

arts and humanities

Intersectionalities of gender, race, class and sexual orientation

Study on black lesbian lives in a lusophone context

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Abstract

The main objective research work is to stimulate the debate on intersectionalities and to deep our understanding about the lives of black lesbian in a lusophone context. Our research focus is directed to identity discourses and life histories of black and lesbian women from S. Tomé, Cape Verde, Angola, Guine and Brazil, living in the city of Lisbon. Using a theoretical background on feminist, postcolonial and lusophone theories, grounded in the Cultural Studies, we try to understand the main problems, constraints, stereotypes and social discrimination for black lesbian and reach some proposals to make their lives less precarious.



Fig. 2 / Photo session - Black lesbian - Guiné Bissau. Lisbon, March 2017. Author's archive.

Objectives

The reflection developed in this research concerns the neglected black lesbian identities in the academic context, by research their lived experience in Portuguese-speaking countries such as: Cape Verde (Fig. 1), Guiné Bissau (Fig. 2), Angola (Fig. 3), São Tomé and Príncipe, Brazil and Portugal. We also seek to find possible negative social and cultural effects that are magnified by the intersection of several discriminatory conditions (black, lesbian, poor, African, Latin American, immigrant, non-academics, non-feminized).

Methodology

The methodological position chosen for this research is essentially qualitative: it concerns the practices, the subjectivities, the identities, using individual and collective interviews, focus-group and a photograph essay.

Literature Review

In the last decades feminist studies are more focused on reformulating ideas and constant deconstructions about gender, race, sexuality and sexual orientation (hooks, 2015: 207). However, there are issues regarding black and lesbian women who have been ignored. According to Zethu Matebeni (2009: 336), lesbians are invisible, stigmatized in many societies and undocumented, which further hampers the interest of researchers. In this way, we highlight research that prioritizes heteronormative visions on the black population in the diaspora and also perceptions of North American and European white lesbians in detriment of other visions. Falquet (2013: 02) explains that this fact is linked to the "political situation of Western hegemony" that produces more theories in the North countries, constituted by a large majority of white, urban and middle-class women. The present research focuses in intersectional black feminism and postcolonial thought. Two strands of the social sciences and Cultural Studies work toward criticism of historicism, Western European universalism, and questions related to the absence of socially oppressed, racialized, stereotyped, and subaltern subjects in academy and outside it.

Some previous results

From the testimonies collected so far, it is possible to perceive that the black population living in Portugal, whether immigrant or already born in a lusophone country, suffers from various practices of discrimination based on the color of their skin, which is independent of their gender or sexual orientation. However, when it comes to the specific problems faced by black, lesbian and 'non-feminized' women, the situation of exclusion is further aggravated. In this sense, it is recalled that the intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 2004) assists mainly in the organization of black women's patterns, taking into account their real needs, since they are subjected to oppression that go far beyond their gender. The results we achieved so far indicate that this community lives in a deep negative intersectionality: they are more vulnerable, they suffer more from high rates of unemployment, jobs without labor rights and lack of opportunities.



Fig. 1 / Photo session - Black lesbian - Cape Verde. Lisbon, March 2017. Author's archive.

Conclusion

The struggle against racism and lesbophobia is not only what is explicitly denounced or object of political activism. It is recognized that the clear majority of black lesbians are discriminated in their daily lives for religious, cultural and/or family reasons. Thus, they avoid systematically to expose their sexual orientation. For these reasons, in the context of this research, micro-organizations are considered revolutionary, because when black and lesbian women face various discriminations and respond to society with their strategic practices of common resistance in daily life (Spivak, 2010), their attitudes, even if silent, are transformative and may contribute to people's awareness of these negative intersectional life.



Fig. 3 / Photo session - Black lesbian - Angola. Lisbon, March 2017. Author's archive.

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