in the conceptions of what it is to be a black subject, woman, and of a certain class and ethnic composition.

Social discourses related to gender or ethnical and racial aspects can be articulated in several ways. “Race”, for instance, can also question the norms of what is considered to be consistent with the ways of being male and female, while maintaining discriminations articulated by sexist and racist oppressive discourses at the same time (Moore, 2000). Blackwell and Naber (2002) corroborate this perspective by discussing the intersectionality issues between gender and “race” and how these two constructs are often imbricated in forms of oppression manifested in asymmetrical power relations. For these authors, interrelated oppressions can corroborate both the increase in racist violence and gender discrimination, for example. In these cases, black women are commonly treated as being of lower value and permeated by a hypersexualization discourse (Blackwell; Naber, 2002).

Hence, ideological contents can situate women in several spaces of exclusion. The different forms of being a woman as circumscribers of possibilities of feminine and gender relations established as aspects that contribute to a “tensioning” of the social relationships are expanded. The premise that there is a social organization of relations between the sexes (Scott, 1989), which transcends biological differentiations, needs that important social markers are taken into account. The gender perspective, taken in the light of the social construction notion, is loaded with something that operates in the construction of a subject of the gender — and therefore opposed to the naturalization of the feminine and masculine. Gender, taken as an operational concept for contesting the naturalization of sexual differences in several spaces of discussion — whether on the possibility of new historical subjects or theoretical fields (Haraway, 2004) — brings into discussion issues that are situated in the everyday experience, and which make the analyses more contextual and complex after *Black Feminism* reflections.

In this relational perspective, ethnicity is understood as an aspect of social intersection that encompasses endless and variable processes, by which social actors identify themselves and are identified by others at the basis of the “us/them” dichotomization — manifesting itself in discursive networks (Barth, 1997; Jaspal, Cinnirella, 2012). It is, therefore, established from cultural traits that are supposed to be derived from a common and highlighted origin in social interactions. The notion of ethnicity as nation lies within the scope of collective feeling and comprises notions of belonging and differentiation. Ethnical and racial aspects appear as a network of collective significances, whose function is to identify with a group — assuming a

sense of belonging — and with certain possibilities of organization based on issues such as affinity, lifestyle, culture, territory, and religion (Jaspal; Cinnirella, 2012). We consider that a look towards the singular experience and its socially identifiable interfaces can favor a critical view based on the narrative experience — in the sense of problematizing the notion of “race” and ethnicity giving visibility to social discourses that attribute certain values and possibilities to it.

Nevertheless, considering cultural aspects based on the strangeness of African university students in relation to their lives in Brazil demands giving light to historical aspects of the country with regard to racism — which, although presented in a variety of ways, is largely based on the notion of whitening in Brazil. According to Bento (2002), the white elite that is characterized by the liability of the oppressed subjects, which is typical of domination actions conceived the notion of whitening. Therefore, with regard to whitening, there was a movement where questioning the “white” category is avoided — with focus on the problematization of the other (in this case, the black) —, which did not fit the current norm (the standard of the whitest — equivalent to the dominant).

In Brazil, this attitude hampered discussions on racism — which generated a negative and stigmatized idea of nonwhite as something spectral that should be extinguished from the intermarriage with the white elite, in an evident hygienist and Europeanizing notion (Bento, 2002). This ideological discourse is supported on fear, serving as a parameter for the solution of the supposed black threat in a country under constitution. According to Bento (2002), this fear would have been one of the reasons why Brazil encouraged immigration in the early 20th century, in order to provide more white characteristics to an extensive and threatening country on the European eye.

Quadros (2004) indicates that we can perceive the impact of this ideology, especially articulated with issues of gender, beyond the subjective field. Researches from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), for instance, present that black women have lower incomes regarding their work. Data from the 2002 Census show that black women could achieve only 31% of income when compared to white men’s income; therefore, a white woman could obtain, comparatively, 62% of income when compared to white men (Quadros, 2004). This relationship between race and gender, under another aspect, can be shown by the type of absorption of black labor in the labor market and in the society in general, which is usually marked by less valued and paid jobs.

In Brazil, race, gender and ethnicity seem to be the constructs of great intersectional impact. We deal with domination relations based on both the pejorative meaning of physical aspects and the definition of dominant groups. As the results of these relations, Lima and Vala (2004) identify two prevalent forms of prejudice in Brazil: the cordial racism and the subtle prejudice. The first is characterized by being typical of a multiracial society, but expressed in a dangerously jocose way, through popular sayings, jokes and supposed jokes. The so-called subtle prejudice is manifested in relation to exogenous groups. It appears in an indirect and cold way and is characterized by the need for a supposed defense of the traditional values of the culture of the endogenous group. These two constructs may be imbricated in

the sense that the conception of endogenous and exogenous group is as relational as a “cordial” form of harassing the other.

These experiences of discrimination also make up the life panorama of educational immigrants from African countries in Brazil. In studies carried out with African students in the university context, Andrade and Teixeira (2009) found that not only the levels of adaptation of the students were good, but also the reasons to seek services in Brazil happened by career guidance, search for housing and health care, despite the perceived racial discrimination. The greatest difficulties, according to the authors, are related to “family”, “health”, prejudice and housing. Gusmão (2011), however, points out that students who migrated to study in Brazil ended up finding formal or informal groups of social support, corroborating the notion of international cooperation by these students, as well as the challenge of organizing their notion of themselves, in this Africa/Brazil interface.

The mapped experiences of students from Africa in Brazil illustrate both the need to assimilate the existing pedagogical practices and to appropriate the ethnical and racial conflicts resulting from this insertion (Morais; Silva, 2011). As Hirsch (2009) presents, African university students are often surprised by the racial discrimination that is present in Brazil, since it is contradictory to the widespread and validated stereotypes about the Brazilian context in Africa — which is sometimes presented as a “social paradise” and holder of more diversified and wider life opportunities (Subuhana, 2009).

In a mapping about the perception of Brazilians in relation to African students, it was found that they are seen as shy and overly educated and formal, besides persisting among the Brazilian university students’ fanciful conceptions on “tribal customs” of the everyday life in African urban areas (Fonseca, 2009). Little knowledge about African cultures seems to be one of the reasons why Brazilian students create or reinforce stereotypes and prejudices about a supposed “wild” Africa. Moreover, this memory linked to a wild Africa contrasts with the perception of excessive politeness of African students (Fonseca, 2009). In this way, from an intersectional perspective, we seek an approximation to the reality of female students linked to the PEC-G in Porto Alegre (Brazil) by highlighting the singularity of their life trajectories and future projects with their insertion in the local university context.

METHOD

Four African female exchange students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS, Brazil) participated in this study, two from Guinea-Bissau and two from Cape Verde. The four participants were between 19 and 25 years old. All the young women came to Rio Grande do Sul through the PEC-G. Data collection was carried out through the proposal of narrative interviews (Flick, 2009), and all generated information was digitized and gathered in a single corpus, following the perspective proposed by Garay Uriarte *et al.* (2002), which was inspired in the grounded theory. We point out this is an inspiration, since it consists in the use of some of the assumptions of the classical grounded

theory. Traditionally, the grounded theory would require the return to the research objectives for each new data collection; the constant (re)organization of the collected material; codification and categorization of the information together with the discussion to form a systematic theory from the collected data (Charmaz, 2009). However, the process assumed in the present research did not contemplate one of the classically related items, which is the return to the objectives at each new interview, and only the other characteristics that identify this methodological framework remained in the process.

Considering the scope of assumed analysis, narrative interviews were used, because they favor achieving subjective information — such as life experiences and personal questions of the narrators. In order to stimulate these narratives and ethically locate the research, the research procedures were objectively explained and the interview was initiated with comprehensive questions that are “generative of narrative”, giving the interviewee the possibility of creating a narrative with beginning, middle and end, for example: “How was your school career?”; “How has it been to study here in Brazil?” In this sense, the narratives constructed throughout the interview were understood as analogous to the life experiences, woven by the perception of those who experienced and directed it based on the notion of audience.

Taking into account some possible connections between the grounded theory and discursive analysis, Keller (2005) suggests that discursive and sociological analyses should be articulated from the assumptions of the grounded theory. According to Keller (2005), the systematization exercise of these approaches could account for a very present oscillation in the qualitative analyses in human sciences — which often tip between macro discourses and overly particular analyses, understood as extremes. The suggestion of Keller (2005) aims at the development of studies in which more elaborated interfaces on social practices are established. The analysis of narratives, within this integrative perspective, for instance, would allow understanding how individuals articulate their experiences and reflect on their positions as to dominant discourses, from a procedural and contextual notion (Burck, 2005).

We used the perspective of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2010) as a way of articulating the results with discourses that circulate socially at the macro structural level. The critical discourse analysis, according to Van Dijk (2010), is not established solely as a methodology, but rather proposes a critical and socially implicated view. The critical discourse analysis has as its prerogative to situate communicational aspects in the conception of social practice. It allows social mechanisms that legitimize inequalities and injustices in a process of reproduction of relations of domination or abuse of power to be put on the agenda.

RESULTS

After conducting the analysis using discursive fragments through thematic axes, *a priori*, three axes were initially created: life trajectory, present, and future. These categories generally covered the narratives of female students —

giving rise to several elements that help to map relevant issues of their experience in Brazil, such as: family life; school in Africa; decision to immigrate; adaptation; professional and life project. These axes of analysis allowed us to identify (as constructs based on empirical data) the centrality of participants' discourses in the "gender" and "ethnic and racial aspects" relational categories (*a posteriori*), as in Table 1.

Initially, in the "life trajectory" category, we emphasized the moment of life before coming to Brazil — and we verified some emerging aspects, such as family support for the exchange, consonant with a family culture of migration and certain values and expectations of the family in relation to the students. These constructs are imbricated in an idea of training, professional future and experiences outside the country of origin as characteristics highly valued in the family context. The proximity of the family with the exchange idea is present in the experience of siblings or close relatives who had already studied abroad. However, the experience of life and study abroad were not always able to serve as an adaptive parameter for the reality faced here. Family and community experiences of study in France, Portugal, in the former USSR or China, seemed small to the experience found here. In addition, the representation of Brazil developed through media products (especially telenovelas) and Brazilian religious in their countries reinforced the idea of tropicality and, mainly, the idea of "racial democracy".

In this conjunction, the experiences linked to the school in the countries of origin were often quoted, and sometimes corroborated expectations of a successful career, based on the importance of a consistent education. The students mentioned that they and their family understand formal education as fundamental, so they studied in private and confessional schools. They associated "good schools" with issues of high level of demands in relation to good grades

Table 1 – Intersectional categories of gender and ethnic-racial aspects present in the participants' narratives.

		<i>A priori</i> categories		
		Life trajectory	Present	Future
<i>A posteriori</i> categories		Family support > Family culture of migration > Parental expectations > Positive references to schooling > Community experience > Positive view of Brazil.	Adaptive process > College in Brazil > Individualism of Brazilians > Racism > Derogatory Brazilian media towards African countries > Group of foreign students as effective support	Emphasis on professional project > Idealized life project > Emphasized ethnic racial feeling of belonging
	Gender	History of women with higher education and international experiences	Welcome of Brazilian students towards African black women different from African black men	Projects of conjugality x professional life
	Ethnic racial aspects	Brazil as a country of racial democracy.	Experiences of racism > black Brazilians X black Africans	

and posture — intrinsically associated with future preparation. In these schools, students were able to live with female and male religious Brazilians, who also influenced them in the choice of exchange by presenting them to the culture and certain customs of Brazil.

Another item that emerges in the analysis of life trajectory is the decision to immigrate, in which the process of educational training and the prospect of improvement of the economic situation in the long term are evidenced as reasons for the participants to study outside their country. This decision to migrate for a certain period is presented by Rocha-Trindade (1995) as “temporary migration”, that is, this temporary migration would occur, for example, to obtain undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in higher education programs.

This broader category also included the “community experience and vision of Brazil” subcategories which show not only the influences of family and friends evident in the decision to study abroad, but also a positive vision of Brazil as a welcoming country to foreigners — where the themes related to “race” and ethnicity, when present, were posed in a sense of closeness and affinity. Many statements regarding extended education and the importance of experiences in different cultures, with references to mothers and women with higher education and international exchange experiences in the family, emerge intersected to these issues.

It is worth emphasizing the possibility of empowerment this migratory experience makes possible. Traveling and getting in touch with another social reality promotes new experiences and puts the person in question into relationship with symbolic and material resources, which may not exist and/or be difficult to access in the country of origin. In fact, Nathália points out that:

[...] yes, and technology also knows, there are here many advanced things, but to study in Africa you suffer a lot, you do not have much [...] the internet is very expensive, you do not have access, there are books, but old books, you have to study to learn, there are no good laboratories, there are no great libraries (Nathália, 20 years old).

Another issue that arises in this empowerment refers to the departure from a position of greater dependence to a position of greater autonomy; in this particular, being in another country, without direct contact with the family, would enable the person to assume responsibilities that they had not assumed before, placing them as responsible for the everyday tasks. Thus, Nathália recalls:

[...] the money came and I had to write and do everything, I had to pay the rent, the light, the water, recharge the bus card, and doing all this is already a responsibility that the person takes, right, but I did not have that, if I stayed there I would never take this, I would never know this, ever. The experience is good though, you know, you suffer (Nathália, 20 years old).

In the “present” category, these aspects related to the process of adaptation to Brazil were better addressed. Thus, the following subcategories emerged as important themes in the narratives: adaptive process and college in Brazil. In this context,

the conception of Brazil as a receptive country was questioned, which is conflict with statements that emphasized difficulties in social relationships — pointing to racism as one of the greatest difficulties that they were having in the country. The participants brought the perception of Brazilian's great individualism and their lack of hospitality when receiving foreigners in their narratives. They report that they did not receive a warm welcome when they arrived in Brazil, and they felt that Brazilians are “cold” in the contact with strangers. The individualism, for the participants, directs interpersonal relationships experienced in Brazil, in contrast to their countries of origin.

The issue of racism was evidenced at some moments in the young women's narratives, who also expressed the prejudice experienced due to gender issues — when they mention having noticed, at times, a discrimination different from that experienced by black male students (who, according to these women, would enjoy a more effective socialization). Concomitant to this, we can perceive another element in the narratives, in which both the migration to Brazil and the possibility of a maturing process are present, as pointed out by Diandara:

[...] people have to wait and see with their own eyes, otherwise they will surprise themselves, because they have other thoughts, and then they arrive here and see something else, they get disappointed and want to go back. I have seen many people who arrived here with another perspective; they came here, saw something else and wanted to go back, because they felt that this was not what they had expected and then they got used to it, I would tell these kind of people to come, because they would know another culture, they would make friends [...] and so to anyone who wants to dive straight I would say go ahead, play their game and move on (Diandara, 23 years old).

This view of the country was not isolated, as Valéria corroborates:

I would advise them to prepare themselves, the first thing, the spirit, the morale, because living away from the family and facing prejudice is too much, but, now as in the case of my younger brother, next year he will finish high school and he wants to come here, and I said no, you better go to another country that is much better [...] My older brother is in France, but he never told me anything, whether or not he has already experienced prejudice there (Valéria, 22 years old).

They also expressed the feeling that Brazilians do not care much about interacting with those who are next to them, in contrast to Africans who, according to them, make friends more easily. These more individualistic perceptions of Brazilians were sometimes associated with the fact that they were black African females, especially when compared with women from other countries. With regard to these passages specifically, the information related to the conflicting coexistence with Brazilians was expressed through the description of situations such as this:

It was horrible, it was very difficult. When I decided to come to Brazil, I thought I would arrive here and would not have greater difficulties to coexist with the people [...]. One day, I arrived in the classroom and we had to do a group work — when I remember this, I think of crying, I was the only black woman in the college in general — [...] we had class work and the teacher said: you are going to have class work, now find a group and ask to join the group to do the class work. But, when I spoke to people, no one gave me attention, they cut me off, it seems like, you know, that feeling when you pull something out of the box and leave it out? (Valéria, 22 years old).

The participant adds that, besides this negative view in relation to her presence, in the described situation, there are other aspects that seem to be related. For Valéria, the perception of Brazilians towards Africans was corroborated by the news conveyed in the Brazilian media: “unlike Brazilians, our media shows the nice things about Brazil. Different from here, which shows nothing but bad things of Africa”. The perception that emerges in the interview, in which Valéria links the experience in the classroom and the perception in relation to the Brazilian media, is interspersed by differentiations regarding the interpersonal relationships in Brazil and Africa. It is noteworthy that, in the interview of Valéria, the processes of differentiation are always mentioned as to Brazilians and Africans, not specifically as to people from her country of origin. This is emphasized in several moments, as in the case of the expression African people — which is problematized, but reiterated — and placed in opposition to Brazilians.

Living with the people, um, the way of being of Brazilians is very different from ours. I can say [...] that Africans are, um, they are free people, not of freedom, but they interact differently from Brazilians. For example, I think Brazilians are very individualistic, every man for himself and God for us all. [...] We help each other, different from the Brazilians that I have met (Valéria, 22 years old).

In this category, statements that mixed experiences in foreign territory with those that expressed both the interfaces between racism and gender discrimination, as well as systems of ethnic discrimination (referring to black Brazilians towards black Africans) also emerged. Due to the demerit of black Africans by Brazilians, they say they also suffer prejudice from black Brazilians because they came enslaved to Brazil, whereas black Africans did not, and therefore, black Brazilians would be (according to the interviewees) more submissive to the standards imposed by white people:

I do not know if it is because black Africans are bold, black Africans are not afraid of anything, do you see what I mean? If you do something to an African that he does not like, he tells it straight to your face, whether you are white, black or mulatto; no matter who you are, he tells it directly to your face, different from black Brazilians, do you see what I mean? [...] I have noticed differences from black Africans in the everyday life, I think it is because of this,

or because they left Africa and were enslaved here and then came from those ancestors, but I do not know the reason for the prejudice of black Brazilian with black Africans, but I think it is because of this, that they do not occupy great positions here (Valéria, 22 years old).

At this point in Valéria's narrative-identity space, we notice how the notion of belonging is not exactly associated with being black, but with being a black African woman. In the same way that this process of differentiation happens due to the meeting of interviewees with white and black Brazilians, the African girls bring into discussion the difference of feelings generated after meeting with the other students — as when they felt treated differently from the European students in Brazil, for example.

Another issue that is raised in the speeches of the participants is that of young women's conviviality with a group of students of the same ethnic origin. This notion of integration and group emerged mainly associated with other exchange students. These exchange groups were not referenced in the University in which they were studying at the time of the interview. With regard to the relationship of friendship among the exchange students, participants Diandara and Inês point out that it is a source of great support in the process of staying in Brazil:

It is a student house, there are people from other parts of Brazil, from other countries, and there are many Africans as well. There are Guineans; I think there are nine or eight Guineans. [...] and when there is a party, there is interaction, but that type of interaction like as childhood friends (Diandara, 23 years old, Guinea-Bissauan).

With regard to the categories deriving from the "future" axis, such as "life project" and "professional project", we can see that, although the projects presented by the participants contain and are based on possibilities offered in their hometowns, the desire of articulating other international experiences with demands of marriage and family is maintained. Certainties generated by family experiences of immigration seem to have been being tested in the experience in Brazil, which in some cases ends up associating the life project with models more traditionally designated to the feminine as, for example, in a traditional view of marriage and motherhood. Two aspects should be highlighted with regard to the constitution of a thought considering the future: on the one hand, the "marriage" factor is present in the plans and planning of the participants, even if it is viewed with some uncertainty; and, on the other hand, the weight the family has in the constitution of this planning, execution and maintenance. Thus, two views are exposed and emerged during the interviews, as in Nathália's example:

I want to get married, but I am not sure. I want to marry someone only when I am about 29, 30 years old. I still want to focus more on my studies, to achieve things, at least to have a house (Nathália, 20 years old).

On the other hand, Inês comments:

I intend to stay at my parents' house for as long as I can. Well, I am saying this now, but I do not know what will happen later, but I do not intend to get married so early, I think I will live with my parents for a long time (Inês, 25 years old).

Here we see the influence that the traditional discourses about family have on the life projects of these young women and their role in the definition of marriage. The role of family influence is great in life projects on the African soil (Leandro, 2004; Subuhana, 2009). A factor that stands out and mixes with the question of marriage is the importance of family in the life planning of participants at a reading where there is interaction between traditional conceptions with more contemporary readings about the notion of family.

DISCUSSION

We realize that establishing discussions about the migratory process of these young women in Brazil is supposed to systematize and understand situations of difference, identification, and symbolic violence. These notions, articulated through markers such as ethnicity, nation, gender and "race", historically position themselves as subjects of study on contemporary immigration in Brazil, but gain a new perspective from the notion of intersectionality. According to Juteau (2009), for feminists who study these themes, this type of perspective of study has a double goal: apprehend the relationships between women and ethnic groups and nations; and examine how these factors are articulated in the everyday life of women.

In this field of discussion, both the heterogeneity of the woman category as well as the observation of the need to operationalize certain factors — understood as aspects that contemplate an intersectional analysis of the situation of these contemporary women, *i.e.* age, ethnicity and nationality — are reiterated. This operationalization and exercise of attention to the daily life allow not only to examine unequal discourses that are articulated socially — in view of maintaining asymmetries between people regarding economic, political, cultural, and ideological issues — but to construct changes and resistances in discursive scope. In the interviews, it is noticed, however, that the process of domination can be shown in several ways, for example, in the linking of sexist contents to racist ones present in daily social relationships in Brazil.

Due to factors such as these, we understand that the process of adaptation to the Brazilian university life (mostly white) by these female students had complex aspects in addition to issues already mapped in other published works, such as: differences in eating habits; in clothing; in the distance with regard to family and friends; and with regard to customs of the country of origin (Fonseca, 2009). Narratives of young women allow us to understand the change aspects of social status regarding their experiences in Brazil, as well as to identify certain conflicts in the ethnical racial field that understand certain systems of domination (for example, in their reading about inter-ethnic relationships between Brazilians) and demonstrate existence possibilities different than those lived in their countries of origin.

The Brazilian context, despite a current conception of racial democracy country, presents alarming data on racism and gender violence. According to data from the IBGE (2009), there are about 13 million people self-declared “black” in the country — and, if self-declared “brown” population were added to this total, the number would be 97 million people (almost 6 million more than the contingent self-declared “white”). The context of higher education does not escape this reality. The asymmetries of race and gender follow educational contexts from pre-school to post-graduation in Brazil, with great difference in the access to education, mainly for black and brown, in relation to white people. These differences are accentuated in the course of the rise in educational levels, reaching great disparities in terms of undergraduate and graduate studies (Barreto, 2015).

Regarding the schooling rate, comparatively between whites and blacks, the study of Silva (2013) indicates that the analysis of the years between 2000 and 2010 is representative of the situation, despite the political investees regarding the access of blacks and browns. With regard to students at masters/doctoral training levels, in 2010, the percentage of whites was 80.7%, while the percentage of blacks was 17.1%. With regard to higher education, the percentage of whites was 73.2% and the percentage of blacks was 24.7%. In secondary schools, the number of whites was 54.3% and the number of blacks reached 44.2%. Only in primary schools, the proportion between whites and blacks was different, 47.6% and 51.0% respectively (Silva, 2013). The analysis of trend carried out by Silva (2013) can be complemented with the research of Bittar and Almeida (2006), in which, by analyzing the data from INEP, they found that, although Brazil is the country with the highest number of people with black African origin in the world, behind Nigeria, only 2.8% of the black and brown students complete their studies in higher education.

The impact analysis of integration policies of black students is focused mainly on data from public universities (for instance: Andrade; Teixeira, 2009; Cervi, 2013; Daffon *et al.*, 2013; Fonseca, 2009; Gusmão, 2011; Moraes; Silva, 2011; Souza; Brandalise, 2015; Subuhana, 2009; Turgeon *et al.*, 2014), with an important lack of researches that point data on the presence of black students in private universities. The only exception found was the report of a research carried out in the same institution of the present analysis (Sarriera *et al.*, 2002). In addition to emerging as a field of study that still needs to be deeply researched in Brazil, as a whole, the access of blacks to higher education, in particular in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, needs a contextual analysis, since this state presents, according to data from IBGE in partnership with *Secretaria de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial* – SEPPIR (Brazil, 2013), the lowest number of self-declared blacks in the country.

It is relevant to remember that although federal data show high indicators of quality of life in Southern Brazil (such as lower child mortality and lower illiteracy rates), such data rarely discuss its intersection with other social markers like race and gender. Studies such as of Olinto and Olinto (2000) have already indicated how, in the case of women in Southern Brazil, these social markers are indicators of inequalities in the same regional context. It is worth noting that, therefore, even

if no studies in the context of private universities in the South of Brazil are found, the set of available research points to a latent potential of inequality, prejudice and difficulties of access to the university context in Rio Grande do Sul. Studies carried out in Porto Alegre also indicate that students relate aspects like housing, food, and climate instability (Andrade; Teixeira, 2009). It is important to point out therefore that the Brazilian racialized and sexist context — and particularly the Southern region — contrasts with some expectations of foreign students about Brazil, which are, for instance, associated with an international stereotype of tropicality. Thus, it links images and representations of the country associated with carnival (linked to the international image of the black Brazilian) (Scheyeri; Siqueira, 2008) and its supposed racial democracy, in which the country is presented as a viable and an interesting option for foreign students.

Within the complex panorama that students find in Brazil, we identified, in the speeches of the interviewees, that the process of differentiation with the others occurs in several ways, and encompasses issues related to “race”, ethnicity, and gender as constructs based on a positioning in relation to a situational interlocutor. In this process, sometimes being an African woman is more prominent, sometimes being a black woman takes the central role of the narratives, and in some moments, being a woman characterizes the exercise of herself in this new context. These possibilities of identity positions in the narratives, while organizing the speech, position the interviewees before their audience: university students, overwhelmingly white, from a private university in the extreme South of Brazil. It is worth noting these markers of difference and identification merge in different forms in the speeches of the participants, in a relationship of interlocution.

In terms of coexistence and interpersonal relationships in Brazil, we see that having an interconnection with other students (African or otherwise) is a key factor for the psychosocial feature to mental health protection (Pizzinato, Sarriera, 2008). However, we are worried that they did not highlight the experience in the university as the main source of positive interpersonal relationships — with the exception of some professors of the University, who were highlighted as central figures of affective and instrumental support. In addition, the relations of friendship, mainly with students from other units of education, were due to being compatriots. This type of bond is very positive for social and cultural adaptation of foreigners and experience in new territories — for Gusmão (2011), friendships with people of the same country reduce loneliness and stress and provide cultural communication and social support.

The university experience in Brazil also questioned some family certainties on the project of pre-migratory life, in which the university study abroad was highlighted as a process that would “ensure” the professional future in Africa. The current insecurity regarding the future — far from being a problem — follows in accordance with what many young people live today, characterized by the hedonistic discourse and the discourse of responsibility of the individual, inserted in a neoliberal society, which legitimates individual responsibility as the only determinant factor in their professional success (Valore; Selig, 2010).

In fact, the planning presented by the participants leads us to a reading of the possibilities of life project, from the perspective of gender relations and considering the impact of being a woman in this process. The empowerment of women regarding issues that concern their exercises about themselves, sometimes thinking indeed about getting married or adapting to traditional models of the feminine — but within the time established by them and with moment and forms consonant with other identity possibilities experienced in the Western societies (such as late motherhood, for instance). In addition, this process of autonomy helped them assume responsibilities and take actions before daily situations, which they would not take in their home countries (such as housekeeping and experience racism or exclusion) and that were interpreted as empowering.

It is also worth mentioning the surprise of the participants when they faced a Brazilian reality different from those media representations internationally disseminated. Because of the clash between the propagated and assimilated myths and the concrete and experiential reality of the country, different visions of the participants are related to the discussions and expectations that they had with their respective families before the trip; that is, there is a reality lived by them that contrasts with the reality propagated in relation to Brazil. While Brazil is, according to the participants, portrayed in their countries as a place of racial democracy and multicultural receptiveness, Africa is represented as a continent of backward populations and tribal customs in Brazil (Subuhana, 2009). It is also worth noting the characterization of black Brazilians as submissive to the Western white culture, due to the past of slavery in Brazil. Although it seems to counteract the readings of Africanism by Brazilians (Subuhana, 2009; Fonseca, 2009; Gusmão, 2011), characterizing the Brazilian population of African origin solely by this aspect of the colonial past also reduces and stereotypes the complexity of this inheritance in the cultural formation of the country. Perhaps this differentiation need of African originated Brazilians is a way of dealing with the ethnical and racial aspects characterized as differentiators of Brazilians as a whole.

This entire panorama seems to reiterate issues that were already mapped for more than a decade in the same context, with this population. In a study with students from the same university (Sarriera *et al.*, 2002), they found that the greatest difficulties in the academic level were related to factors such as distance from family and friends, access to housing, unpreparedness of the universities for diversity, as well as a social coexistence permeated by formalities different from the country of origin. It is worth noting that this study (Sarriera *et al.*, 2002) highlighted difficulties of exercising citizenship, which, according to the authors, does not occur without reflection on social aspects such as those listed in this intersectional analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

This research invites us to reflect on the need to articulate critical analyses about the presence of foreign students in Brazil and, especially, those of African origin. In this particular case, considering a well-known history of the country marked by a racist and sexist composition, it seems necessary to reflect not only

on functioning aspects of higher education as an organization, but on the institutional implications that intersect it — and that involve domination discourses related to racism, sexism and xenophobia, as the participants point out. It seems to us that the concreteness of the experiences lived by these young women must be attentive, so that possible difficulties of adaptation in the country are observed in an intersectional way, considering that a network of interpersonal relationships directly reaches fundamental issues of health and well-being of other minority collectives of the Brazilian society. In addition, the university experience in Brazil seems to have contrasted with previous media representations of racial democracy and tropicity of the participants. Apparently, this divergence allowed the discussion of a construction of life project and training with clear influence of family and community trajectories, integrating — not without ambiguity — traditional and contemporary elements of the possibilities of being a woman and a professional in their countries of origin.

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