



TO THE NORTH AND TO THE LEFT: THE TRAJECTORY OF BLACK WOMEN ELECTED TO THE CHAMBER OF BELÉM IN 2020

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Abstract: This article focuses on the analysis of the experience of black women elected to Belém City Council in the 2020 election by left-wing parties. Based on debates on gender, race and political representation, the aim is to understand the trajectories of those elected in the largest capital in the North of the country. Methodologically, we conducted interviews with four women, configuring this set as a case study, as it is the largest number of black women historically elected to the legislative house. The in-depth interviews were analyzed from three main paths: the previous trajectory of the legislators; the relationship with the parties and the 2020 campaign crossed by the covid19 pandemic. The analysis demonstrates the previous relationship of women with political activism, especially student activism and the influence of black feminism in their political construction, as well as internal inequalities and disputes with the subtitles for candidacies.

Keywords: election of black women; political representation; feminist agendas; political parties.

1 Introduction

The year of 2020 was marked by a substantial increase in black women's candidacies in Brazil for City Councils. According to data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), there were 18.948 black candidates throughout the national territory, 734 of them in the state of Pará and 113 in Belém. In the capital of Pará, they corresponded to 3,66% of the total candidates and 3 of the 35 seats occupied in the legislative branch. It is a historic election for the city, with six women elected, the largest number so far occupying vacancies in the City Council of Belém (CCB), three of which are black and from left-wing parties.

This text, supported by the collection of official data and in-depth interviews with the elected women, seeks to map, from the speeches expressed by the now legislators, how they came to the decision to be candidates, the internal disputes within the party, the agendas of the electoral moment and the realization of a political campaign in a context impacted by the

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covid19 pandemic.

Campos and Machado (2020) and Rios et. la. (2017) warn about the diminutive production of works concerned with the dimensions of race and gender, in an intersectional way, in Brazilian political science. Even more scarce are the studies that advance with qualitative methods to understand the path to electoral success of black people in institutional politics. In addition to these structural absences in the field of knowledge, there is a low concentration of studies and research focused on the northern states of the country.

To understand the trajectory of black women elected in Belém in 2020, we rely on intersectional debates about race and gender, especially in feminist theories of politics, from the perspective of a case study. Methodologically, we conducted four in-depth interviews with councilors Lívia Duarte and Viviane Reis, from the Socialism and Freedom party (PSOL), and Beatriz Caminha, from the Workers' Party (PT). The current councilor Nazaré Lima (PSOL) also integrates this empirical *corpus*, since she joined the CCB as an alternate after Reis left her post to take over the Chamber of Deputies, after the vacancy of Edmilson Rodrigues (PSOL), elected mayor of Belém in the same election analyzed here. In addition to this introduction and considerations, the text presents a section dedicated to the discussion of the theoretical relationship between gender and politics, the presentation of the methodological incursion and analysis of cases.

2 Gender, race and politics

Documenting and denouncing female underrepresentation in institutional elective spaces is anchored, normatively and practically, in feminist debates that maintain that this absence compromises democratic plurality and makes life in a just society even more distant. For the purposes of this work, we understand justice from the perspective of Nancy Fraser (2008) as parity of participation. For the political philosopher, it is not possible to consider a just society when it systematically prevents people from participating in decisions about what affects them. In defending parity of participation, Fraser (2008) is not only referring to processes related to institutional or formal policy, but to the different spaces and forms of societal bonding that depend on collective construction. According to the author, justice requires:

acuerdos sociales que permitan a todos participar como pares en la vida social. Superar a injusticia significa dismantelar los obstáculos institucionalizados que impiden a alguns participar a la par con otros (FRASER, 2008, p. 39).

At an early stage of her work, especially in the 1990s, with the already classic debates with Axel Honneth, Fraser (2008) identified two obstacles to participatory parity: a) the economic structures that generate distributive injustices (maldistribution) and are anchored in a

class dimension; and b) cultural devaluation or status inequality (misrecognition) relating to cultural symbolic patterns of prejudice and disrespect. For the author, it was not a question of choosing to fight one or the other, but of understanding justice through a two-dimensional paradigm, as redistribution and recognition. In a later phase of her work, Nancy Fraser (2008) adds another dimension, in a **three-dimensional** conception of Justice — **politics** - defined as:

el escenario en donde se desarrollan las luchas por la distribución y el reconocimiento. Al establecer los criterios de pertenencia social, y al determinar así quién cuenta como miembro, la dimensión política de la justicia especifica el alcance de las otras dos dimensiones (FRASER, 2008, p. 441).

The political dimension of justice is linked to the demands for *representation*, to the decision rules or what the author calls the "procedures that structure public processes of social confrontation" (FRASER, 2008, p. 42). The misrepresentation occurs when subjects or groups are prevented from participating equally in the spaces in which decisions about their lives are made. In this dimension, the author draws attention especially to electoral systems and rules that remove various minorities, such as women, blacks and LGBTQIA+ people from political contention. Although Fraser has no published research directly focused on the impact of institutional designs for greater plurality of democratic representation, her political philosophy is a starting point for us to think about the need for more women - in the case of this paper, more black women - to enter formal and elective decision-making spaces.

Electing more black women, from this perspective, makes it possible for the demands of the groups they represent to gain space in the field in which other struggles, such as those of redistribution and recognition, according to the author, need to be heard and fought for. In this sense, to understand the lack election of black people in Brazilian politics, Campos and Machado (2020, P.28), in the wake of Anne Philips and Iris Marion Young, argue that the absence of black people or the overrepresentation of white people "implies the marginalization of interests of potential groups" and belittle "structurally generated social perspectives" that are fundamental for the construction of the Democratic State, for the implementation of public policies, among others.

When we look at the data on elected women in Brazil, the urgency to think about fairer representation dynamics in Nancy Fraser's terms becomes more evident. This is not an understanding that homogenizes women, nor that expects, as Campos and Machado (2020) warn, a specific, naive and descriptive type of mirrored political action, but that seeks to break with the same pattern of male and white, economically privileged and heterosexual which is predominant in these spaces. In this sense, we agree with Biroli (2018, p.173), who warns that "politics is updated as a male space". The author emphasizes that:

the history of public space and modern political institutions is the history of

accommodation of the ideal of universality to the exclusion and marginalization of women and other subalternized social groups (BIROLI, 2018, P.173).

In Brazilian political science, although still in the minority, studies on the election of women, especially from a critical-feminist perspective (from which we write), already represent an evident concern, as highlighted by Matos (2016). The problem of low female political representation has been mobilizing more systematic efforts, especially by researchers, since the 1990s, in close dialogue with the first version of the quota law (n.9.100/1995) and the with commitments signed by the countries at the IV World Conference on Women. The paths taken by Brazilian scholars are diverse, but we can observe accentuated concerns with something that Marques (2021) calls “parliamentary career and the effects of electoral connection” and the “recruitment and trajectory patterns”, along with identifications about the inequalities internal to the party and electoral systems and the problems in campaign financing.

When observed in view of their trajectories, the "two pillars of capital construction and entry", according to Araújo (2010) and Araújo and Borges (2012), of women in politics are family capital and action in social movements and/or interest groups. Added to them, according to the researcher, is a more recent institutional capital, linked to positions in the executive branch. More recently, Moritz (2019) also speaks of three profiles, resumes family capital, militancy and adds the outsiders, in which celebrities, women with professional prominence and religious leaders are grouped. Although there are few studies focused on this specific point, family dynamics are pointed out as a strong route for the election of women. When looking especially at municipal dynamics, such as the one analyzed here, Moritz (2019) and also Miguel and Queiroz (2006) observed how they perform better in the North, Northeast and Midwest regions, which is not explained by the offer of a greater number of candidacies. One possible hypothesis is again linked to inherited family political capital, which cannot be considered irrelevant for men, as Miguel, Marques and Machado (2015) explain, but which holds more weight for women.

To understand electoral success (and lack thereof), researchers have also called attention to the importance of looking with feminist critical lenses at party dynamics, especially at informal rules that are processed within these organizations (ÁLVARES, 2008; REZENDE, 2017) for the choice of those who are considered (usually men) with real chances of electoral success. As Araújo (2005, p.196) points out, women who enter politics have the “challenge of competing with mandate holders”, with electoral profiles already widely known. This is in addition to the documented disadvantage in the electoral financing of women and its decisive impact on the number of votes (SACCHET; SPECK, 2012), at a time before the allocation of at least 30% of the Electoral Fund of the parties to the candidates.

This is also linked to what Araújo (2005), along with Norris (2003), differentiates as the

use of rhetorical strategies and substantive and effective strategies of the parties for greater inclusion of women. Although in public speeches and official documents the discourse of the parties may be favorable, the author states that “beyond intentional commitments, few Brazilian parties implement more substantive actions in this sense” (ARAÚJO, 2005, p.211), with some more expressive force in left-wing parties, such as those analyzed in this text. At the municipal level, when understanding the election of councilwomen in capitals of the five regions between 1996 and 2016, Moritz (2019) also finds more of them elected by left-leaning parties. Still, Araújo (2005) maintains that with the increasing number of female candidates, it is possible to observe the possibility of a “contagion effect”, in which even conservative parties have elected more women, with other agendas, different from those historically defended by feminist movements (SARMENTO; ELIAS; MARQUES, 2021).

From the feminist criticism of politics, Marques (2021) argues, the interpretation of these “game rules” gains new contours, which turn to impacts of the patriarchal structure, such as the sexual division of labor, which either distances woman directly from institutional politics or keeps them further away from spaces of leadership and ascension within political organizations. In this sense, it is worth remembering, as Sacchet (2009) points out, that low institutional representation contrasts with the vitality of Brazilian feminisms. In the same direction, Rios and collaborators (2017) point out, which is a democratic paradox:

why are women and black people, such vigorous agents in the formation and maintenance of organizations and social movements, political forms relevant to the democratic conformation in the country, so few in the spaces of institutional representation? (RIVER *et. la*, 2017, p. 42-43)

In this research, we observe, from the reports of black elected women, how the electoral game and the decisions that led them to the Belém Chamber in 2020 came to be, based on an intersectional understanding of the political struggle. More than understanding the concept as a “sum of oppressions”, it is necessary, as Collins and Bilge (2021) point out, to understand intersectionality from ideas such as social inequality, power relations, social context and relationality. In the case of the elected women studied in this text, there are several markers of difference that intersect in their trajectories - race, class, gender, motherhood, generation - along with the experience in the Amazon region, which is placed as a fundamental context. Thus, we agree with Rios and collaborators (2017), for whom:

From a normative point of view, racial and gender diversity in the institutional spaces of politics has important implications regarding the breaking of stereotypes based on colonial visions of power (...) Another important implication of descriptive pluralism of representation is to create – and not necessarily guarantee – conditions for issues relevant to women's and black people's rights to have visibility in public decision-making spheres, especially since these are groups historically underrepresented in the political system. (RIVER *et. la*, 2017, p. 43)

Below we present in more detail the methodological choices that support this discussion and analysis of the interviews with the elected officials; first, however, we situate the context of the political dispute in the capital of Pará in the contemporary scenario.

3 Black councilwomen of Belém and the 2020 election

3.1 Contextualizing the political dispute in Pará

Within the scope of the majority dispute, the 2020 election reflected the national scenario with the influence of bolsonarism in the political game of the capital of Pará. Until the first half of the 1990s, PMDB dominated the electoral dispute in the state of Pará, being the most competitive political actor, also, in municipal elections. But an internal rift created a window of opportunity for other partisan political actors, widening the field of political competition in the state. In this context, while in the state dispute the newly created PSDB⁵ established itself as the party that would polarize with the PT in all the electoral disputes that have occurred since the mid-1990s, in the municipal scope of the capital, the party acronyms that would head the executive power were diversified (BRITO, 2019; SOUZA *et al.*, 2011).

In the 1995 electoral contest, PT ran alone and benefited from the fight between candidates Elcione Barbalho (PMDB) and Hélio Gueiros (PFL), former co-religionists who became staunch opponents⁶. The Workers' Party (PT) elected mayor Edmilson Rodrigues (1997-2000; 2001-2004), who was re-elected for a second term, but did not leave a successor. In the 2000 elections, he was elected by the coalition Frente Belém Popular (PT, PSTU, PCB, PPS, PSB, PV, PCdoB), with Ana Júlia Carepa as deputy (PT)⁷, but did not have a majority of seats in support of his government, which testifies to greater difficulties of governability within the coalition-based institutional profile of the Brazilian political system (FIGUEIREDO; LIMONGI, 1999; SANTOS, 2003; SILVA, 2012; CAETANO, 2005).

It is important to emphasize that the PMDB maintained its political strength in the CCB, which began to be divided with other party actors, to the extent that the representation of the PTB, PSDB and PT gained strength. In 2004, Duciomar Costa (2005-2008; 2009-2012), from PTB⁸ defeated candidate Ana Júlia Carepa (PT) supported by a center-right electoral coalition (PTB/PP/PSC/PFL/PRTB/PV/PRP/PSDB / Prona), and was re-elected for a second term. He was succeeded by Zenaldo Coutinho (PSDB) who also served two terms (2013-2016; 2017-2020) defeating Edmilson Rodrigues, now as a PSOL candidate in 2012 and in 2016.

The presence of PSDB as a support in the mayoral election dispute in 2020 and the

⁵ In the 1994 elections, Almir Gabriel (PSDB) won the state government elections with the support of PT and other opposition parties, which came together with the goal of defeating the absolute dominance of PMDB in the state.

⁶ Hélio Gueiros was in the opposition during the military dictatorship (MDB) and since the 1980s in the PMDB. However, the dispute for the spot of candidate to the state government in 1990, which was won by Jader Barbalho, put him with the opposition. Gueiros was mayor of Belém from 1993 to 1996.

⁷ Ana Júlia was elected governor of the state of Pará in 2006, the only woman to date to occupy the position.

⁸ Duciomar Costa went through several parties throughout his political career: PSD; PP; PSD; PTB, gained notoriety by offering medical assistance to the population and by using a false medical degree.

union of PSOL with PT, one of the parties with the highest electoral density in the capital, gave vigor to the left-wing candidacy⁹ of Edmilson Rodrigues (PSOL), who faced candidate Everaldo Eguchi, of the PSL, in the second round. In a competition with 12 candidates for mayor, the most voted went to the second round with 23,06% and 34,22% of the votes, respectively. However, in the second round, the “Belém de Novas Ideias” coalition (PSOL/PT/PDT/PCdoB/Rede/UP) won Eguchi's solo candidacy with 51,76% against 48,24% of valid votes.

The lack of viability for the PMDB candidacy, the governor's party, added an ingredient to the competition between bolsonarism and opposition forces. The attacks of the president of the Republic on state governments that do not align with his ideological orientations¹⁰ - especially to his policy against the measures recommended by health authorities to face the Covid19 pandemic – made the recommendation to support the PSOL candidate in the second round of elections predictable.

The exercise of Edmilson's mandate will be accompanied by the omniscience of the PMDB, whose most-voted councilor with extensive experience assumed the presidency of the City Council of Belém. The mayor's party is represented by Lívia Duarte (PSOL) in the position of 1st Secretary in the Board of Directors. These institutional positions are important because this is where the legislative agenda is decided, possibly blocking or accelerating decisions of interest to the executive branch (SANTOS, 2003).

The renewal in the chamber was more than 50% of the seats in the 2020 elections, and of the 35 vacancies in the Council, 6 positions are currently¹¹ held by women. Only one of them has had previous experience as a councilwoman. Career and experience are important requirements for the exercise of mandates, facilitating the transit in legislative action (BRITO, 2019).

Since the implementation of the quota policy, 19 women have been elected to the CCB, by the parties PT, PSOL, MDB, PCdoB, PDT, PATRIOTA, PSD, PRB and PPS. Their profile alternates between family political capital and militancy in social and partisan movements, holders of symbolic and media capital, and outsiders of politics with emphasis on their professional careers. This is the scenario wherein we believe it is important to look closely at the experiences and trajectories of black women on the left of the political spectrum who currently occupy positions in the Chamber of the capital of Pará.

Next, we explain our methodological path.

⁹ The former governor of the state Simão Jatene (PSDB) would later be a candidate to succeed Zenaldo Coutinho to the City Hall of the capital, but his campaign accounts were rejected by the City Council; in this context, PSDB submitted a candidate for vice-mayor along with the Cidadania party.

¹⁰ Eguchi is a police chief of the federal Police and tried to be elected deputy for PSL in 2018, with no success. He ran with a sergeant from the same party as vice president and repeating bolsonarist catchphrases in defense of the “family and homeland values” and against corruption.

¹¹ The TRE-PA (Regional Electoral Court - Pará) is still going to judge appeals on application records with allegations of fraud to the determinations of the quota law for female applicants. If they are upheld, two women might lose their mandates and from the vacancies under the court, four more female mandates may be sworn in.

3.2 Methodological notes

The research developed for this text is considered a case study, in the terms of Gerring (2019, p. 69), with a small number of cases (four political actresses) and “highly focused”, from the experience of left-wing parties in the largest capital of Northern Brazil. According to the author, a case “represents a spatially and temporally delimited phenomenon of theoretical importance” (GERRING, 2019, p. 68). Although generalizations to a larger and similar population are not possible, case studies provide knowledge especially in areas and themes in which academic research still accumulates few works, as is the case of the election of black women in Brazil.

In this sense, we do not work with case studies of the **causal** type, but of **descriptive** type, the most common way, according to Gerring (2019, P.104) to operationalize such a research design. Although there is no intention to establish causal inferences, we adopted the concerns of Gerring (2019) about the selection of cases. Characteristics such as intrinsic importance of the case, representativeness in relation to literature and argument and transparency¹² were widely considered: it is an election with a higher percentage of women in the Chamber of a capital that has not been studied in a singular way; it dialogues with recent concerns about how black people and directly women rise in the political elite and is aimed at understanding a particular experience, that of left-wing parties.

The interviews that constitute our empirical corpus were conducted through videoconference during the months of March and April of 2021, with recording authorization. Subsequently, they were transcribed in their entirety. A summary table with information collected from the research participants sits below, in order to illustrate some relevant characteristics of the case analyzed here. As previously indicated, these are the elected councilwomen Lívia Duarte and Viviane Reis, both from PSOL, and Beatriz Caminha (PT), and also Nazaré Lima (PSOL), an alternate sworn in after Reis stepped in as a federal deputy.

¹² Regarding transparency, Gerring offers (P.93) that “researchers should be clear about how they chose their cases and about any changes in their treatment of those cases as the research progresses.”

Table 1 – Information Summary of the black councilors elected for CCB 2020

	Beatriz Caminha	Lívia Duarte	Nazaré Lima	Viviane Reis
Party	PT	PSOL	PSOL	PSOL
Age	21	33	59	29
Race/color	Black	Black	Black	Black
Sexual orientation	Bisexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Bisexual
Maternity	No	Yes	Yes	No
Profession	Student	Student	Nurse	Physiotherapist
Previous link to social movements	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
First candidacy in 2020	Yes	Yes	No ¹³	No ¹⁴
Number of votes in 2020	4.874	5.599	4.023	9.654
Funding in 2020	R\$ 31.390,67	R\$ 126.447,30	R\$ 149.895,70	R\$ 155.962,25

Source: Research data (2020)

3.3 Analysis of interviews

The analysis of the trajectories of the women interviewed elected in 2020 stems from an interpretivist perspective, understanding this as a specific case that can contribute knowledge to feminist and minority representation literatures in the national context. For this purpose, three axes guide the exposition of the results: the political construction of these women and their relationship with feminisms; the relationship with the political party and effectively the electoral campaign in the pandemic context. In this sense, we follow the path of studies such as those of Araújo (2010), which bring the importance of interviews with candidates/elected and also party leaders to understand the electoral challenges and the very maintenance in office. Although the interviewees are public persons and have been presented in the summary table, we have chosen not to identify them directly in the excerpts of this section, so we will inform their speeches from letters with no correspondence to their names.

a) Pre-election trajectories

The four women interviewed in this research self-identify as black, have attended or are

¹³ The councilwoman had been a candidate three times previously, in the 2012 and 2016 elections for a position at the Council, and in the 2018 elections for federal deputy.

¹⁴ The councilwoman was a candidate for federal deputy in the 2018 elections.

attending higher education and share previous work in social, student, professional movements or are linked to neighborhood associations and residents. They fall into the category of militants or activists, which the literature on women's political careers has pointed out to be predominant in those linked to the left (MORITZ, 2019). In all four trajectories, despite the age difference between women, student movements are highlighted as an important point of discovery and political activism. Along with them, the movements of neighborhoods and also linked to the Catholic Church are mentioned by two of the women, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

K: I have always participated in social movements as a whole. I have participated since I was a child practically, right, because when I was a child, I already participated in a neighborhood and church movement, right, but I began to explore it deeper when I joined the student movement. I participated during my childhood in the Church of the Salesian of Work, altar server group, missionary force group, catechesis group, oratory, so these are also forms of organization for me. They are also social movements, right, of another sort, not of a partisan character. Then I also did neighborhood activities, right, dance group of the hut, youth group, cultural groups. And then when I entered university, I began to participate in the student movement.

Y: I went to public school my whole life (...) And then I studied nursing, graduated, went to the country-side, but before college I was already part of social movements. I was part of the Emmaus Movement¹⁵ for many years, church movement and then I was part of the creation of the first nursing academic center of UFPA.

Participation in student movements is also cited by the councilors as one of the ways to understand, discover about feminist performance and also criticize them from the perspective of black women. In this regard, one of the legislators cites how the militancy collaborated for her understand herself as a black woman, especially since there is the circulation of a very common speech in the capital of Belém being a “brunette city”. According to Conrado *et al.* (2015), being black in the Amazon and especially in the state of Pará is different from other regions of the country, due to the historical process of the region that is marked by metaphors and hyperboles that mask black identity through the attribution of the use of the word “morena/moreno” (portuguese words used to describe 1) a person tanned by the sun; 2) a person who is brunette - has dark hair; 3) someone who is naturally dark skinned, usually as a euphemism for black). This is because until the end of the last century there was a very strong collective opinion that there were few black people in the Amazon and that there was a predominance of mixtures of Indigenous and Portuguese, denying the blackness present in the region.

According to Conrado *et al.* (2015), “black identity in Pará is inevitably marked by confrontation with a metaphor of identity”, the use of “moreno” diminishes clashes of racial differences and makes people feel integrated into the local identity. For the authors, the use of

¹⁵ Movement to fight for the rights of children and adolescents in Belém. <http://www.movimentodeemaus.org/>

"moreno" is more than a euphemism in Pará, but is used as "etiquette" to avoid offending someone.

In a society in which the denial of being black is a mark of the historical and cultural process, where a high degree of low esteem is evidenced, the search for an alternative identity appeared as an almost naturalized possibility. The idea of the "moreno(a)" softens the confrontations, attenuates the feeling of exclusion and makes people feel integrated by emphatically saying: "I am moreno". Being conscious of the black color indicates a search for identity that is not encompassed by the entire black population of Pará. Being *moreno* becomes a possibility of insertion in society, through a silent and perverse pact: I deny my color and you pretend that you do not see me." (CONRADO *et al.*, 2015. p. 221).

In view of this, it is possible to understand why the process of recognition of candidates with racial identification occurred from political militancy, it was the time to recognize themselves politically and reaffirm their identity. In the state of Pará, the attempt to erase black people and the rise of the use of *moreno* also occurred through an ideological onslaught by the media and cultural (songs, poetry, newspapers, etc.) forces, thus avoiding social differentiations. This discussion can be observed in the speech of councilwoman Y, especially informing how activism in her University years collaborated to her understanding of herself as a black woman.

Y: That in the miscegenation which is common here, but here in the state of Pará we do not usually call people black. (...) So, even though I saw the difference in skin tone, for my sister, for my mother, I didn't identify as black because they said I was *morena*. (...) So, this thing of me identifying as black, it came after joining the University.

All interviewees identified themselves as black feminists and marked their positions about what they understand about/by the movement and its practical and theoretical conformations. Councilwoman Z critically pointed out the diversity of types of feminisms, including those of "people who do not admit to it", along with interviewee Y who emphasized being a "non-academic feminist".

Z: Within the theoretical debate of feminisms, right, which are several, but not always fully guided by theory, I think we even have a new debate of there being this type of feminism which is not proclaimed, right? Of those who do not say it, of those who do not identify as such, but within the theories of feminism, I identify with black feminism.

Y: I call myself a feminist, *but* a non-academic feminist, of the people, with that language of the people. Because what I observe today is a very academic feminism, full of words, which our people are not familiar with, you know? So, I work a lot with the community, walking the streets, talking to women, offering talks about health.

In the speech of interviewee W, it is quite interesting to note traces of a debate that feminist historiography has touched on. She speaks of an initial contact with a "more general politics", which then critically reveals itself to her as a false opposition.

W: I actually began at that time to be interested in the so-called more general policy, right, which I understand does not exist, but much more by the economic factors, of confronting the coup [2016] right, the crisis, than necessarily specific gender politics. So, it was then that I began to understand myself as a black woman, right, and I almost went straight towards black feminism. I didn't leave there anymore and it was parallel, finally, to my entry into the University. It's kind of confusing for me, actually, to understand at what point I started to understand myself as a black feminist. But my first contact was with the policies of (*name the party*), put it this way. The political project of the (party), but very generally, like, not considering my own existence.

With the exception of one of the women, the group of interviewees is composed of young women, whose personal developments have followed the popularization of feminism and the fundamental role of black women in recent clashes and achievements in Brazilian society. Interviewee K mentions how the 2010s are a decade for understanding the spillover of feminist debates into society - "with the feminist spring of 2015, which I believe is also a historical milestone that has to be highlighted and that we women there began to mobilize much more" (K). The politician also speaks of earlier inspirations in women even before the understanding of feminism "as for its meaning".

K: I believe that the very question of feminism becoming more popular is recent, right? So, surely many of us were not raised to be feminists, we were raised in a new, a different format of education, but I believe that the issue of feminism, right, and all it means, as a theory, came to me after entering the University. But before that, right, we already had our ways of seeing ourselves as women in society, right, as feminism, as a reference in the women who are part of our lives, who build alongside us, right. I was always very connected to my mother and connected to many other women who were references to me, so indirectly we already had this thing of seeing other women as references, of trying to think about society from a female perspective. But feminism itself, as a movement, as organization, it comes to me in the form of the student movement (...)

The emphasis on a dynamic of collective and not individual action, which marks the theorists of black feminism (RIOS; MACIEL, 2018), is also brought up by the elected women in a powerful way.

K: this is an important aspect, right, you can't call yourself a feminist without collective construction, right. There is no way to say "Oh, I'm a feminist but I'm going to stay here in mine lane and that's it", no. We need to build collectively (...) That we could give space to those in the margin, to see that it was not only, that feminism was not only self-organization, debates, movements, formations, performances in relation to other women, but it is much broader than that, right. Feminism was a necessity to transform social structures.

As seen from their answers, collective activism and critical understanding about gender and race run directly through the formation and agendas that will be taken up by these women. In this sense, further research may indicate whether this trajectory anchored in a previous progressive militancy may impact on bills and clashes within the legislative house, in a post-

election moment.

b) The 2020 campaign

In addition to the structural challenges that accompany black women in politics, the 2020 election was marked by the experience of the covid19 pandemic. The imminent danger of contagion, the concern for the health of candidates, supporters and the general population caused changes in the way of meeting with potential voters.

Regarding the themes that moved the candidates, they all mention that their identities as black women were expressed in the campaign programs, in the way they communicated their agendas. Interviewees Z and W mention how the marking of this existence, as black bodies in public spaces, is articulated with a project to demonstrate that this place can be claimed by all.

Z: my campaign was a campaign run by a black woman, a feminist mother, a socialist, okay? So, the focus was quite affected by my profile, right? For a campaign very focused on motherhood, the politics of motherhood, the political system that involves motherhood and that makes us responsible for the creation and raising of other beings, right? And that also miseducates men not to be. So it was a campaign that talked a lot about motherhood in that way, and all the themes that run through us, right? Which is, which is that this whole universe, everything that we, every single thing that we do is political, right? Everything about everyday life is political. So we dealt with all the issues related to us and the city, including mobility, including housing, including hunger, right, it was a very transversal campaign with regards to women.

W: we see, we saw the campaign as having two central agendas, which is still how we see the mandate, and they are the agenda for the right to live and the agenda for the right to the city, something that to us is also connected. So, for us it was a campaign of identification, right, and a campaign that started mostly to affirm who we were in that political space, right, although it was not only that, the affirmation of our, our body existing in politics was always a central agenda for us. It is a central agenda for us, in fact, not only in the campaign, but in the political constitution that we do.

Interviewee K mentions how recent political events have encouraged black women into institutional political contention. The murder of Rio councilwoman Marielle Franco was brought up as a key turning point when it comes to the needs for renewal in politics.

K: and so, the choice, let's say, for me to be a candidate in 2018, was a collective choice, right. We first decided what we wanted as policies, to then indicate a name (...) And we started thinking about politics for women, oh we want to defend it, we want to defend legalization of abortion - there, let's stand for it! Understand? Like that thing of, let's defend our agendas, nobody talks about these agendas, we will do it. Let's defend controversial issues there, let's defend women's lives, let's talk about the issue of combating femicide, domestic violence, let's focus on politics for women in the Federal Chamber, right, in the Chamber of Deputies. And after a lot of formulating policy, then we started to think of a name, and we thought: now who will showcase our policies? Who will be this figure that will represent these policies that we are here collectively thinking of? This is very cool, because it shows a lot of this originality, right, this very issue with creating a political

project and thinking safe, and not wanting a figure and then adapting them to what is going to be presented, right. So then we started thinking, we thought of several names, the so-and-so, the someone else, I don't know who, let's think of who it needs to be. I had already offered my name since the 2016 election for councilwoman, right, but other candidacy options were considered, and I always showed a lot of willingness, right, to be in these spaces, to be a spokesperson for this collective project. So, then we talked, right, we had several meetings, to debate, to analyze, who this profile would be, and especially after Marielle's murder, we realized that there was no way it could be a different profile than the profile of what Marielle was, so we came to the conclusion that the profile of our 2018 candidate had to be the profile of a black woman, if possible LGBT, but that she mainly had to be working class, from the outskirts, representing the struggles of the poorest. And then I, with all my markers ended up being this person, right, who was going to speak for this political project.

The 2020 campaign was especially marked by the massive use of digital networks. The interviewee K speaks of the imposed need to “compete for social media”. Z, on the other hand, states that 50% of the campaign took place digitally, through live transmissions, conversations, meetings - “I slept, woke up, with my cell phone in hand; I breastfed a lot with my cell phone in my hand”. The understanding of audience segmentation in social networks was also part of the action strategy combined also with television time.

W: Instagram is hugely different from my Facebook. My Instagram is 18-24 year olds, more than 60%/70% are women. So, most of them are women, and they are very young people. And my Facebook is and people from 35 years and up who communicate in a different way, so much so that we make use different types of communication on social networks. And on the streets, we had a very large adhesion of workers, right. That, for example, the same number of votes that I had in the neighborhoods of downtown, I had in this neighborhood of the outskirts. So, it was well balanced, the issue of social class within the campaign. And so, a lot of LGBT people, for example, were I think one of the great audiences that we had, because not only did the LGBT person vote, but the whole family voted, right. And we were on television quite a bit, right. I was on TV 7 times. In 7 programs lasting 30 seconds. So, it was an abysmal difference from other women's applications, right, who I think had 10 seconds if I'm not mistaken, 15 seconds, spending much less than me. And television was also fundamental for us, because we arrived in places and people already knew me, because they had seen me on television. Especially in the suburbs.

The victorious campaigns, which brought intersectional discussions to the spaces of media visibility, did not take place in the absence of tensions between the parties. The interviewees report the processes of negotiation and dispute, impacted by gender inequality, in these relationships.

c) Relationship and disputes with the parties.

A third axis that we seek to understand about their trajectories touches on the decision to run in the local election and the relationship with the left-wing political parties of which they are part. Two of the interviewees were candidates for first time in 2020. Interviewee Z stated

that her motives “are all collective” and “there is no careerist perspective”; she also talks about the decision as “a task to be accomplished”. The same term is used by W, when she says that “I accepted this task, but it is a very collective task”. Again, the dimension of a “we” appears recurrently in these women's statements.

Councilwoman W reports how the candidacy was not a previous life project, but was built within the political group of which she is a part. This is a point of difference that the literature on the representation of women has pointed out when compared to the motives of men. Araújo (2010) talks about “politics as circumstance” and “politics as a project”. According to the author's research, in interviews with Brazilian representatives, “power” was not presented as a striking desire or as a project to which one aspired” (ARAÚJO, 2010, p.580). On the other hand, “male representatives assume, in a clearer and more direct way, the ‘I wanted to be a candidate’, ‘I wanted to be a politician’, that is, a more effective ‘agency’ was perceived about their political destiny” (ARAÚJO, 2010, p.580).

W's report illustrates the way her understanding of a democratic backsliding led her to pave her way as a candidate.

W: I never dreamed of being a candidate, it was never part of my dreams, I always wanted to be an urban architect, I always wanted to be a teacher/researcher (...) my construction (...) is being an urbanist, it's more than being in politics. And the candidacy was part of a process of organization were part of, right, of organizing a group in the state, and of the need that we felt for the party itself, even, to have young candidates and to have candidates aligned with the project of society that we defend and the need especially for us to reclaim Brazil, right. (...) And then my candidacy was woven from that group of people in July, I think, June of last year (2020). And that's how it began, so it was not some idea that I, like, nurtured, I dream of doing this, this is something that I desire for my life - it was never anything like that for me. It was a real necessity we felt in the moment we were living.

Coming from elections prior to 2020, Y also narrates how the understanding that she should be part of the electoral dispute came after long years of militancy. Her account also describes how the party received her name. The formal and informal rules that bring black women closer or further away from electoral competition, based on party dynamics, were one of the points mentioned by all interviewees. Between official commitments expressed by the parties and the clashes to “defend the candidacy”, the experience of black, left-wing councilwomen running for the City Council of Belém in 2020 brings relevant discussions to the political underrepresentation of minorities. Councilwoman Y, recalling how she made the decision, tells of the relationship between the community that already saw her as a possible representative and the relationship with her party.

Y: (...) Any issue they had they would call me, and I would come out in defense of the nursing workers. And as a health professional, in the community where I worked, they also asked me a lot: why don't you run?

Right. That's when I really started to think, that I lived defending others, I lived marching, I lived fighting for social justice, that's when I thought about running. And then I became a candidate also because I understood that I already had a baggage, that I already had a history with the communities, students, alumni, teachers, nurses, nursing technicians. Then I saw that I already really a chance. And in the party, my sect of the party did not stand beside me. *But why do you want to be a candidate?* Then there was had a meeting with the sect executives and I stood to defend my candidacy. (...) This was in two thousand and twelve. Two thousand eleven. So, I defended my candidacy. I had a whole trajectory. And then I became a candidate, but I was not considered a priority. So, I got no money. I did a campaign based on the support of friends, and my partner, and five people going out campaigning.

Councilwoman Z claims that her election was made possible by the party structure that complies with the legislation regarding the 30%. According to her, "it is a very mature debate, as it stands, well underway, although the party is a part of society, therefore a patriarchal, sexist structure nonetheless". She continues by stating that "this incentive for us is already an internal law, let's say, right. So, it is followed", but she points out that the dispute "is never on an equal footing".

Interviewee W says that the internal relationship with the party was very conflicted at the time of defining the candidacies. When asked if she noticed any type of different treatment, as a black woman, in this moment of definitions, the councilwoman replied:

W: Different treatments I would call persecution, but, yeah, it was like that, it was a complicated space. (...) And the election campaign in Belém was very complicated for us, anyway, all the things we did were things that we had to spend a lot of time and a lot of energy, so, including showing our commercial on TV, including being taken seriously as one of the priorities, right? Because I was one of the party's priorities. But initially the executives of the party wanted to leave me as a person who was going to have 0 to 200 votes, that I didn't even have that amount of votes for the Academic Center. But it was a space, like, of a lot of confrontation, mainly on the part of the president of the party.

The interviewees repeatedly mentioned in their reports who were the highest priority names in the parties for the council election, all white and mostly men. According to Araújo (2005, p. 212) "party recruitment with a view to electoral competition, that is, the construction and definition of candidacies, are mediated by electoral standards and profiles already tested and/or with electoral capital capable of being effectively in the competition". This was expressed in the clashes brought up by three of the four interviewees, and the experience of K, running in 2020 for the second time, critically reflects this debate already present in the literature.

K: I'm going to be very honest, because there is actually a difference between what the 2018 election was and what the 2020 election was, right. Up until 2018, I was an unknown figure, from the point of view of institutional politics, right? I had never been a candidate, I had never been "tested" as we

usually talk, right, politically when it comes to elections. So, there were no great incentives on the part of the party in the sense of potentializing, of saying “this one, we are going to put our money on her”... I'm talking about the whole party, right, which is very broad (...) like there was already a congressman who was going to try re-election, so most of the election efforts and attention was directed towards (his) re-election. Only there is a very interesting detail, because of the resources reserve intended for women, right, seeing as the party fulfills this very well, fulfills this in actuality, passing on the financial resource to women, dividing TV time in such a way that it contemplates the quota of women, so this is very well considered (...) then it turned out that I had advantages, quotation marks, which are not real advantages, right, I benefitted from a right for being, for having several markers that were contemplated in the quotas.

The interviewee reports how the investment in 2018 reflected in the votes of 2020, and the need to have been put “to the test”.

K: in 2020, I was already known, right, because I had a very expressive number of votes (...) so the treatment was a little different. Why? Because then we already knew that there was a great electoral potential, a potential that had the right condition to succeed, to succeed in 2020 (...) So we already had the understanding that maybe we would get a meaningful number of votes in 2020, so we then became priority, right. The conclusion I take from this, right, for us women, we really need to prove that we are going to get results so that we can actually have some attention. Because there are several figures who run for political positions who do not need to prove themselves, right? So, I think this is always the case for us, we need to prove that we are indeed going to have good electoral results, that we are indeed going to be able to have this, these results, so to speak, result is the word, right, this result. Before 2018, just an observation since it relates to the subject, there were also many disputes, right, about priorities, and I realize that there were even some names of the party that had already been running in elections for many years, there are some figures, right, usually straight white men, older, who had run in previous elections for congress and who even had good results, right, who were always there among the top most voted (...) And there was always this idea that it would be these same guys who were going to make, let's say, the rank of the most voted. (...) so that was certainly very good, it resonated in a way that people came to understand, right, that it's not necessarily going to always be the way it always was.

The interviewees' reports corroborate what feminist literature in Politics discusses about informal rules that “explain” the selection or absence of women as electoral competitors. In the case of the black women interviewed, being seen as “a bet” against traditionally elected political subjects was influenced by disagreements and by a need to prove that they are, in fact, legitimate candidates, differently from the way it happens for men, or in the words of K: “there are several figures who dispute politics and who do not need to prove themselves”.

4 Final considerations

This article, from a qualitative-descriptive perspective, analyzed the experiences of black women elected to the City Council of Belém in the 2020 election, by left-wing parties. Through in-depth interviews with three elected women and one sworn-in alternate, we seek to understand three main axes: previous experience, the 2020 campaign and the relationship with

political parties.

The literature on gender and race in politics, critically discussing representation, anchors our theoretical reflection, especially from Nancy Fraser's conception that fair societies are made from parity of participation. In this sense, the choice made by women on the left dialogues with previous findings of the Brazilian feminist academy about these political parties being more permeable to the entry and election of women.

The findings of this investigation explicate the previous trajectories of the elected women, notably marked by current collective commitments, especially with student movements. The interviews also reveal the power of the theoretical-critical construction of black feminism in the formation of these women, and how they challenge more individualistic conceptions of struggle. The 2020 campaign, in turn, built in a pandemic context, brought along agendas that dialogue with this previous training and had social media as a crucial space. Finally, the internal disputes with the parties they integrate reveal the difficulties and inequalities that affect the political experience of women in the scenario of electoral dispute, and how important it is that quota policies are actually implemented by the parties. The reports about being or not a "bet" or being seen as having "chances" or not demonstrate the need for more studies to understand the path experienced by black women to electoral success.

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