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Intimate partner sexual violence and the self from an intersectional perspective: a case study

Violência sexual por parceiro íntimo e o self sob uma ótica interseccional: estudo de caso

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Abstract

Objective

This is a qualitative study that sought to understand the Semiotic Affective Fields and dynamics of black women self in situations of sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner.

Method

An idiographic case study was carried out with a woman who sought help at Welcoming Service for Women in Situations of Sexual Violence, located in Salvador (Bahia), through narrative interviews and access to sociodemographic data. Through the categorical-content analysis proposal, three thematic axes were followed: a) conceptions about being a black woman and intersectional crossings, b) ambivalences of the self and structural violence: impacts of racism and gender violence and c) movements of the self and resource support: paths to coping.

Results

It was identified that the semiotic tools in the creation of affective fields are cultural constructions, a reflection of a persisting colonialist framework.

Conclusion

The results show the importance of social and cognitive resources for developing the processes of transition and deconstruction in the promotion of new signs, generating approximations to a decolonial movement.

Keywords: Ethnopsychology; Intersectional framework; Intimate partner violence.

Resumo

Objetivo

Estudo qualitativo que buscou compreender os Campos Afetivos Semióticos e dinâmicas do self de mulheres negras em situação de violência sexual por parceiro íntimo.

Método

Foi realizado um estudo de caso ideográfico, com usuária de um Serviço de Acolhimento a Mulheres em Situação de Violência Sexual, localizado em Salvador (Bahia), por meio de entrevistas narrativas

e acesso a dados sociodemográficos. Através da proposta categorial-conteúdo de análise, foram elaborados três eixos temáticos: a) concepções sobre ser mulher negra e os atravessamentos interseccionais, b) ambivalências do self e violência estrutural: impactos do racismo e da violência de gênero e c) movimentações do self e o suporte de recursos: caminhos para o enfrentamento.

Resultados

Foi identificado que as ferramentas semióticas na criação de campos afetivos são construções culturais, reflexo de um contexto colonialista ainda vigente.

Conclusão

Os resultados evidenciam a importância dos recursos sociais e cognitivos para os processos de transição e desconstrução na promoção de novos signos, gerando aproximações a um movimento decolonial.

Palavras-chave: Psicologia cultural; Enquadramento interseccional; Violência por parceiro íntimo.

Sexual violence is understood as any conduct using intimidation, coercion or the use of violence, to force someone to witness, maintain or participate in unwanted sexual relations, commercialize or use sexuality in any way, preventing the use of any contraceptive method, forcing marriage, abortion or prostitution or limiting or nullifying the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights (Presidência da República, 2006). This type of violence affects mainly women, adolescents and children and its high rates and the serious consequences it bears for the cognitive, emotional and social development of both the victims and their family, configure this violence as a public health problem (Habigzang et al., 2011).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) encompasses sexual violence and is defined as a set of behaviors within an intimate relationship that cause physical, sexual and/or psychological harm, perpetrated by spouses, current and past partners, mostly perpetrated by men against girls and women. This type of violence is considered extremely common, although its occurrence and physical and psychological impacts are hidden because this violence occurs in a private setting, resulting in an underestimation of the real levels of data it can generate (Ministério da Saúde, 2012).

A study conducted in Latin America shows that the prevalence of IPV is high, varying in relation to the physical, psychological and sexual dimensions (Ministério da Saúde, 2012). In Brazil, a higher proportion of IPV reports was observed among women with lower levels of education who find it difficult to recognize themselves as victims, only seeking help when the violence goes beyond the barrier of psychological harm and begins causing injuries resulting from physical violence (Mascarenhas et al., 2020). The victims are predominantly female, young adults, with black skin color and with worse socioeconomic status, lower levels of education and without a job. The home was the main place where IPV occurred, which contributes to the invisibility of the phenomenon (Garcia & Silva, 2018). In a systematic review of Brazilian scientific productions in Psychology about IPV against women, only one study was found that sought to assess race and gender in the framework of violence against women; the study presented data from the Atlas of Violence that shows an increase in the number of black women murder episodes in recent years (65.3%) (Curia et al., 2020).

In view of the above, it is necessary to consider that the reverberations of sexual violence associated with IPV generate impacts on the subjectivity and self of the people affected by such violence. This is a field of research that is still incipient, especially when it comes to an intersectional perspective. In our study, the concept of self is framed within a narrative and dialogical structure, understood as a "physical body, thought processes and a conscious experience that each one is unique and differentiated from the others, which involves the mental representation of personal experiences" (Macedo & Silveira, 2012, p. 281). Taking as a reference the Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Mediation and the concepts of Dialogical Self and Semiotic Affective Fields, it is understood

that phenomena that occur in people's lives promote ruptures and transformations in the structure of their selves, such as situations of violence.

Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Mediation is based on the axiom of the centrality of the person who experiences, from where his/her subjectivity comes. Therefore, it transcends the barrier between the self and others, as, in the present time, people address others, who may be real or not real, present or not present, and through such constructs of social reference understand their action for the future (Valsiner, 2014). The understanding of the self is considered from a dialogical dimension composed of different positions of the self, endowed with autonomy, enabling the circulation between the different positions and the dialogue between the different voices. These personify the "self" in its versions, enabling the establishment of narratives and the construction of multifaceted dialogues in the conception of a narratively structured and decentralized self (Hermans, 2002).

The notion of Affective-Semiotic Fields (ASF) becomes relevant for understanding the dynamics of the self in movement, since it integrates semiotic emergence with affective processes (Valsiner, 2012). The ASF are semiotic devices, with an affective quality, that organize the self system and enable its changes (Valsiner, 2012). Specific ASF are responsible for organizing self systems, revealing the tensions and dynamics that emerge in "self-other" relationships in different frameworks (Valsiner, 2012).

There are so far, few studies that cover the Theory of the Dialogical Self taking as reference gender, race and class markers, thus contemplating an intersectional perspective of the self. Intersectionality aims to give theoretical and methodological instrumentality to the structural inseparability of racism, capitalism and cisheteropatriarchy, producers of identity avenues where black women are repeatedly affected by the intersection and overlapping of gender, race and class, considered modern colonial apparatuses (Akotirene, 2018).

The findings that address individuals' conceptions of themselves, considering ethnic-racial issues, point to the implications of racist beliefs and values in the trajectories of self-development, and how the devaluation of black characteristics and overvaluation of white characteristics are at the basis of the difficulty of constructing positive self-conceptions associated with blackness (Oliveira, 2016). There is, therefore, a criticism of the way the self is understood by Euro-Western theories, predominant in Psychology, which do not contemplate the specificities of psychological development of those who do not correspond to the universal human being standard adopted by them, which includes black women (Teixeira, 2020).

In this process, we identify a critical look at the few productions that aim to carry out an analysis of the IPV impacts taking as a reference sexual violence and its consequences on the mostly affected individuals i.e. black women, in light of theories that address the Dialogical Self and its dynamics. Considering that IPV represents one of the most prevalent and endemic forms of violence against women (Curia et al., 2020), our study aims to understand black women's ASF and dynamics of the dialogical self in situations of sexual violence by an intimate partner, taking as a reference an in-depth case study from the perspective of Cultural Psychology of Semiotic Mediation and Intersectionality.

Method

This is a qualitative study using an idiographic method that delves into the world of meanings of human actions and relationships, encompassing the subjective and relational level of social reality, portrayed through history, the universe and the meanings of social actors (Minayo, 2004).

This case study was used as a methodological strategy, which allows for an investigation to preserve the holistic and significant characteristics of real-life events, contributing to the understanding of individual, organizational, social and political phenomena in depth (Yin, 2001).

The investigation setting included a Welcoming Service for Women in Situations of Sexual Violence, located in Salvador (Bahia), where women – living in the state of Bahia and out of that state – from the age of 12, who have been involved in situations of sexual violence, are assisted by a multidisciplinary team. It is worth noting that the first author of this study was part of the team of professionals at the service and conducted psychological counseling with the study participant.

The inclusion criteria used included being a woman, an adult, self-identifying as black (black or mixed race), residing in Salvador (Bahia), being under multidisciplinary care at the Service for at least six months and undergoing psychological care at the time of the survey. The participant's identification and other people first names were replaced to preserve confidentiality.

The project that originated this article was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Federal da Bahia (Federal University of Bahia, Opinion No. 4,642,146) and by the Research Ethics Committee of the Secretaria de Saúde do Estado da Bahia (Health Department of the State of Bahia, Opinion No. 4,950,205). Two narrative interviews were conducted in the Service's own treatment room. A sociodemographic data form was used for the survey and information was collected from the patient's medical records.

The narrative interview is an instrument that encourages the narration of important life episodes, configuring the act of telling/narrating and listening to stories as a method to achieve objectives (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2010). The narrative analysis was based on the proposal of Lieblich et al. (1998) in which the categorical-content analysis was selected and adopted when there is interest in a problem or phenomenon shared by a group of people. Content categories were defined, based on the narrative interviews conducted with the study participant, represented by themes or perspectives that crossed the text and provided means of classifying its units - words, sentences or groups of phrases.

Results

Girassol: Brief Characterization and Insertion into the Service

Girassol is a heterosexual, cisgender woman who identifies herself as being black; she is 30 years old. She is a follower of *Candomblé* and is the mother of two: Sonhador, a boy nine years old, and Flor, a girl two years old. She lives in a workers-class neighborhood in Salvador; she has completed high school and works as an administrative assistant, earning an average of one minimum wage, and is benefited by social assistance programs. She came to the Service about one month after the episode of sexual violence upon recommendation from a female coworker, with whom she had shared details of her situation. She arrived at the unit pregnant, having suffered violence; the aggressor was a man she met through a social media app and with whom she was in a romance relationship. After a period of consensual sexual intercourse, at a certain point in their relationship, he forced her to have sex after removing the condom without her consent, behaviors that are considered rape pursuant to article 223 of the Brazilian Criminal Code.

Girassol received all the care provided by the multidisciplinary team at the Service and reported the case to the Specialized Police Station. She indicated she wanted to undergo the procedure for legal termination of her pregnancy, as recommended by the Brazilian Criminal Code for pregnancies resulting from rape. However, during the institutional protocol for carrying out the

procedure, she withdrew her request and decided to continue with her pregnancy. She was discharged from all care provided at the unit and remained only in psychological monitoring.

Conception of Being a Black Woman and Intersectional Crossings

Girassol describes her life trajectory as someone “before Flor” and “after Flor”. She points out that she comes from a family where she had no contact with her biological father, being raised by her mother and stepfather, in a conflictive coexistence, receiving help from her large family, mainly the women. She highlights the “lack” of a father figure in her life and the attempts to overcome this absence through the care of her aunts. Because she does not come from a family structure based on the “traditional” format, Girassol considered marital separation and reconstituted families as a standard of normality. In her development process, she gradually understood the existence of a “family ideal” and understood that it was different from the family model she had experienced and, thus, she also began to aspire to it.

It was from this construction of family meaning that Girassol established as her life goal to enter into a romantic relationship. She states that she felt fulfilled by the bonds of friendship she had, but she was distressed by an “emptiness” that made her want “to have a relationship at any price”. She indicates that experiencing a relationship could make up for the “absence of a father” and the “lack of maternal affection”. It was in this connection that she began using dating apps, but she was constantly frustrated by the fact that she met men “who were only interested in sex”. In this process, Girassol talks about the relationship in which she got pregnant and delivered her first son, Sonhador; she acknowledged it was a bad relationship; however she made an effort to maintain that relationship in order to sustain the “ideal” family model that she so desired. She highlights her skin color and social status as factors that disadvantaged her in the search for the partner she idealized.

(...) when I went to meet the person, I knew I was starting a relationship with someone and telling me that I didn't want to be with anyone at the moment (...) and in fact I was starting a relationship with someone else. And this other person (...) most of the time it was a woman with lighter skin (...) with straightened hair, who had more money than me, who had a house (...) and then I thought “yeah, to have a relationship these days you have to have a house and better condition! Because I can't get white!”

She shares the difficulties in conceiving herself as a black woman, highlighting the lack of references that highlighted positive elements related to being black. She points out the search for aesthetic procedures such as “surgery to reduce the size of my mouth” and practices such as “my hair took 1 hour for straightening each strand” as examples of how “she really didn't accept herself”.

From this process onwards, she will experience a set of romantic relationships that are not long lasting, since she routinely finds herself getting into a relationship with engaged men. She recognizes that being with a partner who was more caring, kind and loving made her “enchanted” by the person, also putting her in a vulnerable condition because she was unable to pay attention to taking care of herself. Girassol highlights the repetition movement in her life story, naming the influences of her social condition and skin color in the consolidation of this scenario.

Because I think people only want women like us, black women, to use. So, to date, they choose (...) a person who has more money, who has hair that is more acceptable to society, a light skin color, a defined body, now the black woman who has a big butt, you know, skin that is more like this, firmer, more fleshy, is only to be used for sex and then that's it.

She also recognizes how aspects of his characteristics and appearance occupied a place of value in certain settings, as opposed to what happened in other spaces.

(...) I often I even tried to use these things to get a benefit. Like, I would go out and put on a low-cut outfit, because I knew that would draw attention and I would get a drink, get a ride (...).

Girassol highlights reaching a limit in this search when she states that she feels “tired, because she only has to be the love of their life to get the benefit they want”, recognizing that she has no hope regarding the possibility of experiencing a loving relationship and forming a family according to her conception of the ideal model. She finds in the construction and experience of motherhood the opportunity to experience the feeling of love and the consolidation of the family within the only format that she was able to achieve.

Ambivalences of the Self and Structural Violence: Impacts of Racism and Gender Violence

Girassol narrates episodes of racial and gender violence, exemplified by the difficulty in establishing bonds in social spaces such as the school environment, where she states that she could only cultivate friendships with people who were the same as her, referring to issues of race and class. She also portrays other episodes, in the workplace context and in the exercise of her motherhood with her first son, Sonhador, where she felt deprived of her place of belonging due to her skin color.

Girassol also describes situations of gender-based violence throughout her life, highlighting episodes of domestic violence perpetrated by her ex-partner, Sonhador’s father. In this context, IPV is identified.

And so, my son’s father, he abused alcohol, used drugs and I couldn’t tell my mother about this. (...) He would say to me, “What do you think? I’m the only one who will want you, no one else will want you (...) What do you think? A woman with a child, you have to accept all of this! (...) (Crying) “If I go out to look for someone on the street, it’s because you’re not home, you have to accept it! If you’re not showing up, I’m a man, I have to look for them on the street!

Girassol’s process of realizing the violent relationship - physical, psychological and financial - in which she found herself was shaped by the accumulation of roles she occupied, the frustrations and suffering resulting from her ex-partner’s behavior. In addition, she began to regularly check in at a local health unit, starting to see a doctor she had been to because of Sonhador’s pregnancy. This professional began to identify the nuances of Girassol’s health condition and a bond got established; actually he was an important figure in uncovering the IPV situation.

The transitions and transformations in the process of developing Girassol’s self were intensified by the condition of sexual violence imposed by an intimate partner, which occurred years after her marital separation and which led her to the Service. Girassol reports that she continued to seek a relationship after the separation, again through dating apps, at which time she met and began a relationship with the perpetrator of the sexual violence. The IPV that occurred in this framework generated a set of repercussions in Girassol’s perception of herself. She says: “I felt dirty (...) very dirty. As if I had really been guilty, you know? I really felt dirty, as if I had committed a crime. As if I had been wrong, as if I had caused that, you know?” She also addresses the aggravating factor of discovering she was pregnant as a result of the violence, in addition to the impacts of having recognized the situation she had been through.

I was desperate, I didn't know what to do... so I stayed still, I started searching on the internet, drinking tea of I don't know what, tea of that, oh... yeah... like that, and at the time I wasn't aware that he was the one to blame. I thought I was the one in the wrong, just by accepting to go to his house I was wrong, right? (...) So I lived several days of anguish, because many times I cried at home in secret, there were times when my mother saw me crying and didn't do anything (...).

The finding out of pregnancy increased Girassol's feelings of guilt, as she felt unable to face another pregnancy and for not having established a "serious" relationship with the perpetrator of the violence.

When I felt Flor moving into my body, it was terrible, it was something that made me feel repulsed... Finding out that I was pregnant was three times worse than when the situation happened... like, look, I was going to carry this abuse thing for the rest of my life, I wasn't going to tell anyone. (...) I felt that there was something negative inside me and after that I blamed myself so much when Flor was born! (crying). I blamed myself so, so, so much for having thought that about her, for having said those things... For having felt that way.

Added to the other repercussions of the violence suffered, finding out the pregnancy intensified her condition of despair, helplessness and the anguish of not knowing who to turn to or where to go in search of support.

Self-Movements and Resource support: Pathways to Coping

Girassol, in addition to the repercussions of the situations of violence he experienced, highlights the presence of support resources throughout her life trajectory, which she identifies as fundamental for dealing with risk conditions, suffering and difficulties faced in this process.

Access to knowledge proved to be an important resource, both through the training she received throughout her work experiences and through her involvement in *Candomblé*. Girassol emphasizes the importance of being introduced to the historical aspects that permeated racial identification and the positive influence on her acceptance process. Based on a social project linked to a training course in one of the work activities she performed as an adult, Girassol highlights the predominance of employees who self-identified as black or brown and information directed at racial issues by the course faculty: "it was in this course that I had the most courage to show myself as a black woman...".

Girassol attended several religions until she became involved with *Candomblé* and she emphasized the need "to find herself in something" until her first contact with this religion.

(...) and, so, that was the space where I really fit in, where I saw that people were treated equally, there was a moment where we sat down and they showed us the importance of black people, what enslaved black people did, the culture they brought here, the wealth they brought here, even in the way they came here... it's... how I had to assert myself in my work because, for me, being in the public sector, being black, being a *Candomblé* follower, had a very important role for the people from the countryside, that I was important, that I am an important person, that the little piece that I bring there also has a story and, and so... there it's different, there they empower me! There's even a young man there who was the first son of the family and he's a history teacher and, for me, that's very valuable!... and being able to have access to a class like that, for me that's an honor! So there I am in a place where they encourage me to study, to do my best for my children, they encourage me to graduate, go to college, all of that. ...

She also identifies the importance of medical care and guidance while she was in a relationship with Sonhador's father; they actually alerted her to the risks and harms of the marital

relationship she was in. The Support Service for Women in Situations of Sexual Violence also represented a form of support for Girassol.

I was well received by everyone who attended to me... People could see that I was scared... the professionals were patient with me, they sat next to me, they started talking... (crying)... I felt very cared for. Then there was a time when I had to go and talk to the psychologist and social worker and I said, "Okay, now they're going to tear me apart, they're going to say that I looked for this, that I messed up... and then they took me aside and explained what it was like here, what would be done, the step by step, that I would be monitored, would have psychological care, with the team too... and that it wouldn't be resolved quickly, because I thought that I would have the procedure done that day, that the most important thing was that I felt welcomed, sure of my decision... That I could come whenever I needed... that I wasn't alone (crying). So I heard the opposite of what I was afraid of hearing...

Girassol opted for legal termination of pregnancy, from the moment she understood that what she had experienced was a situation of sexual violence committed by an intimate partner, and that she would have the right to legal termination. However, during the implementation of the protocols explained by the Ministry of Health for the request for this procedure, Girassol indicated to the Service team that she had changed her mind. She identifies the influence of the religious context, through sharing the situation with her holy mother, as a determining factor in this scenario.

Before, right when everything happened, I didn't accept my daughter, I didn't accept her at all... I kept asking my religion for guidance... if it was going to happen, if it was going to take away my daughter, if it was going to keep my daughter... the child, in fact, at the time I didn't know if it was a boy or a girl, I asked religion to show me. So I went... the day before it happened, the day before I scheduled the procedure to have it removed here, my mother called to talk to me. She told me, "No, don't worry... if it's about money, I'm here, we'll help you... but don't do that. Everything in this life has a reason, a purpose... believe in faith.

From then on, Girassol was able to connect with other values and meanings associated with Flor motherhood.

My daughter is a challenge, a wonderful challenge, she was the link that allowed me to talk to other family members again... if it weren't for my daughter today I wouldn't have a house, I wouldn't think about the future, about wanting to study... Because, when I had Dreamer, I thought about graduating from school and with her, I think about being able to work and build a house.

It is possible to perceive the crossings that Girassol experienced throughout her development process based on the markers of race, class and gender. Several impacts were generated in the construction of her self-conception, which were re-edited and enhanced by the situation of sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. However, it is clear that Girassol's self was also being grounded in the construction of a positive image of herself, mainly through the support received from resources, such as her support network, religion and access to the Service.

Discussion

Girassol's trajectory is marked by events that exerted a significant influence on the development of her self. Episodes of racism and sexism were observed, directly related to situations of IPV. Girassol experienced situations of physical, sexual, psychological and patrimonial violence, the main forms of expression of this phenomenon (Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020). When thinking about her developmental process, it is understood that it is permeated by the inseparability of the

person in the cultural context in which she found herself inserted (Valsiner, 2014), with culture being traversed by social, gender and class markers. The transformations that occur in the field of her self are related to social suggestions and expectations, articulated in the field of collective culture to guide individuals (Valsiner 2014). In this transitional process, the changes that the self goes through are permeated by tensions, supported by ASF. Tensions are understood as forces exerted on the self's composition system; those forces exert pressure aimed at establishing a balance, adaptation or rupture, generating changes in terms of continuity or discontinuity of her self identity (Tateo, 2018). The ASF, which organizes the self's systems, highlights the dynamics that emerge in the self's relationships in different contexts (Valsiner, 2012).

Ambivalences, one of the representations of tensions, are considered as drivers of developmental transformations, making life experiences a set of tensions between perspectives – which may be opposite or alternative – inherently connected and existing through mutual relationships (Tateo, 2018). The presence of tensions permeated by ambivalences was observed in the construction of Girassol's self, directly related to the intersections of race, class and gender markers, giving an intersectional perspective to the constitution of ASF. These aspects directly affect Girassol's conception of herself, in which certain meanings were re-edited and enhanced by IPV.

The semiotic complex of the construction of her image as “non-black vs. black” is identified, where the presence of negative stigmas associated with being black influences Girassol to seek ways to feel recognized and belonging to the whiteness. The influence that the social environment and coexistence with other significant people in her life story caused the production of signs that enhance racism considerations, generating a negative construction of meaning about being black.

In this connection, culture acts as a generator of meanings based on structural racism and the conception of the colonizing gaze. The “overdeveloped technology brought by white people” (Munanga, 2009), permeated by their characteristics, behaviors and values, causes the black population to question their identity, so that “whitening” (Munanga, 2009) begins to represent a possible solution in favor of recognition. Besides loving the colonizer, a movement of shame and self-hatred is generated, in order to complement the “whitening” of black men and women through the assimilation of the cultural values of whiteness, understood as a consequence of colonization (Munanga, 2009).

Linked to this factor, Girassol reflects on her difficulty in maintaining a long-term relationship and the fact that she is constantly involved with engaged men. The presence of the “inadequate vs. adequate” semiotic complex can be highlighted, related to her sense of belonging and the construction of values about herself. She narrates situations that occurred in her workplace, where she is faced with the different way she is treated in relation to her colleagues, a scenario in which the roles directed at black women, still in force in contemporary society, can be rescued - that of “mulatto”, “domestic worker” and “black mother” (Gonzalez, 1984).

Girassol's continuous questions and searches for her sense of belonging and identity illustrate another affective semiotic complex, “empty” versus “non-empty”, also linked to her past experiences, based on intersectional issues. This complex is initially related to the idea of self-complementation through a loving relationship, envisioning the constitution of an ideal family model. The process of affective and sexual relationships involving black women stands out, linked to racial and gender ideologies that structure a set of practices and behaviors that govern the spaces that are “designated” for them. Outside the “affective market”, they are addressed to the “sex market”, eroticization, and poorly paid and “enslaved” domestic work, while white women would be reserved for positions of privilege in the “culture of affection”, marriage,

and common-law marriage (Pacheco, 2013). In this scenario, reference is made to the process of colonialism, characterized by the relationship of colonizers' domination over the colonized through the use of political, social and cultural violence mechanisms by Europeans over the conquered peoples of all continents (Quijano, 1992).

It is also important to identify the distance between this "ideal" family model and the concept of family originating from African cultural traditions, which had a broader understanding than the current model (Davis, 2017). Once again, Girassol's movement towards whitening (Munanga, 2009) is observed, as a way of also gaining recognition and social belonging, but this fails as it generates her inaccessibility and non-belonging to, in fact, the place occupied by white people. It is understood that this context also acted as a driver of the situation of sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, as it generated Girassol's exposure to risky situations in order to gain a partner. At this point, another semiotic complex is present: "guilty vs. not guilty" for IPV.

The self-blame movement presents a significant impact on women who have experienced sexual violence, especially when the violence involves an intimate partner (Curia et al., 2020; Lourenço & Costa, 2020). Furthermore, the prevailing social discourse holds women responsible for the violence they suffer. Expectations and norms are directed at people, directly based on prejudices and inequalities, especially gender, race and class. This leads to the process of inversion of blame, which places women in the position of sexual objects, subservient, hypersexualized or even as those who provoke violence due to some inappropriate posture in the face of male desire (Curia et al., 2020; Lourenço & Costa, 2020).

This context is related to another semiotic complex in the development of Girassol's self, that of the "woman who aborts vs. the woman who does not". Girassol highlights the intensity of the suffering generated by the discovery of the pregnancy due to IPV, also signaling the helplessness of not knowing how to proceed or which support institution to appeal to. The decision to carry out the procedure for legal termination of the pregnancy was based on Girassol's access to information about her rights and possibilities for care, generating, at first, a path to problem-solving in light of the condition she found herself in after the occurrence of the violence.

The semiotic complexes presented illustrate the ambivalences experienced by Girassol and the transformations in her process of developing her self. Based on those tensions, Girassol comes into contact with significant others and cultural elements that direct her towards transformations in her self, so that certain signs end up prevailing over others, in a dynamic movement. The crossings experienced by black women in their life experiences, associated with issues not only of gender, but also of race and class, generate a transformation potentialization, which influence the repositioning of their self. In an intersectional way, it is understood that, when faced with a situation of sexual violence practiced by an intimate partner, signs can be enhanced, so that violence can provide influences in the sense of continuity of the self.

Black women are affected in their subjectivity due to distinct markers of oppression, with emphasis on instances of gender, class, and race. In this sense, the effects of this violence affect mental health and generate effects on the sense of identity (Martins et al., 2020). The implications that racist beliefs and values generate in the trajectories of self-development, the devaluation of black characteristics and the overvaluation of white characteristics are at the basis of the difficulty of constructing positive self-conceptions associated with blackness (Oliveira, 2016). Such issues make us think about the movement of internalization of these meanings, through the presence of signs that mediate processes of rupture and transition. This process is always constructive, transforming the external material into an entirely different form (Valsiner, 2012).

Internalization can be associated with the concept of coloniality widespread in our society, which includes the deep-rooted repercussions of the colonization process and the marks left on the social structure and imaginary (Quijano, 1992). Ruptures in the development of the self evoke reflections of a gender coloniality (Lugones, 2014), evidencing capitalist racialized gender oppression. In this sense, racism and its reverberations can generate tensions and ambivalences of meanings that go beyond the conditions of maintaining a dynamic of continuity of the self, thus representing events that generate ruptures and that impact the development of the self.

Ruptures are understood as an abrupt interruption in the ongoing process of identity construction, generating a discontinuity in the sense of self (Zittoun, 2009). Transitions can occur from this process, evoking signs that often reflect socially disseminated discourses that reinforce places of disqualification for black people. During the transition period, it is necessary to construct personal meaning for the disruptive event. With this, a process of redefining identity is also intensified, involving the construction and mobilization of the representation of oneself in the past and of possible selves in the future, in a given sociocultural context (Zittoun, 2009). Girassol describes the impacts felt in her perception of herself based on the situations of violence that she identified in her life story. According to Zittoun (2009), such situations trigger uncertainties that can influence the person's experiences and their sense of personal reality. Opposition, then, comes to be understood as the basis for change. To this end, signs are present, not as fixed entities, but as fields of meaning that represent the bridge of contact between the self and others (Bento et al., 2012).

Some of the signs generated throughout Girassol's trajectory were revealed, based on the ASF, which, when generalized, acted as promoting signs (Valsiner, 2012), deeply internalized and which operated as guides in her conduct over time, allowing her to think about the future. In this process, the construction and use of these signs allowed the regulation of Girassol's psychological phenomena, both in the field of personal culture and in the field of collective culture, interdependent, since personal culture is constituted by subjectively constructed personal meanings and collective culture is co-constructed by communicative messages mediated interpersonally by signs (Valsiner, 2012).

Throughout Girassol's narrative, the presence of resources as regulatory processes of experience was also observed, presented by semiotic mediation and inserted in care processes. These acted on the tensions of Girassol's self, dynamizing the ASF and promoting the potentialization of new signs in her trajectory. In this path, the resources represent semiotic mediations, aiming at the regulation of experiences (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2013). Resources – cultural, social or symbolic tools, used to act on the physical world or signs – are part of a process and their uses have a purpose – they are resources used for something specific (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2013). Faced with the “non-black vs. black” semiotic complex, from the moment she gains access to information about the enslavement and history of African peoples, both in the context of training and, mainly, through the teachings and dynamics arising from *Candomblé*, Girassol begins to construct her process of identification as a black woman and to admire aspects related to blackness. It is understood that these processes acted as social and cognitive resources, strengthening her condition as a “black” woman. Girassol then begins to appropriate the process of constructing the “collective black identity” (Munanga, 2012), in a gradual recovery of her history and authenticity, aiming at the reconstruction of a positive history in order to establish the condition of subject and self-esteem in the face of the destruction generated by racist ideologies in colonial historiography (Munanga, 2012).

The tensions involving the position of “inadequate vs. adequate” permeated both the episodes of domestic violence perpetrated by her ex-partner, in a context of IPV, and the episodes

of racism and sexism, such as those experienced by Girassol in the workplace. Girassol's consecutive romantic frustrations also made her question her value and position as a woman, intensifying the feeling of not belonging and inadequacy. It is understood that the bond built with the doctor at the health unit and the Welcoming Service for Women in Situations of Sexual Violence team contributed to the changes in the way Girassol began to perceive herself; those people performed as social and cognitive resources, both by giving support and by offering information about her rights as a woman and citizen. The enhancement of her identity as a black woman, mainly permeated by the social and cognitive resources of religion, also contributed to the construction of the sign of "adequacy" in her reality and life contexts.

This construction was also based on the ASF involving the semiotic complex of "emptiness vs. non-emptiness". It was observed that Girassol's constant drive to seek a loving relationship revealed her need to fill herself with something that was beyond herself, aiming to obtain a purpose and meaning in life. Girassol believed that being loved and achieving success in a loving relationship, in order to be able to constitute the desired ideal family model, would fill the "void" she felt.

The relevance of building a sense of belonging stands out from the moment she connects to validations in her religious community, as well as from the construction of new perspectives on motherhood. *Candomblé* and the birth of Flor, after the entire process of permeating the acceptance and construction of this new motherhood, represented, above all, social resources that contributed to strengthening the sign of "non-emptiness".

It is important to emphasize that, although Girassol considers Flor's birth to be significant in her life trajectory and a temporal marker of the transformations in the development of her self, there are several complexities that permeated the construction of Flor's motherhood and the symbols associated with the motherhood of a black woman. Motherhood permeated the creation of control mechanisms in relation to black women, giving rise to a series of stereotypes in relation to mothers. It is known that black women were delegated the role of "reproducer" and not of "mother" per se, and were only understood in the role of care when this was directed to the children of the "white house" (Davis, 2017).

Girassol's construction as "Flor's mother" allowed her to appropriate a purpose, generating a new emotional construction for her sense of belonging and value, also connecting her with Sonhador's motherhood and with the possibility of experiencing the feeling of love, in reciprocity, and the construction of her family, although not ideal, but possible. Through her experiences, she elaborated on her process and, through contact with support resources, she was able to reconfigure the experience of a pregnancy resulting from IPV into a support for her existence, which highlights the potential of this transformation but, at the same time, the violence that permeates this point in time in her life.

In this regard, resources also emerge in response to the ambivalences experienced by Girassol after sexual violence by an intimate partner. Faced with the suffering arising from feelings of guilt, illustrated in the "guilty vs. not guilty" semiotic complex, Girassol highlights the support she received from Welcoming Service for Women in Situations of Sexual Violence and the importance of the care provided by the multidisciplinary team, which acted as social and cognitive resources. Feeling welcomed, supported and guided in the face of a situation of IPV, especially in view of the consequences resulting from violence, becomes fundamental in the health care process and in ensuring the rights of people affected by this phenomenon. Health care services play a preponderant role in this process, as does, in Girassol's case, the support and assistance received from her religious community, which also acted as a social and cognitive resource.

The ambivalences experienced by Girassol in the decision-making process about undergoing a legal abortion procedure also permeated Welcoming Service for Women in Situations of Sexual

Violence and *Candomblé*, which, once again, acted as social and cognitive resources and offered alternative choices, helping her in the transition between signs and connecting with other meanings in the face of the dilemmas she found herself in, faced with the semiotic complex of “abortion vs. non-abortion”. The skilled assistance provided to women who have been IPV victims, favors the perception of these women themselves, offering spaces for support and reflection on what to do and how to manage their own lives. The relevance of IPV care networks is highlighted as a vehicle for promoting the integrality of women in the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS, Unified Health System), favoring the reduction of the impacts on the physical and mental health of women affected by this violence (Lima et al., 2021).

Religion also helped Girassol to access spaces of shelter and support in the face of the aggravations of violence. The literature points out the influence that religion can have in coping with situations of violence, through the construction of strategies focused on emotion. These help in attributing new meanings by neutralizing the problematic nature of the experience, providing control of emotional reactions and the resumption of previously exercised roles that were affected by the circumstance (Souza, 2020).

It is understood that the semiotic tools used in the creation of affective fields are cultural constructions, so that personal affective fields are cultural in nature, built under the historical conditions of one generation, and transcend them in the next generation, thus being, in Girassol’s trajectory, reflections of a colonialist context still existing, but in a continuous process of transition and deconstruction, aiming at the promotion of new signs that, in a decolonial way, have enabled her to contact new versions of herself.

Conclusion

This study presented a time frame of Girassol’s trajectory, which, from an intersectional perspective, aimed to describe the emergence of ASF from the impacts of IPV and episodes of racism present in the process of developing her self. We could perceive the influence of social and cognitive resources as semiotic tools, which enable the existence of movements between the signs generated from contact with those violence situations, helping Girassol in the appropriation of signs that enabled her approach to a decolonial self. As formulated by Teixeira (2020), the decolonial self comes from the development of black people in a social framework marked by a semiosphere of structural racism, given the possibilities of emergence of the self when faced with valid paths of human existence experience, in a counter-hegemonic perspective, triggering new subjective configurations that will lead to the construction of new identity experiences (Teixeira, 2020).

These new experiences can be illustrated by Girassol’s statements, when she commented on her process of coping with episodes of racism and the repercussions of IPV. Thus, positions of the self I-black-woman can be considered, permeated by signs of empowerment and self-affirmation. The specificities and limitations of this study are acknowledged; this study presents the reality of a black woman who has experienced situations of violence, who was able to access a support service and count on other support agents throughout her journey. The need for more research that provides a deeper understanding of ASF from an intersectional perspective is highlighted, an aspect that is seldom approached in this topic state of the art.

The importance of valuing uniqueness in building support for all women who are predominantly affected by the violence addressed in this study is also emphasized. This goes from respecting the contribution of different religions in this process – such as those of African origin – as well as in building bonds and support networks and access to health devices that can meet the

demands of those women in a qualified manner. The need to promote the development of public policies aimed at challenging IPV is highlighted, which also cannot be separated from policies to combat racism and social inequality.

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