

Racism and Gender Intersections Among Poor Urban Families The Role Of Inclusive Policies

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how social policies affect the relationships of female beneficiaries with their partners, relatives, friends and neighbours in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, Brazil. Relations between groups can involve gender discrimination, racism and social prejudices, which is understandable within the concept of intersectionality, in comparison to the framework of intergroup competition for scarce resources or according to the perspective of realistic intergroup conflicts. **Methods:** A qualitative methodology combined interviews with beneficiaries of Conditioned Cash Transfers programs (CCT) and other social programs, as well as with focus groups comprising of these beneficiaries, their relatives, friends and neighbours. **Results:** social programs have been able to reduce the impact of poverty and have improved gender empowerment and partners' relationships within the families. However, prejudices and intergroup conflicts emerge between beneficiaries with small children and their friends or neighbours, (mainly childless women who applied but were not considered poor and do not receive social benefits). **Discussion:** Results confirm the hypothesis of realistic intergroup competition. Moreover, racism persists in poor communities, indicating that intersectionality should be included in the framework of affirmative policies and education to promote equality values should be reinforced in order to mitigate race discrimination and intergroup conflicts.

Keywords: Poverty, Social Policies, Gender, Racism, Intersectionality, Intergroup Conflicts

INTRODUCTION

The feeling of deprivation lies in the context of competition for scarce resources and is related to frustration and aggression [1]. According to Maslow "the phenomenon of threatening frustration is closely allied to other threat situations much more than it is to mere deprivation. The classic effects of frustration are also found in other types of threat-traumatization, conflict, rejection, severe illness, actual physical threat, imminence of death, humiliation, isolation, or loss of prestige"[2].

The role of perceptions about social injustice and its intergroup expression in the construction of discriminatory and racist positions starts from the concept of intergroup relative deprivation: the distorted feeling that an out-group – women, blacks, poor people or beneficiaries of a social policy – occupies a situation perceived as unjustifiably better than the in-group. Conflicts of interest would be at the origin of discrimination and racism. Tajfel's theory associates prejudice with symbolic competition, and with relations between categorizations, social asymmetries and discrimination[3]. All these theories articulate individual and ideological differences in intergroup relations.

Poverty studies show that black people are clearly in worse socioeconomic conditions compared to whites in Brazil and the USA. Sherif *et al* suggests that there are real or imagined negative interdependence relations between groups, which would be the source of prejudice or

symbolic discrimination, or facing inter-group competition for scarce resources [4]. Campbell's approach relates this competition and inter-group conflicts as realistic, related to scarce resources [5,6], while Tajfel's theory associates prejudice with symbolic competition, and with relations between categorizations, social asymmetries and discrimination. Racism could be a relevant issue in contexts where the majority of a population is poor and self declared "negro", both groups, beneficiaries and non beneficiaries, poor "negros" and poor whites would be competing for scarce resources or just discriminating due to prejudices. These conflicts should be analysed from the multiple social locations of the social actors, such as race, class, gender and other dimensions of identity intersect, from the theoretical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Walby *et al*, 2012) [7,8,9]. That is the case of the local more homogeneous contexts analysed in this study, where race competitiveness operates on the base of the traditional symbolic vision of racism: the perception that blacks are social threats to the economic and individual and collective security, that they would have anti-normative behaviour that could lead them into the world of drugs and robbery, and these behaviours would justify their social exclusion [10].

Concerning gender discrimination, there are different hypotheses about the relationship between gender and poverty and results indicate that families with male household heads are less likely to live in poverty than households with female heads [11,12]. However, Chant demonstrates that women have the same probability of poverty as men with the same level of education and occupation [13]. For this reason, the concept of women's empowerment is now adopted, which allows the design of affirmative policies in order to overcome gender inequalities in the intersection of other vulnerabilities. To overcome gender inequalities, the concept of democratization of power is transversally adopted in the various social policies of Brazil.

Gender and race discriminations use to be treated separately by social policies, with different types of actions and programmes, ignoring the interactions among different social and power dimensions of discrimination, or the complexity of lived experience within these groups. For example, black women have distinct experiences as a result of the intersection of race and gender that are more than simply the sum of race plus gender, but that their legal interests are only protected insofar as they fit into the "race group" or the "sex group" (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) [7,8]. An advantage of the concept of intersectionality is the integration of diverse forms of competitive, cooperative, hierarchical and hegemonic relations between inequalities and projects in a specific context, making visible the tensions between mutual dimensions of gender, race and class inequalities (Walby *et al*, 2012) [9].

This study explores gender and race relationships amongst poor women, living in poorest neighbourhoods of the city with the highest proportion of black people in Brazil, and where most of them receive benefits from social policies. The objective is to understand how intergroup conflicts emerge in homogeneous contexts, and the intersections of multiple inequalities in the perception of social justice, discrimination and social policies. Qualitative methods are used to ask for women's perceptions and attitudes on discrimination.⁶ Intersections among poverty, racism, gender and women empowerment could indicate how collaboration, competition and conflicts work in poor communities, taking into account the perspective of intergroup competition for scarce resources and multiple positions. And to explore what are the ways in which the interactions of gender and race limit black women's and children's access to better opportunities, even if they are included as beneficiaries in social policies. Moreover, it discusses that social policies can mitigate or promote gender and race conflicts, cooperation and competition adopting an integral perspective of intersectionality.

METHODS

The qualitative methodology includes interviews and focus groups in four municipalities of the Metropolitan Region of Salvador: *Salvador, Camaçari, Lauro de Freitas and Simões Filho* in the State of Bahia, which has the highest proportions of black people in the country. Questions focused on relational assets: values, perceptions, making decision processes, and relationships of beneficiaries with their partners, children, friends and neighbours. Focus groups were applied separately for women and men, including few beneficiaries and mainly close relatives, friends and neighbours, discussing the value attributed to the CCT and its effects on gender, spouses and intergenerational relations.

Interpretation was based on discourse analysis about various themes related to perceptions on changes in relationships and perceptions regarding justice and targeting poorest families to receive benefits from social policies.

RESULTS

Partnership, gender relationships and social policies

Interviews with women confirm previous studies that indicated how the CCT increases female empowerment, since they develop a higher ability to make decisions, encompassing a better self-image in a concrete way, as well as a symbolic meaning for women's self-esteem.¹¹ In addition, women increase their capacity to overcome adverse conditions through relationships of collaboration with partners and children, coping with vulnerabilities and family conflicts.

Men denied the possibility that CCT promotes conflicts with male authority because women receive the benefit. They agreed that this does not cause, but rather avoids conflicts, since it promotes the couple's dialogue to plan the use of the benefit. Both men and women, affirm that in families where there was no conflict, the benefit improved dialogue, especially the dialogue for agreements and economic planning and investment in children. In some cases there were conflicts beforehand, and the couple that was already separated may have more dialogue about the use of resources. In only one case, a man, the beneficiary's ex-husband, stated that he thinks he has the right to share the benefit with the ex-wife, causing personal conflicts, but the woman does not give him the resources. All the men in the group were opposed to this view; the consensus among men is that resources should be used exclusively for children and, to a lesser degree, for women's self-care.

There is a consensus among men and women that the effects of CCT are positive because they generate security and serenity with regards to food and other basic needs of children, particularly during periods of unemployment. The safety of "not starving" in cases of extreme difficulty is the common expression to refer to this sense of security, indicating the potential of CCT to mitigate possible competition for resources and to make plans for future.

Some groups had a kind of union of women in a feminist manner. Sometimes, to stimulate this discussion, the question was asked "what they would think if the benefit were delivered to men, instead of women?". It drew immediate, consensual and furious reaction, all were completely against this possibility. Women are even proud to be receiving some money regularly. Some of them demonstrate their happiness in corporal expressions, they really enjoy being able to go into a bank, to use the card to withdraw their money, to make decisions and to have independence, not having to ask their husbands for their expenses. In focus groups men also confirm this effect, and declare they also are pleased that their women are feeling more independent and have higher self-esteem. Both men and women agree that the benefit improves dialogue, since they develop new patterns of discussion, commitment and agreements on the use of the benefit for the children's wellbeing. In brief, CCT is also mitigating

resource competition in families, improving gender relationships and dialogue, and promoting gender equality, thus reducing women's submission and discrimination.

The beneficiaries interviewed responded superficially, denied or assumed that conflict happens only with other families. In the focus groups, it was asked why it is so difficult exposing affections, conflicts and discrimination in an open way, and some cases emerged.

Almost all women confirmed that their husbands agree and discuss with them about the main objective of the benefit is to cover children's needs, but did not related resources competition. At least three women have developed strategies to prevent conflicts for resources - some hide the fact from husbands and deny they are receiving the benefit, and even when their husbands ask for the government approval, these women lie, and even complain against the government, to convince men that their benefit was denied. They are afraid that their husband would take away the benefit if they knew that wives are receiving it. Other cases are of women who reported that their ex-husbands frequently ask what assets they bought with the benefit, and more specifically, if they used it for the children, for themselves or even spent it on another man. Ex-husbands are particularly aware of women's expenses, as kind of control to prevent women spending money on another man.

In a few extreme situations gender discrimination includes violence and serious pre-existing gender prejudices and discrimination. A women married to a drug-trafficker received a house from the program My House My Life, and she asked for a divorce, since she felt safe to start her life alone; she suffered extreme physical violence and death threats from her husband. When she reported him to the police, his friends broke in and torched the apartment. She will be undergoing psychiatric treatment for years. Another women became pregnant when she was an adolescent; her father threw her out of her home. She was about to become homeless, when she was selected to receive a house from the program. This benefit allowed the father to "forgive" and re-establish family relationships. This woman perceives herself as strongly empowered after receiving three social policies: CCT, housing and a popular credit card for home furniture.

Women developed several mechanisms of in-groups and out-groups collaboration: older siblings support younger siblings in fulfilling conditions to continue receiving benefits (attending and passing exams in school and attending health services) and following up on school activities; poorly educated parents use a small part of the benefits to pay teenagers who have already passed higher school grades to support and tutor their children in school assignments.

Racism and intergroup conflicts

Race/colour discrimination is not so evident in these communities. The majority of interviewees declared themselves as "negro" (black or mixed). Asked whether they have suffered some kind of race/colour discrimination, their answers combine social and race/colour discrimination.

Of 44 interviews there were only three cases of explicit or traditional racism clearly identified. Two cases happened in shopping centres, where workers refused to attend blacks.

As anti-racism law only started to be known recently, people now are "falling into the reality", and understanding situations that were incomprehensible for years. However, Brazilian society has little or no awareness of discrimination, even if it is explicit and aggressive;⁷ and people are not concerned or conscious of subtle demonstrations of discrimination. That is

more likely to happen among the poor, who experience different kinds of discrimination, but do not identify the real reasons for being discriminated against.

Two other women related racism against her daughter at a private school and against their interracial marriage, both are punished with aggressive discrimination. A white woman and her black daughter, living in a very poor neighbourhood, which caused daily suffering and somaticized effects:

"People here of the district are calling my daughter a (bad) smelly black. Some people ask if she is my daughter; and she's discriminated against again and again, (now) she's 20 years old and she's never had a boyfriend, so the people keep calling her a sexy, dumb girl... She has headaches and vomit, she cries a lot because of things people say to her... they say: your daughter is nothing... someone says: "Is this your mother? She cannot be your mother", that's how she calls herself a 'on the shelf' because she does not have a boyfriend."

These cases allow the questioning of theories of racism, as being just inter-group competition for scarce resources, to explain such aggressive behaviour in Brazil, most of them among people at the lowest socio-economic level, with similar economic resources.

Moreover, most of them declared themselves as "negro". These women and girls are seen as "dangerous" or undesirable persons to enter the store and the school, to participate in the neighbourhoods where they live. In these concrete situations, the hypothesis of economic competition is not clear.

Black people living in poverty develop strategies to prevent their children from suffering racism, even after changes in anti-racism laws and an increasing consciousness of their advantages - but these laws also fail in their implementation in real life. This is an issue seriously discussed in domestic relationships.

There would be a symbolic perception of a risk of disrespecting predominant social values: blacks cannot occupy white social spaces, prejudices exist against interracial marriages and reproduction, and this suggests that the hypothesis of intergroup competition would be better analysed in the long term. The presence of black people at school and shopping centres seems like a threat in the future, when youths enter the labour-market or to compete for other future opportunities.

Others interviewed expressed the subtle racism as something difficult to identify or to describe. Inter-race competitiveness in the traditional vision of races can explain this kind of subtle and explicit racism: the perception that blacks are a social threat, have anti-normative behaviour and are involved in drugs and robbery are the mechanisms that justify their social exclusion.

Of 44 interviewees, none consider themselves poor. Asked if they know a poor person, they always identify someone in a worse situation than themselves. Poverty itself is obviously perceived as a label of discrimination, also related to social class and skin colour.

That is why children and the beneficiaries themselves reported that they are discriminated against because they receive social benefits, mainly by neighbours and school colleagues who do not receive it.

Intersectionality of class, gender and race

This research confirmed previous results about female empowerment and self-esteem after receiving CCT benefits, and reaffirms women's dignity in their neighbourhood and social networks, since women's decisions also please their comrades, who, in this behaviour, see changes in women's posture toward effective relationships. It was unexpected to find the word "happiness", used in male focus groups, when men described their perception about changes in women self-esteem. They referred mainly to the effects of the benefit on the psyche of the women who are beneficiaries, in addition to their satisfaction in recognizing that the women developed a better and more mature ability for future planning and resources management, a long-term vision of material and symbolic investments for the family. Men agreed that this new female attitude alleviates the decision-making burden that is expected of men in patriarchal systems, and almost all men declared that they were satisfied to not be so demanded upon as providers, and they are satisfied with the greater autonomy of their partners or ex-companions. They always link this satisfaction with the stability due to having a fixed income, which allows security when unemployed, less stress with economic provision, and a more egalitarian dialogue and mutual responsibility between the couple and with their children, in the medium and long-term. Therefore, gender relations improve with CCT implementation and female empowerment and dialogue, negotiation and collaboration among partners. Benefits also mitigate interpersonal conflicts within the families and inter-gender relationships.

Regarding racism, theories of intergroup relations propose that there are competing racial groups. Both, explicit and subtle racism, are combined. In Brazil, in 1951, an anti-racism law was created to prohibit racial discrimination. However, this law was inefficient and have never been implemented. In 1989, a new law established that racial and religious discrimination are crimes of intolerance, specifying what attitudes are considered racist. However, the population does not identify certain attitudes with racism to denounce it.

The cases show a clear demonstration of racism as racial inferiority based on skin colour, relating phenotypes to undesirable behaviour and threats, with negative feelings and hostile practices against blacks, whose can not clearly identify discrimination. Traditional racism articulates psychological processes (perceptions, feelings and symbols) with relations and competition between groups, based on ideological positions in society. This conception involves many more concepts than just competition for economic resources. It is also about symbolic competitiveness and other social asymmetries, such as being or not being beneficiaries of social policies.

To avoid risks of punishment established by anti-racist legal frameworks, the subtle racism moved to accept differences and reinforced cultural discrimination: it is prohibited to affirm the inferiority of the out-group, but it is allowed to reinforce the superiority of the homo-group, the group of which the person is identified as being a member.

Therefore, even among the poorest women who are beneficiaries of social policies, who live in poorest neighbourhoods, race is an identity category that reinforce exclusion and marginalization for black women and girls, who face limited options of political communities formed either around class and gender, as the target categories of social policies, but also around race, a particular category in this complex intersection.

CONCLUSIONS

Social programs are playing an important role in poverty alleviation and, as an indirect consequence, in improving gender and family relationships and relief from conflicts, promoting

gender dialogue, agreements and collaboration among partners and generations within the family. Women self-esteem and empowerment is the most evident and conscious and pro-equality attitude, as well as social and family networks.

However, poor people show difficulties in talking about discrimination, racism and poverty. Beneficiaries assume their black identity and vulnerabilities, but do not accept their poverty condition. There are limitations in terms of identifying racism, since it is becoming subtle, and people are wary of speaking about this issue. Few cases of traditional racism show evidence that it is a major vulnerability in poor families receiving CCT, and it is necessary to promote anti-racism procedures in education, health and other institutional services, as well as in the communication media.

CCT improves the quality of relationships and collaboration mechanisms among the beneficiaries and their relatives and neighbourhoods. But in some cases, relationships with neighbours and friends can be negatively affected due to competition for scarce resources and discrimination against women with small children and also against black people, even with explicit aggression.

According to the hypothesis of intergroup relative deprivation, competition and inter-group conflicts, conflicts are not related in partners, male and female relationships due to the implementation of targeted social policies. The main discriminated against out-group are blacks. Brazilian society has little or no awareness of race discrimination, although aggressive racism is common and interracial marriage is condemned. Therefore, racism is not explained through the hypothesis of competition for economic resources among people in similar economic conditions, but as a symbolic competition.

Poverty is perceived as a label of discrimination; no poor person wants to admit that they are poor. Beneficiaries of social policies are seen by some of their friends and neighbours as occupying a situation perceived as unjustifiably better than the in-group. Conflicts would be at the origin of social discrimination and racism, respectively. Particularly racism in poor communities, even in the absence of real competition, confirming Tajfel's theory which associates prejudice with symbolic competition, in the perspective of relations between categorizations, social asymmetries and discrimination.³

Finally, although the majority of the population observed share class, gender and race disadvantages, black women and girls accumulate additional unfair treatment and exclusion. Even in the poorest contexts and neighbourhoods, among the poorest women who are beneficiaries of social policies, there are differences and conflicts, and the experiences of black women and girls put in evidence the intersection of class, gender and race discriminations. Race is an identity category that reinforces exclusion and marginalization for black women and girls, who face limited options of political communities formed either around class and gender. These target categories of social policies should be integrated by race, a particular category in this complex intersection that limits the achievement of the objective to overcome poverty and inequalities, and it is recommended to integrate new components in the design and goals of anti-poverty and women empowerment policies, in order to intersect additional actions of deconstruction of racism, of mitigating race discrimination and promotion of racial equality.

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