

Dear PPW fellows,

Thank you very much for reading this paper! It's late semester, and I really appreciate your effort. In this text I aimed to share with you my ongoing research findings so far. I'm in the beginning of the writing of my dissertation, so there are still a lot of possible ways of doing it, which is very exciting! Therefore, I enthusiastically welcome your theoretical and methodological insights, as well as any other comments and suggestions. A possible downside is that I still have way more questions than answers and conclusions, as you will notice. Anyways, I'm looking forward to hear from you.

After our session, I encourage you all to drink a beer and/or have dinner around CUNY, after all it's the last workshop of the semester. We should celebrate! Also, I'll go back to Brazil at the end of the summer, and this would be a great opportunity for us to get to know each other. I'll miss the fruitful PPWs debates as well as American IPA beers.

All the best,

Carla

Body and difference in the Brazilian contemporary feminist movement: the case of the Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk (Marcha das Vadias)

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Introduction

In this text I present the guiding questions of my ongoing dissertation and systematize some of my findings and analyses so far. My research's main goal is to analyze from an anthropological standpoint the role of the body in the contemporary feminist movement in Brazil. The body has always been a fundamental political resource to feminists, although only very recently has it become a major focus of social movement studies. Beyond the demands regarding abortion rights or the end of sexual violence against female or feminine bodies, it is necessary to acknowledge the increasing importance of the "protesting body" both at street demonstrations and in internet activism. The body has been politicized to catalyze images and meanings that are central to the framing, networking, and repertoire building of the feminist movement, across all its internal diversity. Furthermore, the body as a political tool is re-elaborating narratives of difference, identity and recognition inside the feminist movement. How is this happening?

In order to answer these questions, I take the Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk as a case. By deliberately investing in nudity, costumes, performances and impersonation, the Slut Walk puts the body at the core of the protest. Brazilian feminism is very diversified, so the particular employment of the body in Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk cannot be not generalized as a proxy for its usage by the whole movement. The heuristic value of analyzing the Slut Walk lies in the fact that this protest makes visible the centrality of the body in feminism more broadly. Because the body is so blatantly visible in the Slut Walk, it brings about debates, in which activists formulate narratives about "us" and the "others", evaluations of what is and is not legitimate in the feminist movement that draw borders and produce re-accommodations within the political field. As a political language, the body generates movement in the Movement, and an analysis of the Slut Walk can help us understand how this happens.

Contradicting repeated speculations on the supposed death of the feminist movement (Hawkesworth 2014), in the last few years, different forms of feminist expression have flourished around the world. Old protests have gained a new global boom, such as "Reclaim the night", during which women's bodies occupy the streets of various cities at night against sexual violence in public spaces. "One Billion Rising Revolution", a mass action launched in 2012 with

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the slogan “dancing as disruption”, has been leading people in more than 200 countries to dance to fight violence against women². By revealing bare breasts or concealing faces under colorful masks, Femen and Pussy Riot activists became widely known and had their performances reenacted by others in many places.

The Slut Walk is another feminist protest that has gained global visibility in the past years. It first appeared in Toronto, Canada, in April 2011, as a reaction to a police officer's statement at a university forum, that “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized”³. With slogans such as “We’re all sluts”, the protest's main demands were the end of “sexual violence”, “victim blaming” and “slut shaming”, as well as the defense of “freedom” for women and their bodies. Dressed as “sluts”, protesters questioned the derogatory meanings of this word and proposed to re-signify it as “empowerment” and “autonomy”. According to its organizers, similar protests were organized in over 200 cities worldwide since then⁴.

The appeal to bodily expressions is remarkable in these recent transnational feminist protests. Although the meaning of the protesting body can greatly vary at the local level, as it is subjected to linguistic-ontological translations across multiple geopolitical borders (Costa and Alvarez 2013), it is undeniable that body performances have become a major tactic in global and local feminist protests’ repertoires. As Reger (2012) observes, these protests have been harshly criticized by older feminists and scholars for overemphasizing popular culture, sexuality and bodily expression. In contrast to previous generations of feminists, who were more focused on policy and legislation change, the contemporary generations are often accused of being ineffectual and apolitical, even non feminist. To Reger, these dismissals result from an epistemological lens that focuses on national-level, state-centered activism, while losing sight of how feminism is diffused into the culture, moves through formal and informal transnational and local networks, and continues to be vibrantly created at the community level.

Everywhere, the Slut Walk has also been criticized by activists and scholars, who often conclude that its embrace of “sexualized bodies” reproduces patriarchal, racial and capitalist hierarchies (O’Keefe, 2014; Cook and Hasmath, 2014). By investigating the role of the body in Brazilian Slut Walk, however, I do not intend to evaluate its political efficacy. I’m interested in how the use of the body in the protest incites or modifies narratives of difference and moves identity boundaries within the feminist movement. I consider that these evaluations - negative or positive, scholarly or not - are themselves native discourses of difference that fuel the identity politics, and

² <http://www.onebillionrising.org/>

³ To read one (among many) piece of news about the police officer’s remarks and the planning of the first Slut Walk in Toronto: <http://on.thestar.com/1rWNIuk>

⁴ All quotes and information are from the Slut Walk Toronto website: <http://www.slutwalktoronto.com> Since I first accessed it in 2012, the link has been active, but in my last attempts in May 2016, it screened the message “Parked Domain”. It’s Facebook page is on: <https://www.facebook.com/SlutWalkToronto/?fref=ts>

therefore are part of my research datum. By analyzing the accounts of and conflicts over the protesting body, I hope to be able to show that, far from being dead, the feminist movement is as vigorous today as it was in the past century.

This project is based on qualitative research methods. Besides observing the 2012, 2013 and 2014 iterations of Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk⁵, I carried out an ethnography of its organization group from February 2013 to August 2014. During this period, I participated in meetings, debates and other activities organized by these activists. Since the beginning of my field work, the activists made clear that they wouldn't be my "lab rats" and demanded that I collaborate with organization activities. I wrote meeting minutes, prepared debate sessions and helped in the construction of their political manifesto. Progressively, I became more and more involved with the group, affecting and "being affected" by it (Favret-Saada 2005), which poses ethical and affective challenges to write about it. Nonetheless, my active participation in the group has enabled me to access those "off the record" emotions, relations and events, of which every social movement is made, and which underlie the decision-making, political organization and identity construction processes. Occasionally, I observed other spaces besides those of the Slut Walk, such as feminist activists' meetings and forums, street protests, scholarly events, which provided me a broader view of the Rio de Janeiro feminist field in which the Slut Walk is situated. In these spaces I learned about the relation and disputes between different groups and the main debates and challenges facing their activism.

I also interviewed 29 feminists who are or were part of the organization of the Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk, feminists from other groups and institutions, and older feminists who lived through past moments of feminism, many of whom are still active. Although still being processed, these data will shed light on the different ways the activists make sense of feminism, the body and the managing of differences and identities. Finally, I also rely on the contents of the Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk's email lists, Facebook page and blog; websites, videos and photos of Slut Walks in other cities; news about feminist protests in different places of the world; blogs and other online feminist forums.

In the next session I describe the Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk rising, organization and the production of narratives of difference between its activists and "other" feminists. Then I explore the meanings the body assumes in the Slut Walk and how it affects the identity politics in the Brazilian feminist movement.

⁵ The protest also happened in 2015, when I was already in my visiting scholarship in New York, and meetings to organize the 2016 edition are currently taking place in the city.

The Brazilian Slut Walk

In the last decade in Brazil, religious and secular conservative forces have been occupying strategic sites of power, such as the media, the congress and policy offices, and promoting setbacks in women's and LGBT rights, among others. For example, in 2011, a project that aimed to promote the debate of gender and sexuality issues in public secondary schools was outlawed after Christian groups inside and outside Congress successfully framed any attempt to discuss this issues in schools as an imposition of a particular and dangerous "ideology" and the "sexualization of children".⁶ In the same year, the Brazilian Congress created the National Register of Pregnant Women, seen by feminists as a device to track and criminalize eventual attempts of abortion. Since 2013, a federal bill threatens to "grant protection to the unborn child", which would set back the already restricted abortion rights⁷.

This so-called "conservative wave" might have opened a political opportunity for a re-articulation of the Brazilian feminist movement, as street and internet mobilizations began to increasingly pop up in the country in the last few years. Many feminist collectives are blossoming in schools and universities, where they organize debates about sexual harassment, gender neutral bathrooms, and inclusive curriculum. On the internet, a myriad of feminist blogs and forums is producing and spreading a body of feminist knowledge and mediating the political engagement of young women and men. In 2014, an online campaign "I Don't Deserve To Be Raped" (Eu Não Mereço Ser Estuprada) led thousands of women to post semi-naked selfies on Facebook⁸ after a national survey has revealed that 26% of respondents agree that women deserve to be attacked if wearing short clothing⁹. In 2015, the campaign #MyFirstHarassment (#PrimeiroAssedio), gathered in just a few days 82 thousand "testimonial" tweets, in which women described their first experience of sexual harassment. One month later, a feminist activist persuaded male columnists of big news websites to cede their media spaces to female writers for one week. In Brasília, the country's capital, the First Black Women National March gathered more than thirty thousand black women in colorful ethnic garments, demonstrating "against racism, violence and for the good living". Even in Rio de Janeiro's Carnival Holiday, the city's most popular party, women's parades have multiplied in the last few years to playfully celebrate

⁶ The fact that the "Anti-homophobia Kit" – the textbooks and videos produced by the Office of Education to approach issues such as transgender identity and violence against gays and lesbians – came to be popularly known as "Gay Kit" epitomizes the success of the conservative strategy.

⁷ In Brazil, induced abortion is illegal, except in cases of pregnancy from rape, pregnancy that puts the woman's life at risk, and fetus anencephaly.

⁸ Facebook is very popular in Brazil, one of the biggest Facebook markets. Along with India and the US, it has been leading sustained growth in the number of active users in the past years (Facebook 2012, 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports, available at: <http://investor.fb.com/annuals.cfm>).

⁹ The government agency that coordinated the survey first disclosed by mistake a 65% rate. When a few days later the agency publicly amended the rate to 26%, women kept on the campaign, declaring that it was still necessary to bring forward the prejudices that normalize sexual violence against women. To see some images of this campaign: <http://bit.ly/1T92E4Z>

sexual freedom or raise public awareness about street harassment. Women artists are promoting “protest-shows” and other cultural events to address feminist struggles.

Feminists now appear to be now everywhere, building online and offline networks that have been successful in promoting public debates about gender injustice. In November of 2015, when a new bill threatened to hamper access to abortion in cases of rape pregnancies, these networks burst into mass street demonstrations, which continues today, filling up the country’s main cities with tens of thousands of mostly young women. Images of mothers carrying their babies and pregnant women exhibiting their bellies painted with the motto “maternity should be a choice” were broadly disseminated in the media and became a symbol of these protests. Coined by the media as “Women’s Spring”¹⁰, these recent explosions of feminist protest and expressions frequently call upon the body to convey their demands. But nearly five years ago, the first Brazilian Slut Walk already signaled both an erupting young feminism and the centrality of the body as a political tool.

In Brazil, São Paulo, the country’s biggest city, was the first host a Slut Walk, in June 2011, just a couple months after the Toronto debut. Since its first iteration in São Paulo, the “Marcha das Vadias”, as it was translated to Portuguese¹¹, has taken place in around sixty Brazilian cities, many of them in a yearly basis, bringing thousands of people to the streets and receiving broad media attention. In 2012, 23 cities from all regions of Brazil organized simultaneous protests. In 2013, Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk alone gathered around three thousand people. The speed with which the march has spread across the country and mobilized the youth is inseparable from the possibilities that new communication technologies offer to political activism.

The first Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk (RJSW) took place in July 2011, in Copacabana Beach, a fancy and touristic neighborhood, as well as a recurrent stage for social movements demonstrations in the city. Against a national and international backdrop of intensifying social mobilizations, it was launched by four women (including a transgender woman) aged between 35 and 52 years old, all of them already experienced in feminist, LGBT, HIV and sex workers’

¹⁰ The article that first coined this catchy slogan was published by one of the best-selling magazines in the country and can be read in Portuguese here: <http://glo.bo/1YI5KR0>

¹¹ Translation is never merely an equivalence of representations, but an act of political transfiguration. “Vagabunda” or “Putá” are much more frequently used words in Brazil when stating that a woman is a slut. “Vadia”, in addition to its less common use, softens the meaning of “Vagabunda” and “Putá”. I believe it was a strategy to make the protest more well-received in Brazilian context. The word can also denote vagrancy, wandering—or vagabondage—through the streets, with no apparent subsistence work – which was indeed an infraction back in Brazilian First Republic, that targeted mostly newly-freed slaves, especially men, classified as “vadios”. Therefore, vadia/vadio is a gendered adjective. In the case of women, the sexual transgression is the main layer of meaning, whereas the breaching of the worker ethos is more emphasized for men. Besides that, this noun also expresses race and class inequalities, as black and poor people are more likely to be classified as vadia/vadio.

movements¹². It took less than a month between the decision and the march. The initial four recruited other activists, also previously engaged in social movements, media and art networks, to comprise the protest's organizational core. Although social networks were intensively employed to call organization meetings, recruit activist, garner media attention and publicize the event, off-line networks mobilized by organizers were fundamental in attracting around 1200 people to the streets, which contradicts the notion of spontaneity that is attached to contemporary protests (Name and Zanetti 2013).

The RJSW has been happening every year since its first iteration. The four early organizers continued to play an important role in the following iterations, assuming the responsibility to call the first annual meeting, which symbolically seals the collective commitment to carry on the protest for one more year. The RJSW's meetings, which always take place in public places such as universities and parks, are announced on the group's Facebook page and blog, and keep attracting new people. In the several meetings held to organize the annual walk, the activists evaluate the current political environment, build a discursive framing, set their demands or statements and define strategies. To learn more about the issues that they wish to approach, they then organize "political formation debates", to which they invite scholars, activists and professionals to speak. Having built and consolidated a consensus around their goals, they write a manifesto. They also continually feed their social media with news and articles related to feminism, publicize the walk in political and scholar events, and fundraise. Mailing lists, bar tables and parties are also decision-making arenas, as well as spaces of sociability, affective bonding and identity construction.

In 2013, for example, one activist suggested to organize the RJSW during the Pope's visit to the city, as part of the World Youth Day, a one-week event organized by the Catholic Church, the main religion in Brazil. Mostly funded by the state, the event would gather around one million pilgrims, and was also being envisioned by others social movements as a stage to their demonstrations. Despite some worries of harsh state vigilance and repression, the "sluts" agreed with the proposal, as they regarded the Catholic event as an opportunity to frame the "secular state", "legalization of abortion", "regulation of prostitution" as their main watchwords¹³. One "political formation debate" for each of these issues was organized during the months before the

¹² The "Arab Spring" was going on, and soon the Occupy Wall Street would appear. Meanwhile, in Brazil, movements for the reduction of city bus fare ("Passe Livre"), against the construction of Belo Monte hydropower plant and for the legalization of marijuana took place. The latter occurred in São Paulo and was harshly repressed by the state police, which prompted activists from diverse strands to organize the "Freedom Marches" in the country's main cities, claiming for freedom of assembly and against the criminalization of social movements. The four aforementioned women activists were in a meeting to organize the local Liberty March, when, also inspired by the happening of Toronto and São Paulo Slut Walk in the previous months, decided to organize the Rio de Janeiro Slut Walk.

¹³ They would also protest against the gender and sexual morality that underpins victim blaming, just as the Slut Walk always does, but this time they would emphasize its connection to catholic 'slut versus saint' duality.

march, with the presence of researchers, sex workers and a federal deputy. As strategies, they produced Youtube videos calling for the support and presence of “sluts” from all over the country, invited a respected organization of pro-choice Catholic women to participate in the walk¹⁴, and decided to walk in the opposite direction to the flow of pilgrims, to avoid eventual conflicts.

In 2014, the organization group comprised around 47 people, among whom there was only one man; the rest identified as women, including two who identified as transgender women. They were mostly under 30 years old; only five people were around 40 or older; among this latter age group were the “founders” of the first RJSW.. Only eight classify themselves as black. Most have bachelor degrees or are undergraduate and graduate students. Only three are mothers. At least 21 women relate affectively and sexually with other women or both sexes (although not necessarily classifying themselves as lesbian or bisexual), and the only man classifies himself as gay. With few exceptions, most live in the central areas of the city and can be classified as middle class.

Similarly to Occupy and other recent social movements, the RJSW organization group values the principles of “autonomy” and “horizontality”. By defining themselves as “autonomous” they reject any bond with, or interference from, militant institutions, especially feminist organizations, NGOs and political parties. They believe that entering the “institutionalized” activism network (that is, raising funds from political parties or maintaining a close relation with national feminist organizations) demands the compromising of core political goals and leads to an eventual loss of critical potential. Also, it would establish an internal “hierarchy”, a power structure that would produce “authoritarian” decision-making, restrain “individual expression and participation”, disincentivize “creative” framing and strategizing, and impose a too well-defined group identity that might repel potential allies who do not neatly fit the group’s strict political boundaries. That’s why they value a “horizontal” decision-making process, so every participant would enjoy “equal legitimacy and opportunity” to participate. One activist summarizes these principles by saying that “[here] anyone can speak, whether they arrive in the first or the tenth meeting, no matter if we have to discuss everything again, and even change our previous decisions; no matter if it’s a man asking sexist questions or comments and we have to explain to him the most basic things. In fact, that's the Slut Walk’s beauty.”

The practical application of these principles is, of course, problematic. Organizers have different degrees of previous experience and embeddedness in social movements’ networks, time availability, political engagement, social and emotional skills etc., which unequally affect their

¹⁴ The Católicas pelo Direito de Decidir (Catholics for Choice) is a feminist NGO that advocates for women’s sexual and reproductive rights based on the Catholic Principles. As “allies in the enemy field”, they are regarded by the Slut Walkers and other feminist groups as a great resource to the abortion rights’ struggle in Brazil, a country where Catholic and other Christian denominations play a relevant role in state politics (Camargo, 2012).

individual power to influence the decision-making process. Older and experienced activists usually speak more and more confidently than younger or newly-identified feminists. Some black activists said that they occasionally felt discouraged to speak up to a mostly white group. Therefore, the principles of “autonomy” and “horizontality” might actually “mask power”, as Jo Freedman (1970) observed long ago¹⁵. Indeed, the principles were mostly raised by activists when there were power disputes, i.e. conflicts between opposite projects. In these occasions, one part might accuse the other of “disrespecting” autonomy and or horizontality, while trying to legitimize its own project.

Nevertheless, these principles have a great role in group identity construction, as they are used to build narratives of difference between the Slut Walkers and other groups, especially the aforementioned “institutionalized” feminists, for whom strategic power sites are mostly occupied by older activists. Ironically, “autonomy” and “horizontality” were also professed by previous feminist generations, especially in the 1980s. Back then, in a post-dictatorship context, feminists were accused by leftist parties of undermining the “general struggle” for democracy, by insisting on “specific struggles” regarding gender inequality (Sarti 2001). “Autonomy”, then, basically meant not subsuming the feminist agenda to those of the political parties. In the 1990s and early 2000s, many of these activists joined or created non-governmental organizations to administer development programs aimed at poor and racialized women, a process referred to as “NGOisation” of feminism (Alvarez 2014). Some activists also integrated governmental agencies or leftist political parties’ women caucuses, especially from President Lula’s administration on, when gender bureaus were implemented in federal, state and local governments. It is against this background of “institutionalized” feminism that Slut walkers are opposing themselves when employing the notions of autonomy and horizontality, drawing boundaries between “us” and “them”, and moving on the identity politics.

The body is also an important element in the production of narratives of difference. Many of these narratives are built around the diverse ways by which the body can be incorporated into the movement’s political framing. Therefore, the rejection of the “institutionalized activism” by the Slut Walkers is also expressed as a departure from its protesting resources, which they consider “square”, “inexpressive” and “impotent”. Slut Walkers want to approach sexual violence against women while at the same time not denying female sexuality, like “other” groups are perceived to do. When Slut Walkers employ nudity and other bodily resources in the protest, they are not only expressing their particular gender and sexual political view, but they are doing so *in relation to* other groups supposed framings. Conversely, many feminists criticize the Slut Walk for what they consider to be a “damaging” political use of the body. While protesting, they might then adopt bodily performances that repeal undesired connections with sensitive sexuality issues. So, the different ways by which activists relationally imagine and perform the body for political

¹⁵ “The tyranny of structurelessness”, Freedman’s famous article, circulated among RJSW activists in its Portuguese translation, when they realized the tricks and “tyrannies” of autonomy and horizontality.

purposes is an important way by which identity politics are elaborated and re-elaborated. To further analyze this dynamic, I will now take a closer look on the role of the body in the Slut Walk protest.

The “flag body”, individuality, and difference managing

When I first went to the RJSW, in 2012, I saw a very festive and colorful atmosphere, which resembled very much the Brazilian street carnival. The participants were very young, mostly around twenty years old; few people looked older than forty. They were mainly white, educated, middle and upper-middle class women. Also, many men and queer individuals participated in the protest. Some parents took their children. Prostitution was defended as a form of dignified work. There were no sound trucks or political party flags, which are very common in Brazilian feminist rallies, and imply the existence of supporting institutions, such as political parties, unions, feminist NGOs. Protest signs were handmade by the protesters, who could write down whatever they wanted, and usually employed a very casual language and bawdry, such as in “we are very pissed off”¹⁶ and “a beautiful woman is the one who fights”. They sang mottos, such as “if the body belongs to woman, she fucks whoever she wants, including another woman”, “in burka or shorts, everybody will respect me”.

I realized that, just like myself and some of the friends I met there, many people were participating in a feminist protest for the first time. Some other friends, who had already had previous experiences as activists, told me that the Slut Walk “finally shook the dust of the feminist movement”, “finally managed to include lesbians” and brought “playfulness” and “creativity” to a “square” and “closed” movement, long accustomed to the “same old formulas”. Based on these first impressions, I assumed that the Slut Walk might have attracted people who do not yet necessarily identify as feminist or who are not attracted by other feminist protests.

What most caught my attention, though, was that participants greatly invested in the presentation of their bodies. Some women showed their naked breasts, others wore bras, high heels and red lipstick, and painted their skin with catchphrases, such as “take your advice off my pubes”, “free whore”, “secular uterus”. As in Brazilian Gay Pride Parades, their performances deliberately emulated an attitude of provocation that aimed to celebrate the female body and sexuality. The body itself was a very important political tool. I would say that the RJSW puts the body at the center of the protest.¹⁷ Video link.

¹⁶ The original expression, “Estamos muito putas”, plays with the double meaning of the word “puta”, both as “slut” and as “pissed off”.

¹⁷ To complement my descriptions and analyses, I highly recommend that readers watch this video (available here: <http://bit.ly/1X65XcH>), produced by anonymous activists during the 2013 RJSW, which took place during the aforementioned Catholic mega-event. Although not very accurate, closed captions

Although the body is a fundamental resource in past and present social movements, especially in feminism, there were not many studies about the protesting body until very recently. As Shilling (1993) observes, the body has historically been an "absent presence" in Sociology. Whether as a reaction to different aspects of biological determinism, whether by adherence to structuralist assumptions by which individuals perceived as products of uncontrollable forces, sociologists long ignored or underestimated the body as a relevant signifier. Since the 1980s, when the field of sociology of the body began to flourish, social movements studies by and large have been detached from it (Le Breton 2012; Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003). Recently, though, the body has become such a key resource to social movements in performing identity and demanding recognition that it can no longer remain unproblematized.

By comparing two Israeli-Jewish leftist protest movements, Sasson-Levy and Rapoport (2003, p.398) distinguish two different meanings of the body in social movements: as "the major matter of the protest", such as in movements that mainly concern body politics (abortion, violence against women, breast cancer, etc.), and as "the carrier for protest", even when the body is not its subject matter. Inspired by this typology, I argue that in the Slut Walk and other feminist protests the body has both meanings. It is the demanded object, as when women demand "autonomy" over their bodies, and the means of demanding it, i.e. the physical support of the activists' messages. In a sense, the body is like a flag; thus I call it a "flag body" (*corpo-bandeira*).

As philosopher Charles Taylor (1992) shows, modern societies developed the ideal of authenticity, the notion that everybody has an individual identity, a particular way of being, an original self that each of us must discover and be true to. Demands of recognition by individuals and groups are made by affirming their authenticity. It is my authentic identity that I or my group demand to be recognized by others. In the Slut Walk, the flag-body seems to be the ideal site to express these demands of recognition. As a means of disruption, the body is used by the activists to question social norms regarding gender and sexuality norms, especially the rules regarding the presentation of female bodies in public spaces. At the same time, the body is a vehicle for "self-identity narratives" (Giddens 1991), an artifact on which each participant seeks to express a distinctive message, a unique self that demands recognition. In contrast with the uniformity that characterizes and legitimizes some protests, such as most workers' demonstrations, in the Slut Walk, customizing one's body and expressing one's originality defines the desired mode of collective action.

However, this body is not universal. The Slut Walk is the stage for tensions between exhortations to individualizing the body and social readings that classify and hierarchize it. This tension may be exemplified by the criticism this protest has received in Brazil and other places regarding the racial implications of the slut category. To some black women's movements, embodying the slut identity in the protest differently impacts white and black women. While for white women, the

are available. Fortunately, most of the images are speechless and depict the protest's aesthetic aspects that I described.

term slut and its bodily performance may be re-signified as “liberation” and “autonomy” – and therefore as a product of their individuality – for black women it would reinforce their stigma as “hyper-sexual” and “inferior” women, reaffirming the subjectification produced by social hierarchies. To groups that hold this position, the Slut Walk expresses the experiences of white, middle-class women, and does not pay attention to the way in which the interaction between gender and race negatively marks black women's bodies, who have a long history of subalternity since the colonial period of slavery in Brazil¹⁸. To illustrate how these criticisms might be embodied in protests, I take the example of the first Black Women National March, held in Brasília in November, 2015. There, the participants’ bodies also played an important role: women were garnished with colorful clothing and turbans that aimed to connect each individual to a common black African-Brazilian culture. Many of them were wearing the same T-shirt, especially made for the march. The building of a legitimate political identity was materialized in a body that was not a symbol of autonomy, but of collective belonging. Also, I assume that any sexualized performance of the body would probably be seen as out of place in this protest¹⁹.

A similar criticism is posed by women from the city’s outskirts and slums: many of them claim that slut is an impossible label for them; it is not something that they can be proud of, especially not in neighborhoods where being seen as a slut poses a greater risk of violence than in wealthier zones. Their rejection of the slut body assumes territorial contents, as they criticize the choice of the fancy Copacabana Beach as the site of protest, as well as the fact that all organization meetings take place at central neighborhoods in evening hours, which they consider to hamper the participation of activists from the peripheries and mothers²⁰.

If, on the one hand, the RJSW is accused of repeating the feminist movement's old mistakes by excluding black and poor women, it is celebrated, on the other hand, for including transgender people, sex workers and men, by which it differs from broad sectors of the Brazilian feminism. Then, again, political borders are drawn between the slut walkers and feminists that do not accept those groups, which came to be generally referred to as “RadFems”, a term that assumes a derogatory tone when employed by the sluts.

So, race, sexuality and class differences affect the ways the body is seen and employed in feminist movements. Moreover, managing these differences is translated into political identities within the feminist field: “black feminists”, “white feminist”, “peripheric feminist”, “sluts”, “not sluts”, “new feminism”, “old feminism”, “RadFems” are all native categories that describe

¹⁸ Very similar criticisms were made by American black feminists to US Slut Walkers, and were expressed in an open letter that is frequently cited by feminist scholars and activists, including Brazilian black feminists. The letter can be read here: <http://huff.to/1NsE3G5>

¹⁹ There’s a gif video of the march here: <http://bit.ly/1NsQdi5>

²⁰ Slut walkers have been attempting to cope with these criticisms by, for example, organizing a debate on black feminism led by black activists, or attending events organized by “peripheric feminists” in their neighborhoods. These encounters were very elucidative on how narratives of difference are built within and among social movements, and I will further analyze them in my dissertation.

identity boundaries. Although these identities eventually assume very well defined political and bodily contours, and pose very concrete tensions, in my work, I am also interested in exploring the ways in which these political borders can be blurred, as in the narratives and practices of black women who are Slut Walkers.

I take here the case of J, a black activist that was a former organizer of the RJSW²¹. J is lesbian, and her gender performance doesn't follow the Brazilian standards of femininity. She told me she's always had "difficulty in seeing herself as a woman", which she illustrates by the fact that she wore heels and lipsticks for the first time only at the age of 25, the week before I interviewed her. At some point after I first met her in the Slut Walk, J began to identify herself as a transgender man. More recently, she classifies herself as "fluid gender", and accepts both masculine and feminine pronouns. She told me that she understands and respects black women's criticisms regarding the slut performance, but as she has never been "perceived as a slut or lived in a slum", and as her body "has always been a homosexual body", then she doesn't assume those criticisms as her own. J's case shows how sexuality, gender and class differently affect black bodies, and dislocate or blur the race identity that, in the previous example, was shaped in a more fixed and well-defined way.

In the dispute about which people and which feminism the Slut Walk does and does not represent, the protesting body acquires different meanings, and updates a series of tensions within the feminist movement. Race, gender, sexuality, age and class are mobilized to produce disputing bodily performances in feminist protests. As narratives of difference, the body produces shifting boundaries between feminist groups and, therefore, constitutes a fertile ground for the re-elaboration of contemporary identity politics. As a major source of conflicts and alliances, dialogues and splits, the body produces the very movements that constitute the Movement and keep it vibrant and alive.

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²¹ In the last couple years, J was no longer in the organization group, but participated in the protests.

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