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INTERSECTIONALITY: A THEORETICAL EXERCISE BASED ON AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH¹

 Marília Pinto de Carvalho^I

 TRANSLATED BY Jessé Rebello de Souza Junior^{II}

^I Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo (SP), Brazil; mariliapintodecarvalho@gmail.com

^{II} Universidade de São Paulo (USP), São Paulo (SP), Brazil; jsouza@usp.br

Abstract

In this essay I propose to bring back an approach to intersectionality that is not restricted to the dimension of individual identity, but also includes the symbolic and structural dimensions of society. The article starts with a presentation of the use of the concept of gender and of its articulation with class structure in a qualitative empirical research about the work of elementary school teachers. Next, possible articulations with racial inequality are discussed, and then I conclude by suggesting a few themes linked to school education that might benefit from an intersectional approach of this type.

GENDER • CLASS • RACE • TEACHERS

INTERSECCIONALIDADE: UM EXERCÍCIO TEÓRICO A PARTIR DE UMA PESQUISA EMPÍRICA

Resumo

Neste ensaio proponho a retomada de uma abordagem da interseccionalidade que não se restrinja à dimensão da identidade individual, incluindo também as dimensões simbólica e estrutural da sociedade. O texto se inicia com a exposição do uso do conceito de gênero e de sua articulação com a estrutura de classe, em uma pesquisa empírica qualitativa sobre o trabalho docente nos anos iniciais do ensino fundamental. Em seguida discutem-se possíveis articulações com a desigualdade racial e a conclusão sugere alguns temas ligados à educação escolar que poderiam se enriquecer se analisados com base em uma abordagem interseccional desse tipo.

GÊNERO • CLASSE • RAÇA • PROFESSORAS

¹ This essay results from my participation in a panel discussion entitled “*Interseccionalidade e Educação: desafios teóricos e metodológicos*” (Intersectionality and Education: theoretical and methodological challenges), which took place during the 39th National Meeting of Anped in October 2019, alongside Patricia Hill Collins and Helena Hirata. I wish to thank Maria Carla Corrochano for the invitation, and Luciana Alves and Cinthia Torres Toledo for reading the manuscript and making comments and suggestions.

L'INTERSECTIONNALITÉ: UN EXERCICE THEORIQUE A PARTIR D'UNE RECHERCHE EMPIRIQUE

Résumé

Dans cet essai je propose la reprise d'une approche de l'intersectionnalité qui ne soit pas restreinte à la dimension de l'identité individuelle, en incluant également les dimensions symbolique et structurale de la société. Le texte débute par l'exposition de l'usage du concept de genre et de son articulation avec la structure de classe, dans une recherche empirique qualitative sur le travail enseignant dans les premières années de l'école primaire. Ensuite sont analysées les articulations possibles avec l'inégalité raciale et la conclusion suggère quelques thèmes liés à l'éducation scolaire qui pourraient être enrichis par une analyse selon cette approche intersectionnelle.

GENRE • CLASSE • RACE • ENSEIGNANTES

INTERSECCIONALIDAD: UN EJERCICIO TEÓRICO A PARTIR DE UNA INVESTIGACIÓN EMPÍRICA

Resumen

En este ensayo, propongo el reinicio de un abordaje de la interseccionalidad que no se restrinja a la dimensión de la identidad individual, incluyendo también las dimensiones simbólica y estructural de la sociedad. El texto comienza con la exposición sobre el uso del concepto de género y su articulación con la estructura de clase, en una investigación empírica cualitativa sobre el trabajo docente en los años iniciales de la enseñanza primaria. Enseguida, se analizan las posibles articulaciones con la desigualdad racial y la conclusión sugiere algunos temas vinculados a la educación escolar que podrían enriquecerse si fueren analizados con base en un abordaje interseccional de este tipo.

GÉNERO • CLASE • RAZA • PROFESOR

ANALYZING THE ACADEMIC PRODUCTION ON INTERSECTIONALITY, PATRICIA HILL COLLINS SAYS

that as it grew exponentially the field progressively abandoned its roots linked to the struggle for social justice, and concentrated on the diversity of individual identities, failing to deal with power relations and social structures (COLLINS, 2015b). Sirma Bilge (2013) complements this analysis pointing out that the depoliticization of the studies and the relinquishing of the analysis of structural inequalities are in tune with a neoliberal approach to social life, which is then interpreted on the basis of interactions between individual entrepreneurs. In this context, the research has its critical dimension sapped, since the valuation of difference and its recognition no longer bring consequences to the discussion about the redistribution of power.

In the Brazilian educational field we find a similar state of affairs, and the dissemination of intersectional approaches has revealed a focus on individual experiences and identities, in consonance with the kind of analysis that is also prevalent in gender and education studies in this country.

In the present essay, I take as a point of departure an empirical research to describe how the concept of gender was used and how it was articulated with class structure. The objective is to propose the resumption of an approach that emphasizes the symbolic and structural dimensions of society. I start by expounding briefly the research, and I try to unravel which concept of gender is present in the analysis, so that I can next reflect upon how to articulate it with other inequalities in the interpretation of the fieldwork material. I conclude by suggesting a few themes associated to school education, which could benefit from an analysis based on an intersectional approach of this kind.

I wish to emphasize from the outset that although these theoretical choices seem fruitful to me in the construction of analyses, they represent one path among possible paths, since I consider that the plurality of the concepts of gender has been one of the potentials of feminist thinking.

THE WORK OF TEACHERS AT THE FIRST YEARS OF FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION²

I have chosen to analyze here my most recent research, concluded in 2018 (CARVALHO, 2018; CARVALHO *et al.*, 2018), about the work of teachers at the first years of fundamental education (pupils from 6 to 10 years old) in which I investigated through interviews and classroom observations the work of teachers from the São Paulo state school network. That study seemed interesting for the present reflection because it deals with the articulation between gender and class, something that is generally less present in Brazilian educational studies.

Our country exhibits a prevalence of the understanding of intersectionality as articulation between gender and race, in accordance to the North American tradition. In the USA, where the term intersectionality originated, the race issue has political centerstage, and the concern with articulating different forms of domination has its roots in the Black feminist criticism to the representation of women as the latter was developed by White feminism. Although the class issue had been present in the first moments, as the debate became more institutionalized in academia, a narrower version of intersectionality gained prevalence, a version in which intersectionality becomes a synonym for Black feminism (NASH, 2011). In the French tradition the theme of the

² What is called in Brazil the “first years of fundamental education” corresponds to USA’s “elementary school” and involves children ideally between 6 and 10 years old. Until the 1970s, it was known as “primary school” (Translator’s note).

articulation between different power relations emerged from the feminist critique of Marxism, in an effort to understand the forms of domination of working women, leading to an emphasis on the relation between gender and class (JAUNAIT, CHAUVIN, 2012).

The association between the teaching of children and femininity is a well-documented and highly debated international phenomenon. In Brazil, the seminal work by Luís Pereira (1969)³ *O magistério primário numa sociedade de classes* (Primary teaching in a class society) established the basis for this discussion, re-approached from different angles in the following decades. The author studied primary teachers from state schools in the city of São Paulo, and indicated the strong relation established by them between the teaching activity, maternity, and what would be called a “feminine nature”. Four decades later, in 1999, investigating what were then the first series of the First Degree in a school of the same school system, I still found a marked presence of that model of the maternal teacher, whose practice included what I labelled as “care”, signifying the individualized and integral attention to pupils (CARVALHO, 1999b).

My recent research started, therefore, from the observation that the new forms of management of education, denominated “new public management” or managerialism, introduced elements associated to masculinity into this space historically understood as feminine. Efficiency, competitiveness and a focus on progressing in the career and in financial rewards have become expected features of the work of male and female teachers. In a profession hitherto understood on the basis of characteristics such as dedication, emotional commitment, vocation, love for one’s work, and accomplishment, would we be witnessing here a process of masculinization of teaching? The question was not about finding out if there were actually more men teaching, but about understanding whether the features of this work, the ways of understanding it, and the reference models were changing and departing from the meanings of femininity.

Throughout 2016-17, a qualitative study was carried out with the use of observations and semistructured interviews. I chose the São Paulo public state school network because of its national representativity and for the presence in it of a management policy of the work of teachers based on a standardized assessment of learning, with the establishment of goals and the payment of yearly bonuses. Seeking the largest diversity possible with regard to sex, age and experience, nine female teachers were interviewed, two male teachers, and a (female) pedagogical coordinator, all of whom worked at the first years of fundamental education in nine schools located in different areas of São Paulo City or in its metropolitan area. Eight of them had their classes observed in one or two sessions.

The São Paulo school network comprises 5300 schools, in which 4.3 million pupils are enrolled and 148,738 teachers work. Out of the latter, 29,662 (19.94%) teach at the first years of fundamental education, where 91.2% are female, according to the School Census (INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTUDOS E PESQUISAS EDUCACIONAIS ANÍSIO TEIXEIRA – INEP, 2018). Governed since 1995 by the same political party (PSDB), the State of São Paulo has seen a good deal of continuity in educational policies, based on proposals of reducing costs and improving efficiency through an administrative reform based on the principles of managerialism. Such policy can be viewed from two complementary angles: on the one hand, the implementation of systematic student performance assessment through standardized tests (Sistema de Avaliação do Rendimento Escolar do Estado de São Paulo – Saresp) and the creation in 2007 of a statewide index (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação do Estado de São Paulo – Idesp) which, apart from results of the test, also considers the flux of students; on the other hand, we have the financial rewarding of education workers based either on the results of the tests and the fulfilment of goals (result-based bonuses) or on teacher assessment for career promotion (proof of merit) (CASSETARI, 2010; ZATTI, 2017).

3 Published in 1969, Luís Pereira’s book results from his doctoral thesis presented to Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo (FFLCH-USP) in 1961, whose fieldwork was carried out in 1959.

This management policy followed a top-down implementation procedure, which in the case of the first years of fundamental education meant that they were imposed upon teachers who historically shared a work model based on characteristics seen as feminine. For example, 92.5% of primary teachers that answered the questionnaires proposed by Luis Pereira in 1959 stated that their profession was more adequate to women, and justified it by saying something along the lines of: “It is easier for the woman to turn the school into a second home. There are many pupils that miss that in a male teacher class”; “in my opinion, the woman is by nature and instinct more connected to the child”⁴ (PEREIRA, 1969, p. 49). In 1999 I came across similar features expressed in teachers’ testimonies and made concrete in practices of care. In the words of a young female teacher then 21 years old:

I think the woman has more patience than men, isn't it? Especially those who are mothers, if you are a mother and you have a student, I think you have more patience, you understand the children better. [...] I think it is a job of the teacher to also help in the family. It is not only contents that teachers convey, because sometimes by talking to a pupil, or talking to the father or the mother, you can help in many other problems.⁵ (CARVALHO, 1999b, p. 65)

The interviews conducted in 2016-17 gave indications that that tradition is still very much present, as in the speeches of Ester and Celina:⁶

[The good teacher] *firstly he has to love, firstly he has to love the pupils. [...] Since my first years I always worked very much with my heart in what I do. After I had my daughter, it became even more present, because I saw the pupils as if they were my children, and I always thought: I want to give all I can to them, because it was as if it was my daughter that was sitting there at those benches.*⁷ (Ester)

*I try to give them the attention, the caring they need, because sometimes they miss it very much. [...] there are some of them that we see that they lack attention, caring. And sometimes this is the only attention they get, here with us. [...] When we are doing some activity that is more difficult for them, I take a chair and sit beside them, I explain, I talk. Then, sometimes you go into private issues of the pupil, also, because they end up telling you, opening themselves.*⁸ (Celina)

In the six decades since Luís Pereira’s study, much has changed in the relations between men and women in Brazil, and also in gender hierarchies and in the ways of interpreting them. Teachers no longer talk about maternal instinct and feminine nature, they talk about emotional intelligence,

4 In the original: “À mulher é mais fácil transformar a escola num segundo lar. Há inúmeros alunos que sentem essa falta em classe de professor”; “na minha opinião, a mulher está por natureza e instinto mais ligada à criança.”

5 In the original: “Eu acho que mulher tem mais paciência que homem, não é? Principalmente aquelas que são mães, se você é mãe e tem aluno, eu acho que tem mais paciência, entende melhor as crianças. [...] Eu acho que é serviço sim, do professor, ajudar também na família. O professor, ele não tem que só passar conteúdos, porque às vezes você conversando com um aluno, você conversando com o pai ou a mãe, você dá um jeito em muitos problemas.”

6 All names have been changed.

7 In the original: “[O bom professor] em primeiro lugar, ele tem de amar, em primeiro lugar, amar os alunos. [...] Desde os primeiros anos, eu sempre trabalhei com muito coração, né, naquilo que eu faço. Depois que eu tive a minha filha, ficou mais presente ainda, porque eu via os alunos como se fossem meus filhos, e sempre pensei assim: eu quero dar o máximo do que eu puder pra eles, porque era como se fosse a minha filha que estava sentada ali naquela carteira.”

8 In the original: “Eu procuro dar a atenção que eles precisam, dar o carinho, porque, às vezes, eles sentem muita falta disso. [...] Tem alguns que a gente percebe que são bem carentes de atenção, de carinho. E às vezes essa é a única atenção que eles têm, aqui com a gente. [...] Quando estamos fazendo alguma atividade que eles têm mais dificuldade, eu pego a cadeira, eu sento junto com ele, vou explicando, vou conversando. Ai, às vezes, a gente entra em questões particulares do aluno, também, que ele acaba contando, se abrindo.”

affective needs, empathy. But the association between their work and femininity does remain, as well as the importance attributed to the integral development of pupils (practices of care).

Furthermore, the tradition does not repeat itself precisely in modern days: rather, it is resignified in the context of the new forms of management of the teaching work. It may give rise to mechanisms of control and exploitation of the work, such as blaming mechanisms, placing responsibility on the individual teacher, and acceptance of external controls and of poor working conditions. As an example of that, the good functioning of the curriculum proposal presupposes the use of equipment and resources belonging to the teachers themselves, as described by Cecilia:

The EMAI (Ensino de Matemática nos Anos Iniciais – Teaching Mathematics in the First Years, a State official material) says: you have to give them homework. I give my pupils homework. Who prepares it? I do. Who has it printed? I have, I buy the paper, I buy the ink.⁹ (Cecilia)

In the same way, new obligations introduced by the managerial administration increased the working time both at home and at school, apart from diversifying the tasks, both by the increase of bureaucratic requirements, with a large number of spreadsheets and reports to be delivered, and by the obligation of taking courses and attending formation meetings which are not included in the working time paid by the State. Thus, whilst leisure time and working time of teachers have been historically superimposed and mixed together, the new forms of management make use of the feminine tradition of this category to move towards a total flexibility of labor or, in the terms proposed by Abílio (2019), towards the creation of a *just-in-time* laborer.

The case of a teacher called Zuleica is exemplary, not just with regard to time availability, but also with respect to multiplicity of tasks and precariousness. With almost 30 years as a teacher she still did not have tenure, and described herself as a “multitask teacher”, referring to her triple daily working shift, in which she arrived daily at the school where the interview was conducted at 07:00 and stayed there until 11:45 “at their disposal”, that is, ready to substitute for any absent teacher. By 12:30 she was entering a different classroom at a different school, where she taught a class, and in the evening, she was back to the first school to replace teachers of middle school.

I come on the off chance, because it's easier, isn't it? I bring some activities with me, and if someone misses the day's work I'm ready, because I like to prepare the class too, any year I teach, I think we are here to work and to give our best.¹⁰ (Zuleica)

If no colleague misses work, “it is a day off”: Zuleica would have been at their disposal and would not receive any payment. These precariousness, multiplicity of tasks and total availability were not created by the new management of the school system, but they are nonetheless entirely functional in it, and thrive alongside the proclaimed modernity and the technical apparatus mobilized.

That notwithstanding, the features traditionally associated to femininity can also originate resistances, visible in practices of keeping an individualized and integral attention to each pupil (practices of care) despite standardized tests, goals and bonuses; in the criticism to mass solutions imposed by the school system; as well as in the possibility of acting not only after financial interest, but of a feeling of accomplishment with the meaning of one's work.

⁹ In the original: “O próprio EMAI [Ensino de Matemática nos Anos Iniciais – material oficial do estado], ele fala: você tem que dar lição de casa. Eu dou lição de casa para os meus alunos. Quem faz? Sou eu. Quem imprime? Sou eu, eu compro a folha, eu compro tinta.”

¹⁰ In the original: “Eu venho na tentativa, porque é mais fácil, né? Trago algumas atividades, e se tiver alguém que falte, estou eu pronta, porque eu gosto de preparar a aula também, qualquer série que eu entro, eu acho que a gente tá aqui para dar o nosso melhor.”

All teachers (including the two male teachers interviewed) talked about the importance of non-financial rewards in their work, which was described as gratifying and meaningful. They said they loved teaching classes, that it was a work where they saw results, where they could make a difference and look forward, a captivating job in which they were happy. As Marlucy and Valter exemplified:

Oh, I think the most important thing is to see the pupil learning. For me, what is most gratifying is to see that my student learned, you know? That he or she is progressing, evolving. [...] This feels very, very good. I think it is the most important thing, because making money, you eventually make money with other things also, if you go after it. [...] There are people, perhaps, that make more money than I do just selling candy in the Metro. But why do we continue in the classroom? I think it's because of this feeling, really, truly gratifying.¹¹ (Marlucy)

The salary [in the company where I worked before] was better, was triple the salary in Education. [...] I gave up a lot, materially speaking, but I don't regret it because I managed to do what I enjoy doing.¹² (Valter)

They all displayed, therefore, a great connection with their pupils and commitment to teaching. And while this opened doors to the intensification of labor, it was also a source of criticism and dissatisfaction with the standardized and controlled system of management. By emphasizing their responsibility towards the children and not toward numbers, and by recalling the individual dimension of learning, by recovering the idea of an education that is not restricted to transmitting contents, part of the teachers articulated criticisms to the current school management:

If you reach the target you get a bonus, the school gets a bonus; if you don't reach the target you don't get it. And there's also the flow, if there is a problem with dropout you don't get the bonus. So, it creates havoc in the school, going after the pupils who are missing classes. And it is not out of concern for the pupil, it is because of the bonus.¹³ (Amanda, our emphasis)

It is like a cake [the official curriculum]: you can even add some filling, but it is too little, you cannot go after many sources. You run the risk of falling behind. It becomes, like, massified, isn't it? [...] So, I am like this, I try to go beyond, I fill this cake with other sources, but that is not the objective, she makes it very clear, my coordinator does.¹⁴ (Claudia)

It is not, therefore, the case of a simple substitution of feminine models of work with masculine ones, neither is it just an instrumentalization of characteristics deemed as feminine with the purpose of guaranteeing the overexploitation of the work of teachers. It is a question of running these models of teacher work alongside each other and in combination, thereby constituting reinvented traditions and producing “new old labor relations” (ABÍLIO, 2014).

11 In the original: “Ah, eu acho que o mais importante é ver a aprendizagem do aluno. Para mim, o que mais me gratifica é ver que o meu aluno aprendeu, sabe?, que ele está progredindo, que ele está evoluindo. [...] Isso me faz muito, muito bem. Eu acho que é o mais importante, porque ganhar dinheiro, a gente acaba ganhando com outras coisas também, se a gente for atrás. [...] Tem gente, às vezes, que deve fazer mais dinheiro do que eu, por dia, vendendo doce no metrô. Mas por que que a gente continua na sala de aula? Eu acho que é por causa desse sentimento mesmo, gratificante, de verdade.”

12 In the original: “O salário [na empresa em que trabalhava] era melhor, era o triplo da Educação. [...] Abri mão de muita coisa, materialmente falando, mas não me arrependo não, porque eu consegui fazer o que eu gosto.”

13 In the original: “Se você atinge a meta, você ganha bônus, a escola recebe o bônus; se não atinge a meta, não recebe. E tem o fluxo também, se tem algum problema de evasão, não recebe o bônus. Então, tem escolas que é um desespero para ir atrás dos alunos que estão faltando. E não é preocupação com o aluno, é por causa do bônus.”

14 In the original: “É como se fosse um bolo [o currículo oficial]: você pode até recheiar, mas é muito pouco, você não pode ir buscar muitas fontes. Corre o risco de atrasar. Fica assim, massificado, né? [...] Então, eu sou assim, eu busco ir além, eu recheio esse bolo com outras fontes, mas não é o objetivo, ela deixa bem claro, a minha coordenadora.”

WHERE IS GENDER IN THIS ANALYSIS?

The concept of gender employed in this interpretation follows from works such as Sandra Harding's *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986). In its opening pages, Harding presents her concept of gender and applies it throughout her analysis of science. She insists in the need to consider three dimensions: the symbolism of gender, the structure of gender, and the individual gender, always emphasizing that each dimension is involved in the construction of power relations.

After indicating the universal and long-standing presence of symbolic systems based on gender, and after stating that gender meanings are disseminated in our systems of belief, institutions, and in the whole of our social life, Harding says:

Gendered social life is produced through three distinct processes: it is the result of assigning dualistic gender metaphors to various perceived dichotomies that rarely have anything to do with sex differences; it is the consequence of appealing to these gender dualisms to organize social activity, of dividing necessary social activities between different groups of humans; it is a form of socially constructed individual identity only imperfectly correlated with either the "reality" or the perceptions of sex differences. (1986, p. 17)

Similar definitions of gender, identifying three or four dimensions (symbolic, structural or institutional, and individual) are present in other texts from the 1980s, such as the well-known article by Joan Scott (1986) *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*. Scott's text proposes that "gender involves four interrelated elements"; "culturally available symbols"; the "normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols"; the politics, the institutions and the social life; and the "subjective identity" (SCOTT, 1986, p. 1067-1068).

In a different approach, Raewyn Connell, in her 1987 *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*, suggests four dimensions in gender relations: power, production (in which she includes the sexual division of labor), symbolism, and cathexis (emotional attachment and personal bonds). Connell emphasizes the importance of considering gender relations as power relations and reaffirms that considering the structural dimensions does not mean denying change and the action of subjects.

What I wish to emphasize in these approaches is the fact that they do not reduce the understanding of gender to social structures or to symbolic systems, nor to identities and personal relations. Rather, they indicate the need to articulate these different dimensions.

In an article originally published in 1989, Patricia Hill Collins refers precisely to Harding's (1986) definition and takes a significant step forward by working with the symbolic, institutional and individual dimensions not just of gender, but also of race and class, considering that Harding's proposal is useful for a broader, intersectional analysis (COLLINS, 1993). While recognizing the possibility of individual action, the author stresses the structural dimensions:

Systemic relationships of domination and subordination structured through social institutions such as schools, businesses, hospitals, the workplace, and government agencies represent the institutional dimension of oppression. Racism, sexism and elitism all have concrete institutional locations. (COLLINS, 1993, p. 29)

Nowadays, what is most often seen in gender analyses and intersectional analyses is a focus restricted to the dimension of individual identity. Thus, the intersectional approach is frequently limited to the observation that low-income Black women occupy such and such place in society; or that middle-class White men have certain kind of privileges et cetera. And it becomes impossible to move forward in the sociological analysis, to go beyond descriptive aspects. At the same time, power relations and social inequalities go out of focus.

Scott's definition, much used in educational studies in Brazil, distinguishes practically the same three dimensions proposed by Harding, but was read mainly in its symbolic dimension

and in a context emphasizing the discursive production of identities under the influence of post-modernism and post-structuralism.

To bring this kind of reading into discussion, it is worth recalling that Harding (1986), for example, highlights the symbolic dimension, but not within the restricted field of the construction of identities:

[...] as a symbol system, gender difference is the most ancient, most universal and most powerful origin of many morally valued conceptualizations of everything else in the world around us [...] As far back in history as we can see, we have organized our social and natural worlds in terms of gender meanings within which historically specific racial, class, and cultural institutions and meanings have been constructed. Once we begin to theorize gender – to define gender as an analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity rather than a natural consequence of sex difference, or even merely as a social variation assigned to individual people in different ways from culture to culture – we can begin to appreciate the extent to which gender meanings have suffused our belief systems, institutions, and even such apparently gender-free phenomena as our architecture and urban planning. (HARDING, 1986, p. 17)

Scott speaks in similar terms: “Established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of” all social life.” (SCOTT, 1986, p. 1069). She also exemplifies this movement referring to phenomena that apparently have little to do with gender, such as diplomacy and agriculture.

Dealing with identity, Harding (1986) insists that gender cannot be taken as a characteristic of individuals and of their behavior, since it is part of the social structures and conceptual schemes. For her, it is within these structures and schemes that gendered individual identities are constituted.

The emphasis on experience is very much present in Brazilian intersectional studies, especially in Black feminism. It is an important effort to break away from the silence and omission about the lives of Black women, since denying the reality of the experience of a person or group is one way of dehumanizing them. But this emphasis has not helped to analyze the institutional and structural dimensions of inequality.

Collins (1993) point out the difference that can exist between the lived experience and the theoretical attitude that the intertwined nature of oppressions proposes: “Race, class and gender may all structure a situation but may not be equally visible and/or important in people’s self-definition.” (p. 28). For her, the symbolic and institutional dimensions constitute the background against which we live our lives and create paths of acceptance or transformation – individual choices do exist, but they do not occur outside of a context.

To these authors, therefore, insisting on structures means neither abandoning the perspective of the action of subjects, nor analyzing just permanences, since structures and conceptual schemes have a history, are contradictory and mutable.

The gist of Harding’s reasoning in the 1986 text mentioned above is: if gender, in its symbolic dimension but not only in it, impregnates the whole of social life, and if science is a social construct, then science is structured in terms of gender. Now, the reasoning in my own research is parallel to that: if teaching at the first years of fundamental education is socially constructed, then it is also structured in terms of gender, in that case associated to a femininity. Likewise, the managerialism is signified and organized in gendered terms, producing subjectivities marked by characteristics attributed to a masculinity, such as competitiveness, technical rationality, utilitarianism and financial drive.

In this analysis movement it is not a question of asking whether it is women or men that exercise the activity of teaching, neither it is a question of knowing their individual processes of identity construction. It is a question of understanding how femininities and masculinities structure the practice of teaching within a specific historical context.

AND WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL CLASS?

My concern here, therefore, was not one of understanding how those men and women constituted their gender and class identities, but rather how they dealt with these multiple meanings that structure the teaching activity. Thus, in order to articulate gender and class it would not be enough to define the class belonging of the subjects of the study or their level of income. And end up observing, for example, that the majority of female teachers of the first year of fundamental education in the São Paulo state school network originate from lower middle-class families.¹⁵

It was necessary to find the form of structural articulation of modern capitalism, to take the discussion about class to the sphere of social structure, beyond individual income and class belonging of the subjects. Because it was not a question of adding an economic element (class) to a symbolic dimension (gender), since I consider that both gender and class have economic, social, political and symbolic dimensions.

In the same way that we could perceive gender as organizing our whole social life, we needed to understand how the class structure of contemporary capitalism did the same thing, structuring symbols, institutions and individual identities.

I found such an approach in the studies that have been pointing out neoliberalism as the “new way of the world”, the English title of the book by Dardot and Laval (2013). These are interpretations that go way beyond economicism and show the constitution of subjectivities based on competition and entrepreneurship as the current form of control in a globalized capitalism.

In very synthetic terms, we can say that for Dardot and Laval (2013) neoliberalism means not merely an economic change, but it represents a new rationality based on a business logic whose reorganization that impacts from the subjectivity of each person to the State: politics, society and economy are gathered under the business reasoning based on cost/benefit, unlimited expansion, risk and competition. The authors take into account the economic and technological changes, such as the dominance of financial capital, globalization, and the significant transformations in labor processes, but indicate that we are also dealing here with profound changes in the functioning and role of the State, as well as in the constitution of a new disciplinary system, a device that appeals to freedom of choice and to the possibility of resolving every social and individual problem through managerial techniques. The market is then the universal and commanding logical model, establishing a utilitarian view of the human being, seen as an enterprise of him/herself.

These are, therefore, analyses that also circulate between the fields of the symbolic, the institutional and individual, between economics, politics and subjectivity. Incorporating these interpretations into my own understanding of the new forms of management implemented in schools of the São Paulo state network allowed me to capture the introduction of the business logic into the classrooms, with the incentive to competition between teachers, the valuation of performance and the assumption that educators organized themselves based on numerical goals, putting financial reward in the first place.

The research problem itself is then constituted here at the confluence of class and gender. Including gender relations into the analysis made possible to perceive that those features of neoliberal management are culturally associated to a masculinity: would the introduction of these forms of management into the work be leading to a masculinization of teaching? What would be happening to characteristics deemed as feminine in the ideal of teacher when faced with the entrepreneurial subjectivity presupposed by such management?

In the educators’ testimonies and practices, it was possible to notice an intense articulation between gender and class, revealing how these structures combine at the symbolic and institutional

¹⁵ Another discussion that has been carried out regards the nature of the teaching work, whether it is a proletarian job or not (APPLE, 1987; PARO, 2012).

levels. Teachers described being anguished and losing sleep at night with children's learning difficulties, and putting their feelings, their commitment and their social responsibility in the service of the achievement of goals in standardized tests, seen as the sole indicator of quality education and as synonym for the fulfilment of the right to knowledge. In short, they were ready to follow the goals for the love of the pupils:

*It was just today that the Coordinator showed us last year's goal, the IDESP, we went beyond the goal; but obviously it's not perfect... there is always that pupil that reaches the fifth year without being able to read or write. **This is a huge anguish for us**, dealing with those pupils, then...¹⁶ (Cintia, our emphasis)*

*Regardless of having a bonus, we are going to teach that to the pupils, that which we are obligated, which is our duty to teach and their right to know. [...] Whatever the coordinators propose we accept, **because we think of the pupils**.¹⁷ (Renata, our emphasis)*

And it was also in the contradictory encounter of gender and class that resistances were weaved: the financial reward was much less valued than the pleasure and accomplishment through the pupils' success, the career was less important than the hope and possibility of transforming their surroundings. The individualized and affective attention to the children was a source of criticism to the standardization of tests and to the solutions proposed in a top-down direction:

*Sometimes, we get some ready-made projects from the Education Board, they say: "This project is to help non-alphabetic pupils." But, sometimes, it is something that doesn't make much sense for my pupil. And then later comes another demand, which is the expectation to put in practice that thing they sent ready. [...] **Because that child, for the Education Board, she is just a number**, she's just a little colored dot that is saying that she is still not alphabetic. The Education Board doesn't take the trouble to go there and find out who that pupil is, what difficulty she has, who are her family; so, they don't take that kind of trouble.¹⁸ (Cecilia, our emphasis)*

Even when explicit criticism was not formulated, teachers contested on a daily basis, in their practices, the focus on quantifiable results, by valuing affective relations with the pupils and getting involved in their integral development. Thus, if historically the femininity attributed to teachers was associated not with professionalism, and while it effectively houses tensions and contradictions, that same femininity also involves the opposition to the standardization of teaching, to the rationality of competition, to the depersonalization of relations and to the simplification that ensues from measurement – in short, an opposition to the business logic.

¹⁶ In the original: "Hoje mesmo a coordenadora mostrou para a gente a meta do ano passado, do Idesp, a gente superou a meta; mas obviamente que não é perfeito... Sempre tem aquele aluno que chega no 5º ano sem saber ler e escrever. Isso é uma angústia muito grande para a gente, dar conta desses alunos, então..."

¹⁷ In the original: "Independente da gente ter bônus ou não, a gente vai ensinar aquilo para o aluno, aquilo que a gente tem obrigação, que é dever nosso ensinar e é direito dele saber. [...] O que as coordenadoras propõem a gente acata, porque a gente pensa nos alunos."

¹⁸ In the original: "Às vezes, chegam projetos prontos, da Diretoria de Ensino, que eles falam: 'Esse projeto é para ajudar os alunos não alfabéticos.' Mas, às vezes, é uma coisa que não faz muito sentido para o meu aluno. E aí depois vem a outra cobrança, que é a cobrança de colocar em prática aquilo que eles mandaram pronto. [...] Porque aquela criança, para a Diretoria de Ensino, ela é só um número, ela é só uma corzinha lá na tabela que está dizendo que ela não é alfabética ainda. A Diretoria de Ensino não tem o cuidado de ir lá e saber quem é esse aluno, que dificuldade que ele tem, quem é a família desse aluno; então, esse cuidado não tem."

HOW TO ARTICULATE WITH RACE?

In the present analysis, I made no articulation between gender and race. To go beyond the mere description of which teachers declared themselves as White or as Black, and to apprehend race beyond the bodily features, I would need to have access to analyses of racial relations that also moved through the three dimensions: the structural/institutional, symbolic and individual. It would be necessary to move towards the proposal made by Luciana Alves (2010) and develop “an object of study that was not based on subjects and identities, but rather on conceptions about Whiteness [and Blackness] and about race, investigating how these conceptions shape the relations established between people independently of their racial belonging”¹⁹ (p. 14). And, just as Harding (1986) observed about gender identities, this approach would have to assume that racial identities are only partly related to bodily features perceived in people, sometimes in a distant correlation.

Furthermore, it would not be enough to make an atemporal and imprecise discussion. It would be necessary to be very clear about the weight of race relations in the specific context of the teaching of children in contemporary Brazil. Is the femininity historically associated to this occupation also associated to Whiteness? What exactly does that mean?

The notion of intersectionality grew out of the criticism made by North American Black feminists of the feminism that was prevalent in that country in the 1970s, which aimed at being universal, but was based on the experience of oppression of middle-class White women. Thinkers associated to anti-racist and lesbian feminism pointed out, among other problems, that features of femininity that had been identified by the movement, such as fragility and domesticity, the emphasis on emotions and on interpersonal relations, were relevant only for the group of White, heterosexual, middle-class women.

In the case of the United States of America, historical studies such as those by Phyllis Palmer (1989) and Bell Kaplan (1987) indicate how the idealized femininity of the White housewife was built less in opposition to a masculinity than as a counterpoint to the characteristics attributed to a non-White domestic worker (robust, rude, untidy etc.). These analyses suggest that only the complex interrelation between divisions of gender, class and race would allow us to understand how women are hierarchically located in the daily process of reproduction, which has consequences even for the definitions of femininity.

Thinking specifically about the concept of care, it also seemed to be initially constructed on the basis of the experience of middle-class White women. It is referenced to the domestic sphere and to the unpaid work for their own families, failing to understand or criticize the position of women from the popular segments, particularly Blacks (and immigrants, such as Latin women), in their majority employed in domestic services – doing, therefore, paid care services to people who are not from their families. Furthermore, Hillary Graham (1991, p. 66) indicates that it is not just a case of knowing that the paid work of care is carried out by non-White women, but rather of taking “the racial structuring of caring as the object of analysis”.

In North American feminism there is a consolidated discussion that may perhaps help us to understand our own country. While for middle-class White women domestic work is a watershed between public life and private life, with the family as synonym for the private sphere and the works related to the caring for family members experienced as confinement and oppression, the same cannot be said for all women. For Black women, from slavery through to paid domestic service, work outside their own families – frequently work involving caring for the family of others – has had precedence over the needs of their own children and relatives. And the absence of a clearly

¹⁹ In the original: “um objeto de pesquisa que não se baseasse em sujeitos e identidades, mas em concepções sobre a brancura [e a negritude] e sobre a raça, investigando como essas concepções dão forma às relações estabelecidas pelas pessoas, independentemente de sua pertença racial.”

defined private sphere, more than its presence, has structured their experiences of oppression. It suffices to recall the wet nurses and more recently the resident domestic workers, the children raised by grandmothers in their places of origin. For Black women, the possibility of caring for their own family and keeping it united would have a sense of achievement, of freedom and resistance to race and class oppression, whereas paid employment caring for the families of others would have been lived as the situation emblematic of their oppression.

How does this issue reverberate nowadays in the work of Brazilian teachers? Is the fact that the ideal model of teaching for children incorporates practices of care and elements of femininity – such as dedication, lovingness, tenderness – related also to Whiteness and to class origin?

I sketched such analysis in the interpretation of the work of Alda, one of the teachers I interviewed and observed during my doctorate fieldwork (CARVALHO, 1999a, 1999b). Alda was the only Black teacher at the school studied and she was also the only one from a popular origin. More than her colleagues she perceived teaching as her work, not talking about vocation nor about passion for teaching coming from childhood, although she shared in the ideal of the teacher dedicated and emotionally attached to the children. At the same time, the work as a domestic worker (an occupation more common among the women in Alda's family) seemed to haunt her relation with the pupils, children of others requiring attention, her involvement, her time ("I am not a babysitter"). Alda's testimonies and attitudes indicated that the circumscribing of a private sphere in her life was a privilege precariously established, for which she still had to struggle, underlining the differences between professional work and domestic work, emphasizing the technical dimensions of the teaching craft, and reining in her affective involvement at school. Whereas for other teachers the work of teaching seemed to mean the realization of their femininity, Alda apparently faced a more contradictory situation.

That analysis was, however, focused on the interpretation of a specific case and, despite pointing towards the same issues, it did not bring forward a debate about the racial dimension involved in the ideal of dedicated and affective teacher. Besides, as far as I could gather, this approach had no follow-up in other studies.

I should underline that this is not a question of knowing whether teachers are White or Black, but rather of knowing whether the teaching work at the fundamental education level is perceived as feminine and also as White. Based on this social perception, both men and women, Blacks and Whites, need to position themselves and construct their forms of labor, practices of conformity or of resistance.

OTHER RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that it is quite reasonable and possible to develop this kind of study on a myriad of other objects – and I focus my examples on the field of formal education. If we agree with Harding (1986) that the concepts of gender are disseminated throughout our symbolic and institutional system, and that they span apparently genderless phenomena – and she gives examples from architecture and urban planning, just as Scott (1986) exemplifies with agriculture and diplomacy; and furthermore, if we agree with Collins (1993) that this is a fruitful path to construct intersectional analyses, then we can ask ourselves many new questions.

In previous studies I analyzed the differences in school performance between boys and girls, considering also economic and racial inequalities, and trying to understand if school success was perceived as masculine, feminine, White, Black (CARVALHO, 2009). That question turned out to be a complex and multifaceted one and, despite several researchers having developed theses and dissertations along these lines (TOLEDO, 2016; SENKEVICS, 2015; PEREIRA, 2008, 2015; ARTES, 2009), there are still many questions left, such as what are the reasons behind differences in standardized test results; the differentiated performances in specific disciplines such as Portuguese and Math; the

influence of age-group of boys and girls; the variations found among urban and rural schools, public and private, or between schools that catered for families from different social classes; or still, the ways in which race classification takes place within the school, in relation to gender and class.

Similarly, there have been studies enquiring about the association between school indiscipline and certain types of masculinity (NEVES, 2008; SANTOS, 2007; SILVA NETO, 2019). That has also been shown to be a complex question and rather resistant to simplifications, which becomes evident when we think about the forms of indiscipline in girls, in the differences between children and youngsters, in the ways in which indiscipline is related to the perception of Blackness and of poverty, or on how educators define what constitutes unruly behavior.

Just like the research summarized in the present essay has focused on the work of teachers from the initial years of fundamental education, Saboya (2004) and Oliveira (2019) studied the work of school principals: would that be viewed as masculine or as feminine? In what aspects did the changes following the “new public administration”, by bringing to the schools the logic of entrepreneurship and competition, lead school management to a model of masculinity? It must be noted that these studies did not face the question whether these models are associated to Whiteness and its meanings.

Actually, it would be worth studying also the work of teachers at different levels and modalities of education, from early childhood education to higher education, as well as the whole of the hierarchy of positions in the educational systems, from the kitchen staff – whose work is strongly associated to that of domestic workers, and therefore to femininity, to Blackness, and to poverty – to the secretaries and ministers of education (positions associated to masculinity, to Whiteness and to better salaries). Can we consider, for example, that the Ministry of Education is more feminine than the Ministry of Economy? Are they both equally associated to Whiteness?

And still: are the school spaces organized in terms of gender, class and race? How does this organization influence the hierarchization of the spaces and their occupation by different subjects? The schoolyard, the principal’s office, the sports court, the kitchen, the school desks closer to or more distant from the teacher – how are they envisaged on a day-to-day basis? What power relations are involved therein?

We could go on indefinitely in the suggestion of objects of study in the educational field that are not based on subjects and identities, but on social notions about gender, class and race. However, I wish only to leave open a few instigations, in the hope of stimulating new studies.

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