

## **ANALYZING FOOD INSECURITY THROUGH INTERSECTIONALITY: EXPLORING THE NUANCES OF COLOR AND GENDER IN HUNGER**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The essay discusses the complexities of the interaction between color and gender in food insecurity, addressing the situation in Brazil. Research reveals that contextual and individual factors, such as living in the North and Northeast regions, low income, belonging to the black/brown race/color, and being female, are related to a higher prevalence of food insecurity. The concept of intersectionality is introduced to understand the multiple forms of oppression that marginalized groups face. The essay highlights the vulnerability of black women heads of households in the face of food insecurity, highlighting the central role of structural racism in social hierarchy and its negative impact on the black population. The marginalization of black women is compounded by negative media representations and gender-based violence. In addition, inequality in access to economic resources perpetuates disparities in food security. The analysis emphasizes the importance of recognizing the nuances within these groups and addressing the human rights violations that occur.

**Keywords:** Food Insecurity. Social Inequalities. Gender. Race.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, a series of evidence has emerged that indicates disparities in access to food at the global level (GRAHAM; DALLMANN; MELGAR-QUIÑONEZ, 2019). In Brazil, research has been conducted with the aim of identifying the elements associated with food insecurity in different populations, revealing demographic and socioeconomic disparities (SANTOS et al., 2018; MARIN-LEON et al., 2011). Both contextual factors, such as living in the North and Northeast regions of the country, and individual factors, such as low income, belonging to the black/brown races/color, and being female, are related to a higher prevalence of food insecurity (FACCHINI et al., 2014; IBGE, 2020).

According to the definition adopted in the country, food and nutrition security encompasses the "realization of everyone's right to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting food practices that respect cultural diversity and are environmental, cultural, cultural, economically and socially sustainable" (BRASIL, 2006). When this human right is violated, it results in food insecurity, which progressively manifests itself in the family environment, from concern about the future availability of food to the occurrence of hunger.

Kepple & Segall-Corrêa (2011) developed a conceptual framework for the discussion on the determinants of household food security, which encompasses multiple and intersectional factors distributed at three levels. At the macro-socioeconomic level, there are institutional, international and national policies related to the economic and social fields. At the regional/local level, access to food is influenced by elements such as employment, food prices, availability of public services, education, health, as well as the presence of racism and discrimination in society. At the household level, the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of individuals are considered, such as race, gender, education, and income.

The conceptual work developed by Kepple & Segall-Corrêa (2011) played a fundamental role in advancing the debate on food security. By highlighting the structuring element of Brazilian society, racism, together with gender discrimination, they brought to light determinant factors of social opportunities and access to material resources. These aspects have been incorporated into analyses of food insecurity, expanding the list of

structural consequences of the social disadvantages faced by the black population and women.

However, although it is often observed that food insecurity is more common among the black population and women, it is important to highlight the criticisms made by black authors in relation to approaches that focus on factors linked to inequalities. These criticisms underscore the importance of recognizing the differences that exist within these groups and often point to the invisibility of the human rights violations that occur (GONZALEZ, 1984; CRENSHAW, 2002; HOOKS B, 2019). If for white women from the middle classes, an important point for autonomy is their insertion in paid work, demanding activation policies; For black women from the poorest classes, participation in the world of work is, in general, precocious, precarious and inscribes them, from the outset, at disadvantageous levels. The demands are, therefore, differentiated (MARCONDES et al., 2013).

In this context, Crenshaw (2002) introduced the concept of intersectionality to highlight the various forms of subordination that certain groups face due to their identities. She argues that intersectionality seeks to address the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of oppression by examining how racism, sexism, and other systems of segregation contribute to creating fundamental inequalities that determine the position of marginalized groups in society.

When looking at color and gender nuances in food insecurity, it is important to consider factors such as structural discrimination, unequal access to economic resources, empowerment, and political representation. These factors can contribute to the disparities observed in contemporary society - and which refer to a historical context of slavery - and to the perpetuation of the cycle of hunger in marginalized communities.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate the complexities of the interaction between color and gender in food insecurity, in order to understand how these elements interact with and impact experiences and inequalities related to food shortages.

## METHODOLOGY

This essay presents reflections based on the authors' vast didactic experience and their significant role in scientific dissemination over decades. The research adopts a qualitative and reflective approach, based on a documentary and descriptive investigation, through a literature review (ESTRELA, 2018; THOMAS, NELSON & SILVERMAN, 2007).

The structure of the study comprises four sections, in addition to the introduction and final considerations. The first section addresses family transformations and the black woman as head of the family, highlighting the challenges and social dynamics that permeate this reality. In the second section, structural racism and its gender perspective are discussed, based on the analysis of the 2018 Atlas of Violence, conducted by the Brazilian Forum on Public Security, which evidenced the high homicide rate among the black population as a reflection of racial inequalities in Brazil. The third section problematizes unequal access to resources, analyzing how, historically, women have been directed to domestic activities and responsible for raising children, in contrast to the absence of this requirement for men. Finally, the fourth section discusses empowerment and public policies, emphasizing that, after the abolition of slavery, the Brazilian State did not implement effective social policies to integrate the black population into society. This historical gap persists, reflecting the insufficiency of current public policies to respond adequately to the racial and gender demands of this population.

## **FAMILY TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE BLACK WOMAN**

Over time, there have been significant changes in family structures within households. The traditional composition, which includes the head of the family, spouse and children, has had its relative importance reduced. On the other hand, an increase in the number of family arrangements involving childless couples, single-person households, and single-parent families with children or other relatives has been observed. These transformations reflect the different forms of family organization that have emerged in society.

A trend observed throughout the time series is the growth in the proportion of households "headed" by women. The IBGE, through the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), asks the respondent who is the reference person of that household. In 1995, 23% of households had women as reference persons; twenty years later, in 2015, this number reaches 40% (IPEA, 2017).

In order to understand the multidimensional scope of inequalities resulting from the intersection of gender and race hierarchies, it is necessary to consider variables beyond income in order to reveal the complexity of this phenomenon. In this context, single-parent family arrangements led by women may represent greater vulnerability and are more present among families in poverty (MARIANO; CARLOTO, 2013).

It is important to highlight that families headed by women are not limited only to those in which there is no male presence. In 34% of these families, there is the presence of a spouse. However, the number of families in which women do not have a spouse and have children is significant. In these situations, it is necessary to emphasize that these families often face a higher risk of social vulnerability (IPEA, 2017). This is due to the average income of women, especially black women, which remains considerably lower not only compared to that of men, but also in relation to white women.

These results highlight inequality in access to food, revealing that black women who are heads of households are more vulnerable to food insecurity. This condition was also observed by the study by Marin-Leon et al. (2011) in relation to Brazil. The study examines this situation through the lens of intersectionality, an approach that takes into account the interplay of power relations such as racism and sexism. This allows us to analyze the reality of groups that are affected by more than one form of oppression, such as black women. For Crenshaw (2002), this approach favors the understanding of the specific conditions that arise from these intersections, including the food insecurity that affects this group.

## **STRUCTURAL RACISM AND ITS GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

Racism manifests itself within a structure of domination, where power plays a central role in racial dynamics. For Almeida (2018), racial inequality is not limited only to being a characteristic of isolated actions of racist individuals or specific movements, but also manifests itself as a result of the dominance of certain racial groups over institutions, which use institutional mechanisms to impose their political and economic interests.

According to Schwarz's (2007) analysis, racial democracy does not exist in Brazil due to the perverse practice of exclusion and discrimination. He argues that in our society race is not limited to a purely biological concept, but rather plays a central role in social hierarchization. In his book, Carneiro (2011) reports that certain individuals of Caucasian origin, including those who share this perception, conceive the existence of a single standard considered acceptable for being black: the one associated with failure, fragility, "submissiveness", dependence and subordination, as if they were the only possible condition. Additionally, the presence of powerful, noble and victorious blacks is seen by such individuals as an affront.

Currently, it is common to come across the constant presence of representations in the media, in soap operas and in advertising campaigns, which perpetuate the subaltern allocation of the black individual. These representations contribute to naturalizing the collective memory inclined to racial segregation and to marginalizing the black population, simply by virtue of the color of their skin (NUNES; NOGUEIRA, 2021).

From a statistical perspective, the analysis of the 2018 Atlas of Violence, conducted by the Brazilian Forum on Public Security, which highlighted the high incidence of homicides among the black population as one of the main manifestations of racial inequality in Brazil, is extremely important. The aforementioned study was forceful in revealing that, when calculating homicide rates within the population groups of blacks (blacks and browns) and non-blacks (whites, yellows, and indigenous), the magnitude of inequality becomes evident (BRASIL, 2018).

Analyzing the same document and making the record of the female population by the race/color variable, a phenomenon already widely known is confirmed: considering the data from 2016, the homicide rate is higher among black women (5.3) than among non-black women (3.1) – the difference is 71%. In relation to the ten years of the series, the homicide rate for every 100 thousand black women increased by 15.4%, while among non-black women there was a drop of 8%. Therefore, it is undeniable that racism constitutes a system that results in various manifestations of negligence or negligent acts, since, regardless of its form of manifestation, racism implies moral contempt for people belonging to the racialized collective.

The Atlas of Violence, when carrying out a differentiated analysis by gender in its research, found that the data presented show the urgent need to improve the mechanisms to combat gender violence, since laws and public policies are insufficient to prevent the occurrence of such brutal murders of women.

The study also reveals that, although the statistics present mortality rates by gender, "the woman who becomes a fatal victim has often been the victim of a series of other gender-based violence, for example: psychological, patrimonial, physical or sexual violence". For Schwarz (2007), as there is a series of negative representations related to the malandro and the mestizo, when it comes to women, this situation intensifies. Black women, especially mulatto women, are the target of stereotypes that go beyond laziness, also involving sexually "reprehensible" practices. She is associated with prostitution, betrayal and is seen as clever and cunning.

## UNEQUAL ACCESS TO RESOURCES

According to Carneiro (2011), the lives of black women are historically marked by the exploitation of their work and their bodies, by exclusion, discrimination and social rejection. Food insecurity, by aggravating the existing disparities between races and genders, emerges as a manifestation of the socioeconomic exploitation and marginalization faced by the black women's group. It can be understood as a synthesis of socioeconomic indicators that show the social vulnerability inherent to the position occupied by black women in society.

For Silva et al (2022), black women and white women, although they face gender discrimination as a result of racial discrimination, have different experiences in various spheres, including the workplace. In general, women have less access to the labor market than men. In 2015, the unemployment rate among women in Brazil was 11.6%. However, when we analyzed the data by race/color, we observed that this percentage was even higher for black women, reaching 13.3%. In addition, in the same period, domestic employment represented 18% of occupations for black women, while for white women this number was 10%. These disparities are accentuated when we consider the formalization of these occupations. Only 29.3% of black workers had a formal contract, compared to 32.5% of white workers (IPEA, 2017).

According to data published by Rosa (2009) and IBGE (2022), white women experience forms of gender discrimination, but their racial identity grants them more substantial privileges and advantages in the context of social relations, in contrast to black men and black women. This discrepancy can be understood through the greater inclusion of white women in higher education and in the labor market.

The diversification of social functions did not extend equally to black women, resulting in the strengthening of class and race inequalities among women. This was because activities that were not culturally valued as part of domestic work, with the goal of eliminating the sexual division of labor, ended up being assigned to black women. This dynamic reinforced the presence of this group in private contexts, such as in the role of domestic workers, for example (NOGUEIRA, 2017). In the field of health, differences are also observed between these groups. In the study by Leal et al. (2017), worse indicators of prenatal care and childbirth were found in black and brown women, compared to white women.

When it comes to studies, throughout history women have traditionally been directed to domestic activities and raising children, being held accountable for this responsibility by society, which does not occur in the same way with men. This reveals the existence of significant gender inequality and highlights the sexist nature of our society (OLIVEIRA, 2022)

According to IBGE data, it is possible to observe that women represent the majority at all levels of education and have a tendency to stay longer in school (Brasil, 2019). However, it is important to note that access to education is not reflected in an equivalent way in the labor market, since there is a wage disparity between men and women who have similar levels of education, with men being better paid. In addition, it is important to highlight that inequality in access to education also disproportionately affects black women, who face an even greater wage differential when compared to white men.

In Silva et al. (2022), households headed by black women were more likely to face moderate or severe food insecurity, even when considering the highest level of education. In addition, when the per capita family income was higher than one minimum wage, these households showed a higher probability of experiencing this condition, along with households headed by black men. Márcia and Prates (2015), based on national demographic censuses, identified that the income of people graduated in the same professions and inserted in the same occupational category had significant differences, reaching more than R\$ 1,000.00, in which whites earned more than blacks, especially in professions such as medicine, engineering and law.

In order to understand the multidimensional scope of inequalities resulting from the intersection of gender and race hierarchies, it is necessary to consider variables beyond income, in order to reveal the complexity of this phenomenon (MARIANO; CARLOTO, 2013). Black women have often sought training in courses that are socially and economically less valued, usually in areas of relative subordination and that are marked by an emphasis on care, such as social work, nursing, or physiotherapy. Although this training can provide remuneration that contributes to family expenses, it does not represent a significant financial change for their families (GÓIS, 2008; QUERINO, LIMA and MADSEN, 2011).

According to Assari's (2018) research, a relevant aspect to be considered is the existence of reduced educational returns for the black population compared to whites, due to the discrimination present in the labor market. This discrimination perpetuates the

inequality of competition between blacks and whites, even when they have the same level of education and occupy similar jobs, manifesting itself through the wage disparities between these groups. In addition, within black families, there are few individuals who manage to ascend socially, becoming references and support for those who did not have the same opportunities.

This shows that the initial social position of blacks and whites differs, since differences in opportunities over generations and wage discrepancies perpetuate racial inequalities, causing adverse impacts on black families. These have less capacity for consumption and accumulation of wealth, in addition to greater vulnerability in periods of economic crisis and austerity policies.

## **EMPOWERMENT AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

After the end of the slave system, the Brazilian State did not implement social policies aimed at individuals newly acquired as citizens. Likewise, current social policies continue to fail to adequately address the historical demands related to racial and gender issues of the black population (LIRA, 2018).

For the aforementioned author, in the current context we can identify the place of exclusion of the black population in the formulation and implementation of social policies promoted by the State. This population occupies positions of surplus workers, characterized by precarious labor and subject to super-exploitation, receiving the lowest wages, the minimum necessary for survival, thus perpetuating the invisibility of a people over the centuries.

Following the research of Mariano & Carloto (2013), which explored the effectiveness of public policies aimed at food security in Brazil, it was found, through interviews with white and black women beneficiaries of the Bolsa Família program, that although both belonged to groups in poverty, black women faced greater social and economic vulnerability. In addition, these women also reported experiences of racial discrimination when seeking job opportunities. The researchers found that Black mothers who faced racial discrimination during job search, hiring, or in their workplaces were 1.46 times more likely to experience food insecurity (PHOJANAKONG et al., 2019).

These observations highlight the need to overcome the limitations of universal policies, which do not take into account the experience of discrimination faced by black women. Therefore, it is essential that assistance programs be implemented in conjunction

with actions aimed at combating the culture of racial discrimination, both at the interpersonal and institutional levels. This effort, previously coordinated by the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (Consea), an institutional space for social participation, was dismantled in a context of dismantling public policies aimed at food security, aggravated by the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic (VASCONCELOS et al., 2019 and RIBEIRO-SILVA et al., 2020).

During the period of interruption of Consea's activities, its members remained engaged and organized a People's Court against Hunger in 2021. In this event, the federal government was considered responsible for the increase in the prevalence of hunger in the country.

After a period of one year, the results of the II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, conducted by the Brazilian Research Network on Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security (Rede Penssan), revealed that approximately 125 million individuals in the country were affected by food and nutrition insecurity. Of these, an estimated 33 million were in a condition of real famine. This situation represents an increase of 70% compared to the previous year, evidencing the serious intensification of the problem in the mentioned period (PENSSAN, 2022).

As highlighted by Brito and Costa (2015), in the Brazilian context, there is an association between food security and gender disparities, which results in higher probabilities of moderate food insecurity in households headed by women compared to those headed by men. In addition, previously mentioned studies show that women are in need of interventions aimed at promoting their autonomy and empowerment, since they are still often relegated to the traditional role of family protectors. These findings highlight the need for policies and actions that adequately address gender and food issues, aiming to ensure greater equity and autonomy for women (BARROSO, 2004).

In line with the relevance attributed to women as central actors in the biological, social and economic spheres, particularly in the context of domestic Food and Nutrition Security (FNS), the contributions of Le Bihan et al. (2002) and Maluf (2007) stand out. These authors emphasize the importance of implementing actions aimed at strengthening the female condition in various areas, such as education and professional, among others (BRITO; COSTA, 2015). This perspective underscores the need for holistic and gender-sensitive approaches to promote women's equity and empowerment in the context of FNS.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned by Almeida (2019), racism presents itself as a systemic phenomenon that manifests itself in society through actions that can be both conscious and unconscious, resulting in disadvantages or privileges, depending on the racial affiliation of the individuals involved. This observation highlights the complex and pervasive nature of racism, highlighting the need for critical approaches and combat strategies to achieve a more equal and just society.

Persistent individual and institutional discrimination directed at the black population results in widespread harm over time, including a lack of recognition, opportunities, and material resources. In addition, inequalities in access to food are influenced by sexism, which perpetuates gender discrimination and restricts women's participation in society to marginalized and subordinate roles. These determinants, combined, contribute to the continuous reproduction of social disparities, requiring effective and transformative actions (SAFFIOTI, 2015).

The aforementioned determinants have significant negative impacts on the lives and social structure of both black individuals and women, reflecting on several areas, including health (WILLIAMS and PRIEST, 2015; ESTRELA et al., 2020). The intersection of these determinants creates a suffocating social dynamic for black women (CARNEIRO, 2011). By considering the effects of this interaction through the perspective of race and gender intersectionality, it is possible to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the food insecurity scenario, by making intragroup differences visible and placing these determinants at the center of the debate on the subject. This approach is essential to promote a more in-depth analysis and direct effective actions to address food insecurity.

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