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# Gender, Race and Diversity: Professional Trajectories of Black Businesswomen

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## Abstract

Since the beginning of this century diversity management has been present as an important topic of studies in the field Administration in Brazil. However, research on this topic that focuses on the Black population is still scarce. In order to contribute to fill this gap, this article brings the results of a socio-anthropological investigation conducted through the biographical method and ethnographic fieldwork on the professional trajectories of two generations of Black businesswomen. These trajectories were analyzed from the societal contexts that framed them and considering gender, race and class in an intersectional perspective. The results reveal that the career paths of the second generation were built in a much more favorable societal context. However, they also show that we are still very far from gender and racial equality in the Brazilian corporate world.

**Keywords:** gender; race; diversity; intersectionality; professional trajectories of Black businesswomen.

## Introduction

More than 15 years after the publication of the pioneering article written by Fleury (2000), the diversity management is consolidated as an important research topic in the field of organizational studies in Brazil. This theme has already been the subject of critical analyses that sought to denounce its ideological character (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004), or reveal the distance between the formal discourse and the daily practice of companies in this area (Saraiva & Irigaray,

2009). However, research on diversity management that addresses the Black population is still scarce in our country. For this reason, Costa and Ferreira (2006) point out that the racial dimension is one of the great gaps of the studies on diversity management carried out in Brazil; and Barbosa (2009) speaks of the denial of race in Brazilian organizational studies. Writing a few years later, Rosa (2014) stated that this gap has not yet been fulfilled, and Jaime, Barreto and Oliveira (2018) argued that although the research on racial issues has been present in the field of the social sciences in Brazil for over a century, this theme is largely forgotten in the field of management studies in the Brazilian society.

This article is an attempt to fill this gap by analyzing the professional trajectories of two generations of Black businesswomen in view of the theoretical lens related to gender, race and class in an intersectional perspective. In fact, in the field of social sciences, but close to organizational studies, there is already some research that deals with race in the business world focusing on this professional category. This is the case of Santana's (1999) study of Black professionals who have achieved middle or top management positions in banking organizations. It represents the first effort in Brazil to address Black executives; however, it differs from the research presented here for at least three reasons: (a) its author has delimited the empirical research in the city of Salvador (BA), whereas one is focused on the city of São Paulo (SP); (b) he opted to focus on middle-aged Black individuals with a more senior profile, whereas this research compared two generations of Black businesswomen; (c) his research did not relate the careers paths of the individuals interviewed to the societal context, which contrasts with this effort to relate such trajectories to the debates about race in the public sphere, as well as the responses produced by the corporate world to this socio-political agenda. In another study, Santana (2014a, 2014b) analyzed the trajectories of Black professionals in the public sector in Salvador.

Ladeia (2006), in turn, approached the access and the professional mobility of Black professionals in Brazilian companies, also circumscribing the empirical research in the city of São Paulo (SP). He collected narratives of Black professionals, interviewed Human Resources managers to raise their perceptions about the racial issue in the corporate world and sought to relate the occupational paths of these Black professionals to the diversity initiatives developed by the companies in which they worked. However, his effort is also different from the one that is undertaken here. This is because, although his empirical research included interviews conducted with young people, average age between twenty and thirty and located in different positions in the organizational hierarchy, none of them were executives, understood here as the professional that occupies the levels of middle management or top management. They also did not enter in the corporate world through trainee programs, that is, they were not being prepared to take command posts. In addition, Santana (1999) and Ladeia (2006) did not privilege the gender issue in their work.

Souza (2015) focused the gender issue on his study of Black individuals in positions of command in the labor market. However, her research was conducted in Belo Horizonte and she did not take into account in her analysis the socio-political context that frames the trajectories of the professionals she interviewed.

The international literature also presents a gap in the analysis of the professional trajectories of Black businesswomen. This is even if there are abundant studies that focus on businesswomen (white ones), or on Black businessmen. In fact, there are already studies that analyze the career paths of Black women who have held leadership positions in schools (Jean-Marie, 2013) or in higher

education institutions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). It is equally true there are some research focusing on Black women who have built their occupational paths in indistinct spaces of the labor market (Allen & Lewis, 2016; Barnes, 2015; Sokoloff, 2014). However, they do not concentrate the attention on the corporate world. Moreover, in the specific case of Barnes (2015), the analysis is directed to the strategies developed by Black women to reconcile their career projects with the demands of family and communitarian life.

Therefore, we present in this article some results of an ethnographic research about Black businesswomen carried out between 2006 and 2011 in São Paulo (SP). The research focused on the corporate world, understood as the one composed of the largest private national companies and the transnational corporations that operate in Brazil. So that, the study does not cover the public administration, the Small and Medium Enterprises, or the Black entrepreneurs.

This article is organized into six parts. Still in this introduction the research problem will be presented. Some information about the theoretical discussion as well as the methodological approach will be provided in the two subsequent sections. Then, the professional trajectories of the first and second generation of Black businesswomen will be analyzed. Lastly, the conclusions will be displayed.

### *Research problem*

In order to present the research problem, let us start with two pieces of information. The first one is that a social, racial, and gender profile mapping carried out in 2015 by Ethos Institute (2016) shows according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* – IBGE), in that year 51.4% of the Brazilian population were made up of women, who represented 43.6% of the Economically Active Population (EAP). In turn, 52.9% of Brazilian citizens were Black and of mixed race, corresponding to 52.8% of the EAP. Even so, the participation of individuals of these segments in the personnel of the 500 largest companies that operate in the country was very low. The women were represented in 31.3% of the middle management positions and 13.6% of the top management positions. Black people, in turn, were represented in only 6.3% of the middle management positions and 4.7% of the top management positions in these companies. Taking more specifically the situation of Black women, inequality was even more striking. They occupied 1.6% of the middle management positions and 0.4% of the top management positions in the 500 largest companies acting in Brazil. This means there were only two Black women among the 548 directors (Black and non-Black of both sexes) in these companies.

The second one is that in August of 2006, the Human Rights and Minorities Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, held a meeting with representatives of the Black movement, the Public Ministry of Labor (*Ministério Público do Trabalho* – MPT), and the Brazilian Federation of Banks (*Federação Brasileira de Bancos* – Febraban) in order to discuss the inclusion of Black people into the labour market of the financial system. This meeting resulted from the establishment, by MPT, of public civil examinations against the private banks by request of the Black movement (*Comissão de Direitos Humanos e Minorias* – CDHM), 2007; (Lopes, 2000, 2007). In response to this social pressure, many banking organizations have implemented trainee programs towards the inclusion of young Black individuals.

These two pieces of information signal the presence of two distinct subjects. Initially a first generation of Black businesswomen, understood as middle-aged Black professionals, with an average age of 50, who had initiated their career trajectories at the end of the 1970s, in a historical context in which companies acting in Brazil were not concerned about diversity management. Then, following a second generation of Black businesswomen, a group made up of young Black women who arrived in the labor market in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century at a time in which gender and racial issues had become a cause of fierce political dispute in Brazil. As a result, companies started to “recycle” discourses on gender and race relating them to diversity management (Jaime, 2018).

Actually, because of their age and recent entrance into the corporate world, the representatives of this second generation are not in managerial positions yet, but are taking part in trainee programs as potential managers. Consequently, when talking about them we are referring more precisely to a second generation of Black businesswomen with developing careers.

This scenario leads to the following research questions:

1. What changes happened in the career trajectories of Black businesswomen from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
2. How do these changes reflect the transformations that occurred in the Brazilian society, especially with regard to the racial issue, during that period?
3. What consequences do these transformations have on Black businesswomen’s racial and gender identities?

Before answering these questions, we present below some clarification on the theoretical discussion and on the methodological approach and research strategies.

## **Theoretical discussion**

This section is dedicated to the presentation of some theoretical discussions that will be mobilized to understand the professional trajectories of Black businesswomen. It is divided into four sections. Initially, some general considerations about the concept of gender are made. Then the same is accomplished for the idea of race. Subsequently, discussions on gender, race, and class from a perspective of intersectionality and consubstantiality are presented. Finally, considerations around diversity management are displayed.

### *Gender*

In her classic article, Scott (1988) says gender concerns the ways each society elaborates its meaning concerning sexual differences, and structures the relations between men and women. Thus, these differences are not given in essence but are being constructed and reconstructed. When opened the field of gender studies in the 1970’s, several authors denounced the universality of male domination. They argued every society, whatever its familiar organization model and its economic base, was structured from male supremacy (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). This perspective is questioned by socio-anthropological contemporaneous debates.

The intention is to overcome the static way that some analysts see gender relations. Bourdieu (2001), for example, insisted on the idea of male domination. On the one hand, for the construction of his argument, he criticizes the presupposed biological determination, when advocating that what really happens is a search for legitimacy in a relationship of domain, inscribing in nature what is, in reality, a naturalized social construction. His effort aims to unveil the historical mechanisms of producing inequalities, being partly specific agents, such as the family, the school, the Church and the State. On the other hand, at his approach everything goes as if there were only efforts to maintain, and not also to transform the domination mechanisms. Locked to gender habitus which are inculcated through socialization processes, women, and even men, would not be able to redefine the hegemonic gender relations. Therefore, the sociologist writes back to the advances of the feminist movement, above all since the 1970s, as well as to the theoretical production of intellectual feminists (Fournier, 2002). This is an approach that is unable to explain certain social phenomena.

An alternative for it is provided by Moore (1994, 2000). She maintains gender identity is not something passive, acquired all at once by socialization; and supports the idea there is a more complex relation between gender identity and gender discourses, that is, between gender while constructed in operations of significance, and gender as it is constantly experienced, negotiated, and renegotiated by social individuals. She highlights society itself has a multiplicity of gender discourses, both contradictory and conflicting, that operate in different social contexts. Although hierarchically ordered, these gender discourses are liable to a historical change. In this way it would be possible to not only understand the hierarchical nature of gender relations produced in each social context, but also the transformation efforts within the pattern of these relations.

Another key issue in contemporary debates in this field concerns the deconstruction of the idea of gender as something related to a unified identity, based on the category of "women." If a person is a woman, it certainly is not all that this person is, because gender identity establishes intersections with other social localizations such as class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. In this way, talking about women in the plural, would be more adequate than thinking about this identity from the pretense of homogeneity (Butler, 2011). Brah (1991), in turn, asked how gender difference is linked to differences and antagonisms organized around other markers such as race and class. For her, it is essential to think about these interconnections not from metanarratives, or universalizing explanations, but as relations historically contingent and specific to certain contexts. We will return this point later. Before, we highlight some aspects concerning the idea of race.

## *Race*

With regard to race, the starting point in this article is the assumption that race does not exist as biologists have demonstrated for over 60 years (Jacquard, 1986; Cavalli-Sforza & Cavalli-Sforza, 2002). However, despite this, many people still think and act as if it does exist. So that, the idea of race remains important to comprehend the dynamics of social relations, as many social scientists argued (Banton, 2000; D. Fassin, 2006; E. Fassin, 2006; Guillaumin, 1986; Guimarães, 2002, 2003; Munanga, 2004a). Through a play on words, Guillaumin (1986) makes this point very clear: No, race does not exist. And yet it does. Certainly, it is not what it is said to be, but it is, however, the most tangible, real, and brutal of realities. So, in this article we understand race as a social and political construction, an instrument of domination and exclusion (Guimarães, 2002, 2005;

Munanga, 2004a). We also follow Fassin (2010), who signals the importance of a new research agenda on the race issue. For him, it is precisely because races do not exist biologically that one has to be interested in what drives our societies to make it exist in common language and scholar discourse, in ways of thinking as in the ways of acting. In that way, thinking about race is taking into account the discussions that take place in the public sphere; the disputes fought in the political arena.

In the Brazilian case, the political disputes around the issue of race fought in the last 20 years show a break with the discourse of racial democracy, which had been hegemonic in the country since its inception in the 1930s (Guimarães, 2006, 2017; Munanga, 2004b). Clearly, this transformation did not happen from one moment to the other. It is the result of at least two factors developed some years ago. On the one hand, studies and research conducted by social scientists since the late 1960s that demonstrated adequately enough the existence of racial inequality in Brazil (Bastide & Fernandes, 2008; Fernandes, 2008; Hasenbalg, 1979; Hasenbalg & Silva, 1992). On the other hand, the efforts accumulated by The Brazilian Black movement that since the 1930s, using different discourses and distinct political strategies, had been denouncing the presence of racism in this country (Andrews, 1998; Barcelos; Pahim; 1993; 1999; Santos, 2007).

Let it be clear that race relations are not thought of in this paper as those occurring between distinct biological groups, but rather as relations between groups that employ the idea of race in structuring their actions and reactions among themselves (Milles, 2000a). Thus, as Cashmore (2000) points out, the study of race relations must pay attention to changing events and interpret them in the context of historical, political, and social conditions. Following this line of reasoning, it may be suggested not every use of the word race points to the presence of racism. It may even have an inverse sense, reflecting engagement in the anti-racism struggle. This seems to be the core of Banton's argument (2000), for whom the main question is not what comes to be considered race, but the manner in which the term is employed. Thus, it is true that the idea of race lent itself to the marginalization of segments of the population, as was the case with scientific racism, which originated in the nineteenth century and marked the first half of the twentieth century, being based on the explicit association between the biological and intellectual, aesthetic, and moral (Guillaumin, 1986, Munanga, 2004a; Wieviorka, 1998). This is also the case with contemporary forms of racism, which emerged at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and which are anchored in concepts such as culture and identity (Wieviorka, 1998). However, the idea of race can be utilized by the same marginalized segments as a strategy to fight against this marginalization. It can likewise be mobilized by other agents, in other ways. These issues are best understood through the concept of racialization.

According to Milles (2000b), the term racialization has been used to refer to any process or situation in which the idea of race is introduced to define and qualify a specific population, its characteristics, and its actions. Thus for him, in its broadest use, the ideological content of the process of racialization is not necessarily racist. Milles (2000b) advocates it is necessary to analyze the senses built around the idea of race and considers the concepts of racism and racialization should be treated as analytically distinct. This perspective is corroborated by Fassin (2010). For him racialization is often seen as the expression of individual and intentional, or collective and institutional racism. However, racialization is not limited to these forms. Beyond them, for example, is when it concerns the racial identification of a group that recognizes itself as Black, and mobilizes itself as such to establish itself as a political force. Fassin (2010) suggests in this case it is possible to

reverse the reasoning, and considers it is the refusal to accept this recognition that is problematic. Thus, according to him, although racialization is initially the imposition of an explicitly or implicitly racial category on individuals and groups, usually to dominate, exploit, or exclude them, it is however a more complex phenomenon.

In order to deal with this complexity, Fassin (2010) suggests racialization is problematized not as a uniform and univocal phenomenon, but as an ideological category that expresses itself in different ways according to the occasions, contexts, and groups that refer to or give rise to it. He then warns it is necessary for the researcher to refine his analytical tools to cope with the emergence of the race issue in the public sphere along with its multiple meanings and objectives.

But neither race nor gender can be thought in an isolated way. Both categories gain in intelligibility when thought from a perspective of intersectionality and consubstantiality, along with other social markers of difference.

### *Gender, race, and class in a perspective of intersectionality and consubstantiality*

These warnings highlight the importance of concepts worked in the field of gender studies and feminist epistemology, such as intersectionality, consubstantiality and coextensibility. The term intersectionality was forged by the African-American jurist, professor and anti-racism activist Kimberlé Crenshaw. It dates back to Black American feminism from the 1970s, which had in Patricia Hill Collins and Angela Davis, two of the most important representatives (Hirata, 2014).

Kimberlé Crenshaw was interested in understanding how the interdependence of power relations in terms of race, sex/gender, and class contributes to structuring the experiences of women in general, and Black women in particular. She was also concerned in how this interdependence makes them affected by the inequalities produced and reproduced in various spaces of social life, such as family, education, and work (Crenshaw, 1991, 2002). This led her to signal the analytical profitability of the notion of intersectionality. According to her, it is a concept that aims to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. More specifically it allows the researcher to pay attention to how racism, patriarchy, class oppression, and other discriminatory systems create basic inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and others.

The issue of the intersection between gender, race, and class was addressed by many representatives of Black feminist epistemology. Collins (2002), for example, focused on the intersection of oppression systems based on these identities, and also on sexuality, in order to understand the experiences of Black women. Because of the objectives of this article, we would like to emphasize the passage of her work in which she addresses the oppression of these women in the interstitial space between family and work. She recovers the literature that addresses the work of Black women on the slave colonial system. Collins also discusses the participation of Black women in the domestic work and in the professions that have less prestige and remuneration, such as nursing assistants and saleswomen in fast-food chains. Furthermore, she drew attention to the unpaid work that these women perform in the family context, for the benefit of their partners and even the social policies implemented by the State. In other words, compared to other social groups, Black women are historically over represented in jobs that are economically exploitative, physically demanding, and intellectually deadening.

Moreover, as the traditional American gender ideology is built on the public/private binary separating the family households from the paid labor market, the Black woman came to be seen as less "feminine," because she works for pay outside the home, and thus competes with men. Consequently, her work takes her away from her children. Otherwise placed, Collins (2002) demonstrated how the articulation between gender, race and class operated to put Black women in subaltern positions in the labor market, while playing crucial roles in the organization of family life and ethnic community. Additionally, she discusses the drama experienced by the few Black women who achieved social mobility, reaching managerial positions in the public or private sector. This drama refers not only to the isolation in which they are in their workspaces, but the difficulty of finding conjugal partners, especially if the search falls on Black men. This is because they do not find many men from this ethnic-racial group in this class stratum.

As pointed out above, the issue of intersectionality was present in activists and theorists of Black feminism such as bell hooks and Angela Davis. In "Race and Gender," bell hooks (2019, p. 89) states "all women in this nation [the United States of America] know that their status is different from that of Black/non-white women." She adds these women have known this since childhood, because when they were watching television or reading magazines, they saw only their image. And then she concludes all white women know whiteness is a category of privilege, regardless of whether they recognize or deny this fact. From this reasoning, she builds a critique of the reluctance that led white feminist thinkers to recognize the importance of race. But she also emphasized the work of Black activists to put racism at the center of discussions about gender inequalities, laying as the basis for an anti-racism feminist movement.

Angela Davis was certainly one of those activists. In "Women, Race and Class", Davis (2016) articulates racism and sexism with capitalist dynamic. She interprets the history of the racial issue in the United States, evidencing the subordinate role that Black women have occupied in it. The participation of these women in slave labor, their engagement in the suffragette movement and in the campaign for civil rights are themes worked by the author. She also denounces the fact that housework falls disproportionately on women's (especially Black women) shoulders. Finally, like hooks, Angela Davis is part of a generation of African-American intellectuals who drew attention to intersectionality, simultaneously as an analytical category and as an instrument of political action.

However, the relevance of this concept in social analysis was problematized by French sociologist and feminist Danièle Kergoat (2010). She questioned the geometric character of this notion, arguing that thinking in terms of cartography results in a naturalization of analytical categories. She stated, like the notion of multipositionality, the idea of intersectionality presents a problem, because, from his point of view, "there are not exactly 'positions' or, more specifically, these are not fixed." These positions are inserted into dynamic relationships; they change constantly, involving complex negotiations. She suggested instead of thinking about the imbrication between gender, race, class and other social markers of difference, it is better to investigate how they influence each other. So she proposes the concepts of consubstantiality and coextensibility. With these terms, she sought to emphasize social relations of class, race and gender are consubstantial, that is, "they form a knot that cannot be untied at the level of social practices, but only from the perspective of sociological analysis" (p. 94). They are also co-extensive, which means that "when developing... they reproduce and co-produce each other" (p. 94). In other words, she



emphasizes "the dynamic and complex intersection of the set of social relations, each printing its mark on the others, adjusting the others and building itself in a reciprocal way" (p. 100).

Kergoat (2010) also argued analysis should never reify these categories. To do so the historical imperative is necessary. It means these categories need to be historicized, since "they have a structure that allows their permanence, but also undergo changes that correspond to historical periods and events that can accelerate their course." This warning is especially important in this article, since in it are compared two generations of Black businesswomen who built their professional paths in different societal contexts. Finally, she drew attention to how the dominated are able to subvert these categories of domination, emphasizing this subversion is only able to change the social relationships if it is the result of a collective action.

It is not the intention of this article to evaluate which of those concepts is most pertinent to the understanding of the forms of subjugation experienced by Black women. The position of Hirata (2014) is subscribed here. According to her, there is a convergence between them, since both propose to not hierarchize the forms of oppression. Hirata argues if an author like Patricia Hill Collins considers intersectionality as "one of the ways to combat multiple and imbrided oppressions" being at one time a "knowledge project" and a "political weapon," this idea is realized by Danièle Kergoat, when she affirms the importance of thinking at the same time about dominations, precisely not to contribute to their reproduction (p. 70).

Hirata (2014) recommends, then, it is interesting "to resume these analytical categories to advance knowledge of the dynamics and interdependence of social relations and in the fight against multiple conjugated forms of oppression." She advises both categories be assumed instead of one or the other. According to Hirata (2014), this has been done in Brazil in the studies undertaken, among other researchers, by Nádia Guimarães and by herself. These are researches that focus on inequalities that mark not only the professional trajectories of men and women, but also the career paths of white and Black men, and white and Black women. Such research reveals white and Black women have more stable trajectories in lower prestigious occupations whose working conditions are more precarious, such as domestic employment, an activity in which Black women are more present. They also show women in these two racial groups are more subject to unemployment, while white and Black men predominate in formal jobs and self-employed work, although Black individuals are to a lesser extent.

In the field of organizational studies, Alvesson and Billing (2009), Ely and Meyerson (1999) and Holvino (2010), among others, have brought attention to the issue of interseccionalidade and consubstantiality, when affirming that organizations are not simply typified by gender; they are also crossed by class, ethnicity and sexuality.

### *Diversity management*

The theme of diversity management has existed within the research agenda of organizational studies since the end of the twentieth century, and its origin can be found in the United States. It is associated with affirmative action policies implemented in the country in the late 1960s, after the end of racial segregation. These policies sought to correct the historical disadvantage that certain social groups, including African Americans, had in accessing education, health, and employment (Collins, 1997). In this social–historical context, several papers on this

theme have been published in the United States since the 1990s. Among them, the contributions made by Cox and Blake (1991) and Ely and Thomas (1996) stand out due to the international notoriety that these authors gained as references on the subject. The central point of these authors' arguments is the same: if diversity is managed well, business performance improves, meaning an important source of competitive advantage for the companies. This occurs because an organization that has a consistent diversity management program attracts and retains the best talents, forming working teams with individuals who have different cultural repertoires. Consequently, they become more creative, innovative, and able to meet the varied consumer demands of a multicultural society.

In the Brazilian context, Maria Tereza Leme Fleury's article was the pioneer in addressing this subject. In it, Fleury (2000, p. 20) endorses the view of authors such as Taylor Cox and David Thomas, and suggests diversity can be defined as "a mix of people with different identities interacting in the same social system, [in which] coexist majority and minority groups." And according to this definition, she points out managing diversity means "planning and executing systems and organizational practices of Human Resource management in order to maximize the potential advantages of diversity and minimize its disadvantages." She also emphasizes this process should add value to the organization. Briefly, according to Fleury (2000) diversity management is an administrative methodology that intends to contribute to the improvement of the company's performance.

This mainstream on diversity management in organizations remains active in more recent studies in the field of administration, such as those of Cho, Kim and Mor Barak (2017) and Mehng, Sung and Leslie (2019) who have followed the same managerial vision. Both researches explore the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance. Cho et al. reinforce this association brings positive results to companies, although respondents in their investigation admit to having a lower propensity to implement diversity management. Similarly, Mehng, Sung and Leslie (2019), in their exploration of the relationship of diversity with the cultural aspects of South Korea, argue gender diversity has increased in the Korean workplace, resulting in the need for adopting Human Resources management practices that help addressing the challenges of this new reality. The authors emphasize South Korean culture is traditionally characterized by a rigid hierarchy of gender, which can hinder the recognition of Koreans that diversity is a resource that provides improvements in business performance. Therefore, this perspective is established as a clear managerial approach, exempting itself from a critical appraisal of this administrative methodology.

However, Cappelle, Silva, Vilas Boas and Brito (2002) go against this economic logic about the advantages of diversity in organizations, emphasizing that it actually elevates corporate conflicts. The study refers to gender relationships in a predominantly male organizational context. The authors emphasize since there has been a greater hiring of a heterogeneous workforce, there is also a need for managing contradictions in these work relations. They also signal strengthening inequalities limit female work and do not allow the exploration of the richness of diversity by the organization.

For anthropologist Livia Barbosa (2002), diversity management is a response from the business world to Black, feminist and LGBT movements. The author points out the understanding of these movements cannot stop in the assumption that it is profit the great factor that leads companies to develop actions of this nature. To say that within the capitalist system, the main goal of companies is to make profits, is to say the obvious. The question that arises, she warns, is why in

certain contexts the achievement of profit involves formulating certain discourses and practices related to demands of society. Among them, for example, the agenda of sustainability and diversity.

Following this line of reasoning, we understand diversity management allows transnational corporations to respond to the contemporary social and political agenda structured around the politics of identities. In this way, the State and the social movements organized around this issue are also part of the complex game of diversity in organizations. Consequently, even if companies cannot add value to the business through their diversity management practices, they may be required to implement them. And this could be the more consistent, the more incisive the pressures of these social movements, or the more forceful the regulatory frameworks of public policies on combating racism, sexism, LGBTphobia and other forms of intolerance in the workplace (Jaime, 2015).

## **Methodological approach and investigation strategies**

The research method was qualitative, based on what Olivier de Sardan (2008) denominates as a socioanthropological approach, and Bertaux (2006) as an ethnosociological perspective. Basically, a double investigation strategy was used.

As for the first generation of Black executives, the life stories of four of these individuals were gathered. For the selection of the interviewees, some requirements were taken into account. Firstly, as at the time when the fieldwork was carried out there was no association that brought together Black business people, we used different networks to locate them (professionals who were following a graduate program in Human Resource Management, NGO activists, business leaders, the interviewees themselves). With regard to the Black identity of these subjects, it was taken into account the classic orientation that identities are mirror games involving self-identification and identification by others. Thus, if someone indicated a person as a Black businesswoman, this was taken as an important clue. If this person agreed to participate in the research, it was decided she could be considered as one. Then, regarding the socioeconomic issue, we consider as executives, professionals who occupy middle management or top management positions in the corporate world, understood as the one formed by large private national companies and transnational corporations operating in Brazil. Finally, for this first generation, no sector of economic activity was privileged for two reasons: (a) these women may have built their professional trajectories through companies in different segments; (b) given the very low representation of Black women in top management positions, as the quantitative data cited in the introduction attest, choosing a sector of the economy would heighten the difficulties in finding individuals to be interviewed.

The biographical narratives were reconstructed through what Kaufmann (2007) designates as comprehensive and Olivier de Sardan (2008) as socioanthropological interview. For Kaufmann (2007), in the comprehensive interview the researcher must assume an empathic posture and grope until he finds the good question, that is: not the one given by his guide, but the one that is always to be discovered from what has just been said by the interviewee. According to Olivier de Sardan, in the socioanthropological interview the researcher's main objective is to understand as finely as possible the logics of perception and action of his interlocutors. For both, the researcher should facilitate the production of a discourse, of a narrative, by the interviewee. Narrative is thought here

in the minimalist sense proposed by Bertaux (2006), for whom a discourse takes on the narrative form when one person tells another, researcher or not, episodes of his lived experience.

The interviews were transcribed, and their analysis followed the recommendations of Bertaux (2006), Crapanzano (1984) and Kofes (1994; 2001). For these authors, when resorting to this method it is important the researcher avoids to be imprisoned in oppositions such as macrosocial versus microsocial; objective reality versus subjective reality; society versus individual; structure versus action; history versus biography. This caveat points to a perspective of complementarity. From this perspective, to narrate a biography, to tell the life history of an individual is to talk about his interpretations about his experience, the choices he made during his journey, therefore of microsocial and subjective reality. But it is also to address the structural constraints that arise in the path of this individual, of the societal context (space and time) in which this trajectory was built, that is, the macrosocial dimension, the objective reality.

Regarding the second generation of Black businesswomen, a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1998) was carried out. The fieldwork involved conducting participant observation in a transnational corporation of the financial sector which has a diversity program that was considered a reference in Brazil at that time. Such a program includes distinct support groups (women, Black people, people with disabilities, and LGBTs), besides a diversity committee composed of members representing these groups, the Department of Human Resources and the business areas.

At the end of the ethnographic fieldwork, comprehensive or socioanthropological interviews (Kaufman, 2007; Olivier de Sardan, 2008) with members of both the women's support group and the Black support group were conducted. The diversity manager and the director of Human Resources of the company were also interviewed. Human Resources managers and young Black businesswomen of other companies were also heard. Finally, in order to understand the social inscription of this program, interviews with representatives of distinct agents who brought up the diversity issue to the Brazilian public sphere were carried out. Among these agents, it can be mentioned international organizations, State, Black movement, Unions, think tanks supported by companies, and consulting firms specialized in diversity management. Altogether, about fifty professionals were interviewed and the interviews took an average of two hours each.

To make the research feasible this part of the investigation was concentrated on the banking segment. This choice was basically directed by one reason. In the context of contemporary capitalism, companies within the financial sector, because of their growing profits, have been the main targets of pressures for inclusion, made by Brazilian social movements working on the human rights agenda. This is due to the fact that a victory within this economic segment could spread, via organizational mimicry (DiMaggio & Powell, 2012), to companies in other sectors of the economy, which would see in the diversity initiatives of the organizations of this segment, best practices to be imitated.

## **The first generation of Black businesswomen**

The first generation of Black businesswomen is formed by women who have built their careers in an unfavorable societal context. With regard to the issue of race, there was no form of support for any case of prejudice or racial discrimination. Brazil was living in a military dictatorship established in 1964. Thus, there were restrictions on mobilization within the civil society. The

modern Black movement was only beginning to emerge within the country with the formation of the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU) in 1978. From the State side, there was no public policy, neither to punish acts of racial discrimination in more concrete forms, nor to eliminate racial inequalities (Barcelos, 1999; Pahim, 1993; Santos, 2007). In addition, the MNU was inspired by Marxist ideology. Consequently, the Black movement and this first generation of Black businesswomen followed quite separate paths (Andrews, 1998; Hanchard, 2001; Pahim, 1993). The Black businesswomen avoided bonds with the militancy very strongly. The movement, in its turn, undervalued these individuals, attributing to them the blemish of "Black bourgeois."

Black businesswomen of this generation experienced situations of prejudice and racial discrimination in the corporate world. With regard to the issue of gender, all the representatives of this generation interviewed highlighted the difficulties that women found in the labor market in the late 1970s. They noticed inequalities in payment in the development of their career in comparison to their male colleagues, and reported situations of moral and/or sexual harassment experienced, in addition to other forms of symbolic violence. They also indicated their condition of exception in the corporate world when they reached managerial positions, since they did not see many women, or any Black women, in similar positions.

The following reports make this evident. One of the interviewees told when she worked in a bank, a professional with whom she had previously worked at a marketing research institute had requested his hiring as an assistant. However, the reception of the head of the department was terrible. *"Oh my god! Did you bring a Black woman here?". It was my colleague who told me this. She also said to me that she answered him the following: 'You asked us to hire a competent person!'"*

The veiled character of racism was perceived by another Black businesswoman interviewed. She made this evident when talking about her relationship with one of the company's directors, who for a few years was her boss:

He didn't want me in the company, clearly he didn't want me there. He never trained me, mentored me or at least had a friendly conversation. Never. He didn't even address me like this: 'Good morning! Are you all right?'. On the contrary, he was hostile, he always asked for an audit on my work. I think his dream was to find some mistake that could justify that I got fired. Could you imagine what is to work for three or four years with a person like that?. (Joana, interviewed #1, 2016)

When it did not occur through direct insult or a subtly perceived rejection, racism appear through stereotype. The Black woman does not fit in the image of the executive that is built in the business world. The Black businesswomen who worked with marketing research cited above told an experience that embarrassed her:

I once went to see a possible client. We had just spoken by phone. When we met in person, he said to me: "Wow, I imagined you so different! I imagined you lower, white...". She said that a little embarrassed. I often felt this strangeness in the eyes of clients, because I didn't deal with assistants, I usually negotiated directly with managers, with the professionals who hired the research. (Mara, interviewed #2, 2016)

For this first generation of Black Businesswomen, sometimes things went not indirectly, but through explicit racial injury. Another interviewed narrated the following situation that she went through:

At that time sexual harassment was very common. The logic of the supervisors of the production line was as follows: If you don't fuck with me, you will not receive a promotion! They preferred the white girls, so fortunately it didn't happen to me. But as a result they put me in the worst jobs, in sectors where there were more problems. When demand fell, the headquarters in the United States requested staff cuts. So at one point, they said they were going to fire I don't know how many people from the production. So, they collected the badges of the employees to make the evaluation. Upon picking up my ID card, a white supervisor said the following to one of the directors: "You can cut this, because she's a rubble and besides, she's Black!". I wasn't fired because another supervisor with whom I had worked and who considered me a good employee asked my transfer to his team. But I heard the guy say those words and it shocked me. And absolutely nothing happened to him. (Vanda, interviewed #3, 2016)

And in the following account she narrates an experience that reveals the extreme to which the sexist and racist posture can reach:

Once, something happened I didn't expect. I knew that it was a unionist strategy. I had taken a training that prevented us to the fact that when they sit at a negotiating table with a woman, they try to embarrass her somehow so she could lose focus on what is being discussed. However, I confess that I didn't expect it to happen to me, I wasn't ready that day. It was a meeting of electronics companies with several unions. We were at a table and, as was usual, on one side there were the representatives of the companies and on the other side the representatives of the unions. One group facing the other. In front of me a tall white man. The debates were very fierce. At one point in the discussion, when I was speaking out, this man put his foot on my leg under the table and pushed my knees. Actually, I could have lost my reasoning at that moment, so shocked that I was. He set his foot and tried to press with the shoe tip so I could open my knees. I kept talking and he insisted harder. So when he pushed even harder, I pulled the chair a little back, opened my legs slightly so as not to get vulgar and asked him aloud: "Are you more comfortable like that?". Then he was the one who destabilized himself, because the person who was conducting the meeting asked for respect. I've been through situations of extreme cruelty like this. (Vanda, interviewed #3, 2016)

This narrative makes evident the intersectionality and consubstantiality between gender, race and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Hirata, 2014; Hirata & Kergoat, 2007). This Black businesswoman was in a position of power in terms of class relations. She represented the company (the capital) in a clash against the union (the work). It was supposedly his interlocutor who was in a subaltern position. But she was a woman, in a space where there were practically only men. The male uses a strategy he would not use in combat if the opponent were another man: sexual subjugation. His foot was invested in a phallic power, it was like a penis penetrating, without consent, that female

body. And she was a Black woman. Her opponent was white. In the imaginary of the slave colonial system that marks the formation of Brazilian society, the white man is in an asymmetric position in the relationship with the Black woman. He can seduce her with his power and wealth, when he does not rape her. She' is his property after all. It is in this doubly cruel, sexist and racist imaginary, that that concrete man unconsciously seeks references to build a strategy of destabilizing his opponent. The relationship between business leaders and union representatives is usually tense, and was especially so in the 1980s, context that frames this account. But would that strategy have been used in the dispute if the unionist was a woman and the business leader a man, or if the union representative was a Black man with a white woman in front of him as a representative of the companies?

However, all these situations do not mean that the Black businesswomen of this generation were passive victims of racism, condemned to stagnation in the organizational game. It was not the case. They developed strategies to achieve their goals. These strategies were characterized by solitary and defensive behaviors. They tried to safeguard themselves from seeing further situations of prejudice and racial discrimination as experienced throughout their careers. Moreover, they avoided conflicts to solve situations that they could not fail to see coming. So, the first generation of Black businesswomen consists of a set of individual trajectories.

The reports below make this evident:

I wasn't aware of racism at the time. When these things happened, I kept wondering: what am I missing? What am I doing that doesn't please my director? That made me improve my work. So my ignorance about racism and discrimination against women ended up helping me in some way. My philosophy was the following: getting out of the way of those who didn't like me. What would I get if I insisted? If I was not satisfied, I'd leave. I couldn't fix the situation. If the company had this culture, I wouldn't be the one who would be able to modify it. For example, when I was hired my salary was lower than that of the other managers. And they had more benefits than I did. Is that racial discrimination? Is it gender inequality? I've never asked these kind of questions. I've just accepted. Anyway, I was well paid. (Maria, interviewed #4, 2016)

Moreover, the gender and racial barriers that they found were not only related to the workplace. They also reported obstacles within their private lives (Davis, 2016; hooks, 2019). Only one of the interviewees continued to be married after her career advanced. Most of them divorced and one only married when she was in her 50s. She had no children, although she had cultivated that dream. All of them reported difficulties in achieving a stable marriage and / or organized family life. This was in part due to both sexism and racism. Concerning the sexism question, they pointed out, for example, the men of their generation have not accepted staying at home waiting for their wives to come back from work because these wives had professional commitments going beyond their formal working hours. They also stressed their husband's difficulties in dealing with wives who were earning higher wages than themselves.

With regard to the racism question, they pointed to the difficulties of Black women with undergraduate degrees finding partners to marry (Davis, 2016; hooks, 2019). On the one hand, because of the racist ideology, white men of their generation had not seen them as desirable wives.

Perhaps as desirable women for an affair, but not desirable for marriage. On the other hand, due to the absorption of racist ideology, Black men of their generation who had higher education sought to marry white women, although less educated. Black men with less education, in turn, because of the sexist culture of the time, have not supported their professional success as businesswomen. The speech of one of the interviewees is quite clear in this regard:

At that time, Black men who were seeking social ascension had a great concern to marry white women. It was a way of 'improving' the race. The fact is that all the Black women in my age group that I know, and who are successful, are single!. (Vanda, interviewed #3, 2016)

Finally, it is also worth mentioning, at the institutional level, there were not public policies at this time from the State in Brazil to eliminate gender and racial inequalities in the workplace. Brazilian society was imagined as a racial democracy and racism was regarded as a simple misdemeanor and not as a crime.

## **The second generation of Black businesswomen**

The second generation of Black businesswomen is formed by individuals coming into the business world in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a rather more favorable societal context. With regard to the issue of race, they rely on a sustaining apparatus to provide them with support in case of prejudice and racial discrimination. Since the (re)democratization of the country, started in 1985 and marked by the strengthening of civil society, the Brazilian Black movement has gone through a process of institutionalization and professionalization (D'Adesky, 2001; Santos, 2007; Telles, 2003).

The early 1990s witnessed the beginning of "Black" NGOs articulated in transnational advocacy networks in which there was an intense production and circulation of antiracist ideologies (Agudelo, 2006). The discursive archive of these ideologies (heterogeneous, fragmented and conflicting) includes post-socialist elaborations. These "Black" NGOs have been fighting against racial democracy discourse that was hegemonic in Brazil since 1930 as well as requiring an approach to the Brazilian State in the sense of not only punishing racist behaviors in a more concrete form, but also adopting affirmative action policies (Guimarães, 2008; Munanga, 1996).

In the Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration, started in 1995, and especially after Lula da Silva's election in 2003, the Brazilian State has been responding positively to these demands. The Office for the Promotion of Racial Equality Policies was created and in a climate of tension and fierce disputes many universities have adopted affirmative action policies towards the inclusion of Black people (Carvalho, 2005; Santos, 2007; Souza, 1997; Telles, 2003).

The companies needed to respond to these changes in a societal context. Seeking an answer, they found diversity management in the archive of managerial technologies that is part of the new transnational business culture. This management tool has represented a solution that allowed them to translate the pressures of the Black movement into a business language, thus reducing the potential conflict of racial relations. As a result of this translation, it is possible to notice the disappearance of political disputes that mark both the origin of diversity management in the U.S. –



in the context of the civil rights movement and its questioning of male, white, protestant and Anglo-Saxon supremacy – and its reception in Brazil. This reception was mediated by the demands of civil society after the (re)democratization (Alves & Galeão-Silva, 2004; Barbosa, 2002).

However, the diversity is presented in an equation that involves: (a) increasing creativity of working teams because of the personal experiences brought into them by individuals with different backgrounds; (b) expanding the company's skill to respond to the demands of different market segments and therefore the creation of a competitive advantage; (c) improving business performance, ultimately (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ely & Thomas, 1996; Fleury, 2000; Hanashiro, 2008). That is, the business discourse on diversity is marked by pragmatic and triumphal logic. It seeks to neutralize the disruptive potential of the multicultural movement in an attempt to turn it into something palatable to business interests.

Actually, the development of the second generation of Black businesswomen reflects a moment in which the racial issue becomes a fierce object of political dispute in Brazil (Carvalho, 2005; Guimarães, 2008; Santos, 2007). The young women who comprise this generation are entering into the corporate world through trainee programs run for Black people, and created on diversity program frameworks.

This movement occurs in an economic context marked by reengineering and downsizing processes, especially in the banking industry (Gussi, 2005; Rodrigues, 2004). So that, the fact that many of these young women are being hired even before concluding their graduation is quite revealing of the strengthening of the Black movement. The second generation of Black businesswomen is then the result of the encounter between the demands of "Black" NGOs and the translation of these demands by enterprises. So, this generation is not a set of individual trajectories, but rather the fruit of collective action.

With regard to the issue of gender, the second generation of Black businesswomen also found a more favorable scenario than the first one, especially because of complaints by NGOs and the greater surveillance of the Brazilian state in relation to moral and/or sexual harassment and gender inequalities in the labor market. However, the young Black women who I talked to pointed out the persistence of racist and sexist ideology as a concrete barrier they encountered both in the workplace and in their emotional relationships.

The reports of some of these young professionals clearly reveal this. They were beginning their trajectories in the corporate world through trainee programs aimed at Black people that companies were creating in response to the pressures of the Black movement. However, these programs were not always well structured. One interviewee said she used to call her Black co-workers to attend the meetings of the Black Committee that the company she worked in had created. However, many of them were afraid. *"They said, 'Oh, but a two-hour meeting? What's my boss going to think? I don't know, I don't think they're going to look with good eyes,'" she said. And she added she shared the fear of these people. "Many managers consider it absurd for their team of employees to leave for part-time training. Now, imagine if you said you were going to a two-hour Black committee meeting!"*, she mused.

Another young Black woman went through a more concrete embarrassment. She reported when she joined the company where she participated in the trainee program she was allocated in a department that another Black intern had passed. This other intern had suffered bullying.

Colleagues played offensive pranks, ridiculing her hair. Moreover, since she did not perform well, she would not be hired. It was in this context that she arrived in the department. She sought to impose herself in this adverse environment.

If the other intern allowed that kind of joke, I didn't. Making them respect me took time, about eight or nine months. And it was a fight, I had to be aggressive with some people. But, this behavior protected me from prejudiced comments, she said. (Helena, interviewed #5, 2016)

This situation reveals, for the most part, Black women of this second generation found a context more favorable to affirm their Black identity. In this regard, a Human Resources manager of a company narrated:

Contrary to what we thought, the young people integrated with the employees and brought their blackness to the company. They didn't straighten their hair. They used to wear them in a Black style. There's a situation I never forget. Marina worked with me, I was her boss. If someone referred to her like this: "Brunette, please...", she would soon answer: "Don't call me Brunette. You can refer to me as Black. I am Black!". (Sophia, interviewed #6, 2016)

The same young woman told us a story that evidences how the intersection between race and class was determinant in her trajectory.

As I tried to differentiate myself from the previous intern, they put me on a level of equality with the other trainees. And it is hard when you realize you don't have the same background. They dominate Excell, they are able to do things in this software that for me are very complex. And it's not just Excell, it is the case of languages and other abilities that have to do with your family history, with the fact that you have studied in a public school while the other interns studied in a private school, you know? When they travel on vacation, they go to the U.S., to Europe, even to Japan, while you barely go to Rio de Janeiro or to Minas Gerais to visit the family. (Ana, interviewed #7, 2016)

This passage shows they felt overwhelmed by the fact that they did not have certain technical skills, or the cultural background necessary to access the prestigious positions. This discomfort also involves the racial issue as it's clear in the narrative below:

In this world, clothing, gestures, everything is standardized. It is standardized with the white style in mind. And when you bring something different... This week I braided my hair. I was worried because they're used to seeing me with my hair stuck, or blew my hair straight. When I arrived, everyone got awkward. My manager looked at me and said, "It's..., it's in fashion your hair, isn't it?". I don't think she knew what to say. The lack of naturalness of her comment was visible, you know? A guy even said to me this: "Wow!

Now you look like a real Black woman." I kept thinking: "What! Did I happen to change the color of my skin? Before I wasn't Black?" But I didn't get into the merits of the matter. Can you understand how hostile the environment becomes? (Ana, interviewed #7, 2016)

Another interviewee told a similar story: "*White girls can cut, smooth, cache or dye their hair, but you... When you change, questions like, 'Is it real? Are they going to stay like this forever? Can you wash it?'. It's very annoying to have to listen to that,*" she said.

They clearly realized gender, race and class were intertwined (Crenshaw, 1991; Hirata, 2014; Hirata & Kergoat, 2007) making their trajectories even more difficult than that of young Black men who were also part of the program. One of the interviewees stated the company in which she had joined was very traditional and then stressed: "*They just want men in senior management positions. That's declared. I heard this from my own boss. So being a woman is an obstacle, being Black woman then...*".

The Black women of this generation were aware that the difficulties they would encounter in building their social trajectories and professional pathways would not be limited to the dynamics of companies themselves (Davis, 2016; hooks, 2019).

In an interview with young Black professionals of both sexes, they were asked to talk a little about the gender issue in the relationship with partners. The women said "boys" still consider they need to be the provider of the house. They also pointed out an "*independent woman scares men.*" One of them stated "*the Black woman, as she goes up socially, the number of Black men with whom she is most likely to marry diminish. Those who have arrived there, do not always have the vision that the Black woman is also beautiful.*" At that moment the men got a little awkward. They oscillated between defensive postures and openness to criticism. Some of them acknowledged that they would have difficulty relating to a woman whose salaries were higher than theirs. Only one of them stated this would not be a problem.

In any case, it is undeniable the women who represent the second generation of Black businesswomen found a much more favorable societal context to build their careers in the corporate world than those who compose the first generation.

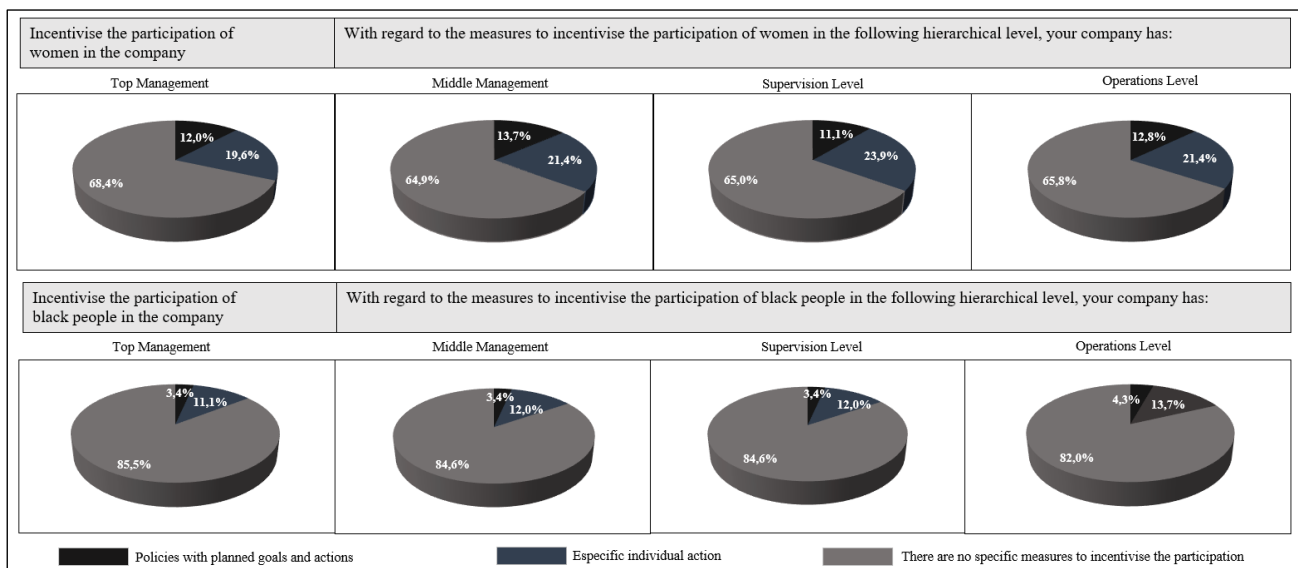
Meanwhile, this more positive picture should not make critical eyes relax. The company experience in which it was carried out the participant observation reveals how much the racial issue is still a source of tension in the Brazilian society. A brief comparison explains this point. Looking at two support groups which are part of the diversity program of this company (for women and for Black individuals) we can see that the autonomy of Black people's group is quite inferior to that of the women's group.

The women who created the latter were white professionals placed in top or intermediary positions. They themselves select who will coordinate the group and what will be the agenda and action strategies. Moreover, the diversity program previews the nomination of a sponsor for each group, someone who is in a top position, being responsible for gathering the collective demands and taking them to the diversity committee. However, the members of the women's group opted not to appeal to this resource. Given the place they occupied in the organizational structure, they had a wide network (Brunstein & Jaime, 2009).

Now, in the case of the group of Black people the dynamics is different. Despite it formally relying on a leader, this person, actually, has only a figurative role. The coordination stays, in fact, under the responsibility of a diversity manager. It did not happen in its first formation. The professional who founded the group had an intermediary position within the company. Nevertheless, he left the organization unsatisfied with the direction and rhythm of the diversity program. Currently the collective is almost wholly formed by young members who participate in the trainee program. Anxious about an opportunity in the corporate world, they practically do not formulate any demands.

In addition, while the fieldwork was carried out, there was a maneuver which deposed the then group leader, the only member that at that time had a managerial position. For the vacated post a professional who until that moment had not taken part in this experience was put forward. She was subordinated to the white executive who is the group’s sponsor. It all happened in a forged election, being that the former leader was not informed, so he could not evaluate the possibility to apply for the election.

Briefly, there is still a long way to go until sexism and racism are not barriers to building the professional trajectory of Black businesswomen. This reasoning becomes clear when one realizes practice of diversity management focused on racial inclusion are far from become widespread in the Brazilian corporate world. As we can see in Figure 1, a survey conducted by the Ethos Institute (2016), shows among the 500 largest companies operating in Brazil, the percentage of companies that claim to have policies with planned goals and actions to incentivize the participation of women and Black individuals in their different hierarchical levels is very low.



**Figure 1.** Incentivise the participation of women and Black people among the 500 largest companies operating in Brazil

Sources: Ethos (2016).

These data and the discussion made in this article reveal, despite the progress already made, there is still a long way to go in Brazil until the country may promote racial and gender equality in the corporate world.

## Conclusion

This article addresses the racial issue in the business world. Jaime et al. (2018) argued it is present more than a century ago in the scientific production of sociology and anthropology since the foundation of these areas of studies in Brazil. They also claim this issue has been one of the forgotten dimensions of the research undertaken in the field of Administration in Brazil. This gap had already been pointed out by Barbosa (2009), Costa and Ferreira (2006) and Rosa (2014). However, its presence has expanded in recent years within this academic community, due to the effort of Black researchers and white engaged scholars (Jaime et al., 2018; Nascimento, Teixeira, Oliveira & Saraiva, 2016). In the specific case of its occurrence in the corporate world, the debates about diversity management represent an important contribution to the placement of this theme on the agenda, as the pioneering research of Alves and Galeão-Silva (2004) and Fleury (2000) attest.

This article aimed to contribute in this direction, bringing to the discussion the results of a research on the professional trajectories of two generations of Black businesswomen: a first one, composed by Black professionals who had initiated their career trajectories at the end of the 1970s, and a second, made up by Black women who arrived in the labor market in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This research interrogated the professional paths of these generations from the theoretical lens of gender, race and class in an intersectional perspective. It was structured from the following research questions:

1. What changes happened in the career trajectories of Black businesswomen from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
2. How do these changes reflect the transformations that occurred in the Brazilian society, especially with regard to the racial issue, during that period?
3. What consequences do these transformations have on Black businesswomen's racial and gender identities?

From the empirical evidence presented here, we believe it is possible to answer these research questions as follows.

1. Comparing the end of the 1970's and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century it is possible to note a change in the construction of professional trajectories of Black businesswomen, which addresses to the passage from individual strategies to collective action.
2. This change reflects a transformation in the societal context, with respect to the greatest politicization of debates on the racial issue fought at the Brazilian public sphere. This phenomenon is fruit of alterations in the political strategy of the Brazilian Black movement, which since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been absorbing the new agenda present in the antiracism transnational advocacy networks. This has led the Brazilian corporate world to translate the new social and political agenda into the terms of an entrepreneurial language, resorting to a managerial technology (the diversity

management) which circulates within the global flows that characterize the business transnational culture.

3. The greatest politicization of the debates over the racial issue fought in the Brazilian public sphere in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the translation of the new social and political agenda through the corporate world into the terms of entrepreneurial language represent a societal context more suitable so that the Black businesswomen may construct or reconstruct Black identities more positively affirmed.

However, the most favorable societal context found by the second generation of Black businesswomen does not lead to an overly optimistic view of racial equality in the corporate world. The trajectories analyzed in this article cannot be taken as a reference for the understanding of all Black businesswomen. The data presented at the end of the last section show the percentage of the 500 largest companies operating in Brazil that have planned actions to incentivize Black participation in top or middle management positions is still practically insignificant. This has occurred despite the fact that the presence of Black individuals in these positions (4.7%) is well below its participation in the demographic composition of Brazilian society (54.9%). Moreover, this small group of Black managers are composed almost exclusively by men. Only two women are represented in this select club. The intersection or consubstantiality between gender, race and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Hirata, 2014; Hirata & Kergoat, 2007) exerts a strong influence on the social trajectories of Black women, making it difficult for them to build executives careers.

Despite the contributions to the academic community, as well as to the Black movement, trade unions and companies, this article presents limitations. These restrictions can be overcome by further studies on this theme. In sum, we stand out the need for a deepening of the analysis from the perspective offered by the concepts of intersectionality and consubstantiality. We also highlight the relevance of comparative analysis carried out from research on professional trajectories of Black businesswomen in other Brazilian cities (Souza, 2015), or even from other countries (Wingfield, 2012). Briefly, there is plenty of room for an entire research program that leads to the deepening of our understanding of this phenomenon.

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## Conflict of interests

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