

**“WHITENESS CANNOT BE ANTI-RACIST...”: a dialogue with Lia Vainer Schucman**

**“A BRANQUITUDE NÃO PODE SER ANTIRRACISTA...”: um diálogo com Lia Vainer Schucman**

Lia Vainer Schucman \*

Anderson dos Santos Cordeiro \*\*

**Tradução:** Mariana Soares Pires Melo \*\*\*

Lia Vainer Schucman received her Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of São Paulo with an internship at the University of California at the Center for New Racial Studies. She earned her master's degree and bachelor's degree in Psychology from the Federal University of Santa Catarina. She completed her postdoctoral studies at the University of São Paulo. She is a professor in the Psychology Graduate Program and Psychology Department at the Federal University of Santa Catarina. She is also the author of several articles and book chapters. Among her works, there are important books as: *Entre o encardido, o branco e o branquíssimo: branquitude, hierarquia e poder na cidade de São Paulo*, result of her Ph.D. dissertation. And the recently published *Famílias inter-raciais: tensões entre cor e amor*, in which the focus and interest are studies on whiteness in Brazil and racial relations. Professor Schucman distinguishes herself as a reference in the area and among the authors on this topic. This interview was conducted on two occasions: October 16th, 2023, and May 3rd, 2024, remotely, on the Google Meet platform.

**Anderson** — Professor Lia Vainer Schucman, our interview will focus on whiteness studies in Brazil. Could you talk a bit about your trajectory and how you have engaged in discussions on race relations?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — I believe that telling how we get somewhere is always a production of different meanings in the present about our past. I remember that from a very early age, I used to pay attention to the forms of discrimination at school. From the moment I began having affective relationships with Black people, I started to be aware of

---

\* Professor in the Psychology Graduate Program and Psychology Department at Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). Professor Schucman earned her Ph.D. at The University of São Paulo (USP), with a period of study at The University of California (UC). E-mail: liavainers@gmail.com.

\*\* Graduated in Social Science from The Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), Brazil. E-mail: andersondsc97@gmail.com.

\*\*\* Ph.D. in Sociology from The Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), Brazil. Researcher at Grupo de Relações Afetivas e Violência (GRAV). E-mail: melo.mariana89@hotmail.com.



the differences in treatment that I would receive when I was alone or not, and that would make me feel unsettled.

When I was a teenager, I used to practice *capoeira*.<sup>1</sup> I remember that we were at a party, and that day, a friend of mine, who was also a *capoeira* teacher, said he would walk me home that night because it was dangerous [to go alone]. At this moment, when we were coming back home, two white men robbed us, and the police were patrolling the area. This friend of mine hit one of the men so he could take my purse back. When the police saw that scene, they stopped, and we were arrested. They took us to the police station in the trunk of the police car. We argued along the way, saying that we had been the ones who were robbed. The police did not listen to us.

When we arrived at the police station, they did not care about me, but they arrested my friend without any justification. At that moment, the precinct chief — I do not remember every detail from that night — told me that I could call my mother so she could come and take me home while my friend remained in custody. I called my mother, and when she arrived, she said that we would only go home when my friend could also leave. We spent the entire night at the police station. In the morning, the police released him. That was when I noticed that he was covered in blood because he had been beaten during the night. It became clear to me that Brazil had produced the idea of a criminal before the crime. At that moment, I noticed the weight of structural racism on Black people. For example, I could call my mother, who had a landline. He did not have a phone at home, so he could not warn his family about what was happening. Meanwhile, I could ask for help from people who could pick me up. And even though nothing was happening to me, he had been arrested and hurt.

Therefore, all that structure materialized in that scene, and since then, I have been alert to these forms of discrimination that occur daily. After entering university to study psychology, I wanted to study something related to prejudice and discrimination. My first research scholarship was about this subject. However, there were no people studying racism in psychology. By that time, it would be considered a topic studied by sociology, and it had been said that “this was not a psychology topic”. Then, I searched for something

---

<sup>1</sup> [Translator’s note]: Capoeira is a Brazilian dance and fight that has roots in African culture.



in education where the topic had already been studied with more emphasis. My scholarship research at the beginning was, in fact, in the education area.

**Anderson** — Considering your family, how was the issue of racism and discrimination addressed?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — My family is Jewish. I was raised with my grandmother, who was in a concentration camp and came after the War to Brazil. The idea of discrimination was something very discussed in my family. For example, the family photos were portrayed by my grandmother as: “This one is dead. This one also. This one... I don’t know where he is.” — in this way, we had many pictures of our family understood through a genocide memory.

Moreover, I was fully aware of what prejudice could do. Because of that, I studied anti-semitism and the Jewish identity during my master's degree. Among the questions I had asked my interlocutors in my research, the most important was, “What does it mean to be Jewish?” — many people interviewed did not have an attachment to Judaism; they had no ties to anything related to it. But they also said, “It is not possible not to be [Jewish], because every time it will be pointed out that I am a Jewish”. Among those many responses, this topic caught my attention: the impossibility of choice, the determination that you are something that you had not chosen to be, but that you are placed inside a bigger structure.

During my Ph.D. studies, I wanted to continue studying this topic, but it became overwhelming for me. I decided to start a project that I would study this one that names the other. Why is there someone who says that I cannot be something? Why is there someone who names me? My grandmother has always said that Brazil was our country, that we were here, and that this was our refuge. So, we must think of Brazil in the best way possible. During this time, I said: I have to think about this issue from a point of view that considers racial domination, of which Brazil is part. Even though I had a particular experience with my family, I knew that in Brazil, Jewish people would become white people because of their phenotype, and I thought about what kind of study could be a contribution to the country.



I was already aware of the issues of anti-black racism, but I did not know that this was called whiteness. Then I started to study [it] in psychology, looking for studies that would consider racism [as a whole], not only the demeaned group. That was when I read about the critical whiteness studies, which were life-changing (laughs). I remember which studies were the first ones I read: the ones from Cida Bento.<sup>2</sup> She did not have the reputation she has today. There was no book yet, but her dissertation was crucial to my research. That is a definition, in whiteness studies, that names whiteness as places of comfort, where a race is placed in others who do not define themselves, which is the race category itself. From that, I noticed what I wanted to understand: this power to classify and name the other. This situation is typical of the white racial group history, who named the other Asians, Indigenous people, and Jewish people. Therefore, I learned whiteness through this path of critical studies. Then, I discovered a world of whiteness studies in the United States and went there to study.

I remember that when I arrived, my advisor Howard Winant — who was incredible, and studied and wrote that famous book *The Race Formation in the United States* — gave me so many books about whiteness and said that everything I needed to know about it was there. At that moment, I remember I could not believe it. There was a world that did not exist in Brazil. I spent a whole year in touch with whiteness studies, which was very interesting. My Ph.D. dissertation, then, was about whiteness because I wanted to study the racist person. However, I eventually became interested in understanding how white people appropriated from the race category produced in the 19th century and made themselves subjects starting from their own symbolic and material privileges, which were considered by the idea of being white as a norm and normativity.

**Anderson** — Which readings or authors that address whiteness and the white population were essential for your understanding of racial dynamics? You have mentioned Cida Bento, but what other sources could you list as crucial?

---

<sup>2</sup> [Interviewer's note]: Maria Aparecida da Silva Bento, Black Brazilian intellectual. Reference in studies of whiteness in Brazil, she defended the first dissertation (Bento, 2002) on the topic.



**Lia Vainer Schucman** — I believe that the historical foundations of whiteness studies are all connected to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois.<sup>3</sup> I consider him remarkable because in Du Bois most famous work, named *Black Reconstruction in America* (Du Bois, 2017), he presents a dynamic that intertwines categories such as race, class, and status. He seeks to demonstrate the acceptance of racism and the association with the white racial category by those who were from an immigrant class in the United States and came from Eastern and Southern Europe. Rather than consider themselves as a class category together with Black people, they have created white unions, Italian unions, and unions as forms of exclusion and differentiation.

The author will tell us that these people, when they used the idea of race, also benefited from the dominant class gains and tried to differentiate themselves from the formerly enslaved and recently freed Black people. Du Bois named the prestigious places based on whiteness as “public and psychological wages”, which resulted in access to symbolic and material goods that Black people could not have a share of. Therefore, anyone who studies whiteness has a historical debt to the studies of Du Bois, who initiated this field.

In Brazil, a remarkable work is the one of Carlos Hasenbalg (2023), named *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*, especially chapter 3. He shows how the whiteness of the skin will become a property, in the same way that a car is a property, that a house is a property. Whiteness is a property in social mobility so that white people can ascend socially in a class society. Hasenbalg breaks with both Marxist and colonialist theories. He will combine both, thinking about race stratification within the class category. He will not only address the class category, nor just the race category, but how in combination they work together. So, I believe this is a key aspect of Carlos Hasenbalg’s studies on racial inequalities, which is very strong for me. Even though it is not called whiteness, it is in the field of critical race theories. But of course, I could mention other authors such as Kabengele Munanga, Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, Stuart Hall,

---

<sup>3</sup> [Interviewer’s note]: William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) was a sociologist, historian, researcher, activist, and professor at Atlanta University. He was considered one of the pioneers of social sciences and whiteness studies and the first black person to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University. At the beginning of the 20th century, he was seen as one of the main leaders of the international black movement, fighting for the emancipation of Black people and recognized for being one of the creators of Pan-Africanism.



Howard Winant, Liv Sovik, France Winddance Twine, Edit Piza, Peggy MacIntosh. Although this is not an exhaustive list, these are some authors that I can reference now.

**Anderson** — In your book *Entre o encardido, o branco e o branquíssimo*, a result of your Ph.D. dissertation, you detail the nuances of whiteness in Brazilian society, especially in São Paulo, as part of your study. Can you explain what whiteness is? And how is it produced?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — Well, there are some different theories about the definition of whiteness. Some experts will think of whiteness as an ideological construct that operates even without white people. Better saying, it works as a position of power and an ideal of culture, civilization, and morality that works for everyone, for white, Black, and Indigenous people, as an ideological construction.

On the other hand, that is a theoretical point of view that will think of whiteness as a racial identity of white people, which can be explained in this way: how white people are also constituted through the category of race? What is the white race?

There is also a field within whiteness studies that will think not about identity, nor this ideological construct, but what would be the reaction of white people when facing the achievements of Black people, Indigenous people, and other categories.

We have three fields that are in articulation. However, I like to think of those three interrelated as a prestigious position and status that white people occupy in societies structured by racism. Whiteness is an ideological construction, which is thought from the category of race, in an ideal of moral superiority, intellectual superiority, and aesthetic superiority of European civilization. However, this is believed to be almost natural for white people, which means [an idea of] a white superiority part of their own racial identity. The individual appropriates this ideological construction and establishes a racial identity that also produces a reaction when there is a loss of privileges.

**Anderson** — Since you are talking about this issue in Brazil, can we say that whiteness is a fixed identity? Or is it always in dispute?



**Lia Vainer Schucman** — See, the white identity does not make any sense, culturally speaking, if we think about Brazil. There are no racial groups, as the act of naming is what constructs race. The concept of race is a social invention that is reinforced daily.

What can put a Lebanese, like **Temer or Haddad**,<sup>4</sup> in the same category as a Portuguese person? Culturally, they do not eat the same things; it is often not the same religion, and they do not share the same ancestry. It is not the same ethnic category that presupposes a common ancestor. In other words, there is nothing immanent or fixed in whiteness. The only thing that produces whiteness is racism. It is a constructed identity that comes from racial domination. If you remove racism from whiteness, there is no white identity left. Because then this person will be of Jewish, Lebanese or Italian descent, they will be part of different social positions. Whiteness only makes sense when it is believed that race exists in society. Therefore, whiteness is a power relation category. And absolutely nothing in whiteness is immanent besides the daily power exercise. No one is born with power because they are white. Melanin does not have power, and a lack of melanin does not have power. It is the same to say that no one is born with power because they have the male genital organ. That part of the body does not give any power to anyone. What gives power is the exercise of domination, which is the exclusion of women, femicide, and thinking that women should work more. That is the domination exercise, and there is nothing about white people that gives them power, only the daily exercise of domination, such as racism.

Therefore, there is no fixed identity because there is nothing immanent, no production of the white cultural subject, which is said to be a unification. The only thing that unifies all white people, those who are classified as white, is a position of advantage in a society structured by racism. So, it is not a fixed identity because if you eliminate racism, this identity does not even exist. Such identity is the production of racism, produced by racism.

---

<sup>4</sup> [Translator's note]: Michel Temer and Fernando Haddad are Brazilian politicians.



**Anderson** — In this topic, in a recent podcast interview, which is already debated in your book *Entre o encardido, o branco e o branquíssimo*, you describe that whiteness cannot be anti-racist, but the white individual can. Could you precisely define what this anti-racist person would be?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — That is a great question. I keep seeing titles of speeches and "anti-racist whiteness" lectures. This person probably has not read what whiteness is. Whiteness is the result of racism and racial domination. So, the perspective of “anti-racist whiteness” is, in terms, a contradiction. Now, white people may not identify with this ideological construct, that is, go through a process of disidentification and fight against racism, and still, this person benefits from the racist structure. It is a position inside the structure where this person is inserted and benefits from the racist structure. Their action might be like the actions of those who sign this contract, as Charles Wade Mills says (2023). On the other hand, some do not accept signing the contract. Then they can be anti-racist when they cease with the daily actions of domination. In other words, conscious or unconscious daily actions that perpetuate and legitimize the racist structure.

It is interesting to think that there is no social structure without agents. There is only a structure of racism because there are agents who maintain it. Some people reproduce racism. So, there is a way of being anti-racist that is not not being racist. Not being racist produces absolutely no change. What produces change are anti-racist actions, and in this sense, whiteness is characterized by the benefit that all white people receive from the racist structure. However, the action that is perpetuated is the material and symbolic distribution of resources produced from the expropriation of land, the expropriation of work, and the value of Black and Indigenous lives in this country. It is a kind of resource that is produced by all of us, but it is only distributed among the white racial group. A classic example: 56% of the Brazilian population is Black, because they are Black and *pardo*. Moreover, they pay taxes to maintain the judiciary.<sup>5</sup> In turn, the judiciary only has white judges who favor white people. We have a resource produced by a large Black majority, which is only distributed among white people. Whiteness is primarily the maintenance of resource distribution that is expropriated from the

<sup>5</sup> [Interviewer’s note]: Data from the National Council of Justice (CNJ) show that only 1.7% of judges identify as black. Available at: <https://www.cnj.jus.br/com-apanas-17-de-juizes-e-juizas-pretos-equidade-racial-segue-distante-na-justica-brasileira/>.





population as a whole to be made available only among white people. This context is white racial supremacy working in practice.

**Anderson** — Professor, in your research, it is clear that you use different authors from sociology and anthropology to maintain a dialogue and to think about the studies of racial relations and whiteness. What intersections do social sciences and psychology have when observing the dynamics of whiteness?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — It is paramount to think about the category of race from a sociological point of view, how it is produced from a historical moment, and, especially, what it means sociologically. This is a way of giving meaning to historically constructed power relations. If we do not understand race as a social category in terms of maintaining power relations, economic, political, and legal domination, and the production of subjectivities, we will not be able to understand the fundamental field of social psychology. That is, understanding individuals inside the structure and the structure in the individuals. We must understand how this structure works to understand how the subject benefits from it and maintains it. It is fundamental for social psychology to understand this subject that maintains the structure or disrupts the structure. Who is this subject produced in this white structure? It is not possible to do this without understanding the social structure. Because of this, we need to study history and sociology. Fundamentally, it is important to understand the social structure appropriated by white people, maintained and legitimized daily.

There is a specific area in psychology that tries to understand these agents of the structure, in other words, how the structure is being produced daily by individuals, based on identity construction, on the idea of moral and intellectual superiority. The concept of whiteness — which perhaps most characterizes whiteness as power relations — is a particularity that claims to be universal. That idea of universality, of whiteness as a position of power. If we do not understand how the subject maintains this, we also ignore how the structure continues. So, I think it is a double point of view and comprehension. Furthermore, even though in psychology, we read many authors from sociology, anthropology, and social sciences as a whole, there is still some resistance in sociology and other areas in reading the work on race relations carried out by us in psychology.



**Anderson** — Do you still see any resistance to the study of race relations within social psychology?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — It is not the same as when I started. When I started, everything was very new in the field of psychology. Today, it is possible to see that there has been a significant change and even that social psychology has almost transformed the studies of racism in recent years. So, there is a big change. It is not the field of social psychology that has resistance, it is the people, the subjects, the professors who are training professionals. Of course, the field cannot be constructed without individuals. However, I think there is something like: “This is an important topic. This topic is important right now. I am a professor and must debate this issue in my class.” But we see resistance to actually doing it. Not that it is just a checklist as if: “I have already indicated a text about this, and that is enough.” It is undeniable that this topic is essential for social psychology. However, one thing is the public dimension of what is said, and it is another to actually place this at the center of the relationships established at universities, in the relationships engendered in the divisions of financial resources such as research scholarships, for example. Which student will I supervise in graduate programs? The topic emerges almost like a checklist, but concrete anti-racism actions still find substantial resistance.

**Anderson** — Could you talk about your most recent book: *Famílias inter-raciais: tensões entre cor e amor?* (Schucman, 2023). How was the process of observing these families to study the tensions between love and race?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — I always think of myself as a naive person. When I started to study racism, right from the beginning, when I was very young, I believed that people were racist because of a lack of racial literacy or a lack of education. Maybe I was some Enlightenment thinker at the time (laughs). I thought that explanation or education could break the whiteness pacts. Today, I am much more pessimistic about this, because I consider that racism is at its peak in capitalism and power relations. It is not a lack of awareness, but discrimination that happens based on interests in maintaining economic, political, and power relations. It is much more challenging to destroy racism today than I thought twenty years ago, precisely because of the power structures that keep society unequal through the economic structure of capitalism.



Nevertheless, I kept a certain degree of naivety about affective relationships: I believed that, perhaps, very close and affective relationships of care, affection, and love — and here I was greatly influenced by reading the studies of France Winddance Twine, who coined the term “racial literacy” —, could stop racism, at least in this family environment. I wanted to understand the possibilities of disidentification between white people and whiteness within these families and loving relationships.

Therefore, the family seemed like an interesting object that could be studied to understand this issue when considering interracial relationships. However, it was a completely excluded hypothesis, as the study led me to conclude that affection does not prevent racism. Loving, being close or right next to, does not prevent the production of hierarchies of values of lives that are of more or less worth than others. They appear in different forms. For example, the white part of the family is the one in which things happen during lunches and dinners. Then you ask them why the encounter is happening here, and someone answers: “Because we live here in Pompeia, it is much closer than Itaquera”.<sup>6</sup> But the critical question is “closer to what”, after all? It is the same distance from Pompeia to Itaquera and from Itaquera to Pompeia. However, the Black part of the family had to cover a longer distance for a family gathering. The family photos that are shown are more often photos of white people. The stories they tell are about white people. So, we see the maintenance of values given to one family and another or to the white and Black individuals. In the history of families that have Indigenous ancestors, there is also silencing and denial. The person is characterized as the crazy grandmother, the crazy man who could not speak properly. And it was not the case, but another culture, other issues.

There is also a romanticization that shows an entire hierarchy within the family nucleus. I became close to these analyses because I started discussing whiteness studies in lectures, seminars etc. And many people came to me and talked about the impact of this ideological construction of whiteness within their own family and family experience. From the grandmother who put a clothespin on her nose so she could change its shape, to

---

<sup>6</sup> [Translator’s note]: Pompeia and Itaquera are neighborhoods in São Paulo. Pompeia is a middle-class neighborhood where the Palestra Italia soccer stadium is located, which reflects the influence of Italian immigrants in the city. In contrast, Itaquera is located in Eastern São Paulo, farther from the city center and located on the outskirts.

a family that straightened their hair. Others said: “What a pity you were not born with blue eyes just like your Portuguese great-grandfather”. So, we keep and maintain these hierarchies within families.

**Anderson** — In your research about interracial families, you describe that families that are seen as Black define themselves as *pardas* (brown) or white. How can we explain this within the Brazilian historical and social context, considering theories of racial whitening?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — That was quite interesting. Some families that I talked to were not seen as white by me. If I would ask a person what it was like to have experienced racism since, obviously, there was someone in the family who considered themselves Black. Otherwise, I would not have even considered the family for the research. I proposed the investigation of interracial families. That means that someone has to think that there are Black people in the family, right?

I found families in which no one, from my point of view, was white. However, people only considered one person in the family as Black. Moreover, the people who defined themselves as Black were the ones who accepted to be interviewed. Precisely because there is a dispute over racial classifications, race is not a truth. It was not supposed to be me, as a researcher, who was right about a person’s race. This is because my reading is actually the way I was socialized. We have different classifications happening at the same time in Brazil, and this produces a dispute. We have a very popular classification that identifies, due to the whitening ideology, anyone who appears to have lighter skin as non-black. There is a denial of what is Black, *moreninho*, *café com leite* etc. The Black category is often banned from popular classifications. For example, sometimes I would say this: “Oh, you are from a Black family”, because I included Black and *pardo* people, following the classification that I had acquired through the influence of Black social movements, in which Black and *pardo* people are part of the Black category, as a sociopolitical category. However, this classification did not make sense to the interviewee, who would say: “What do you mean? Are we a Black family? No one is Black here”.

This happens because of the whitening ideology that had the purpose of whitening the nation, an ideal of reaching whiteness. Those people, “who are not white, but also not



Black”, did not learn from the same socialization as me, so how can you name them as Black?

It is still a very popular classification, but it has changed considerably due to racial quotas. Moreover, I think it is important to emphasize that no one has brought more changes in Brazil when it comes to this issue than Racionais rap music, that is, the Hip Hop aesthetic movement. They led people to construct racial awareness, and this continues to change. Sometimes, the mother does not consider the family Black, but the son does. This is an example from the book’s first chapter: “My mother portrayed my father as white: affections and denial of race”. The mother said in front of the boy: “Look, no one is Black here”. The boy replied: “No? But I’m Black”. Still, during the interview, this mother responds: “He was never Black. With this thing of going to university, now he says he’s Black”.

So, nowadays, we have several racial classifications at the same time for each family. However, the less racial awareness or discussion about race relations, the more the whitening ideology permeates racial classification decisions.

There is a specific case that is not in the book, Fernando’s case, which I am talking about for the first time in this interview. I have always participated in several hetero-identification committees. It was in one of them that Fernando’s case occurred. He has been admitted to the university, has come from a Black family, and considered himself Black; however, he was seen as white. The committee did not recognize him as Black. Sometimes, it is not a situation of Afroportunism, but perhaps the issue of racial classifications being always in dispute, even within the family and beyond it, what generates these kinds of tensions in social relations.

**Anderson** — In analyzing interracial families, who usually names someone as Black? Would it be the person who pays the bills? Is there a gender issue involved?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — This is interesting because, generally, the person who has the most authority in the family is the one who defines everyone else in the family. This only causes tension when there is someone who is part of a social movement, or there is someone who has racial awareness, and they start to cause tension. But if not, the same person has authority for several other things, such as deciding which school to send the

children to, etc. This person also decides whether you are white or Black. It is quite amusing how racial dynamics are also intertwined with many other family dynamics of hierarchies and authority. However, tension rises when a child attends university or becomes part of a hip-hop movement. And they say: “I’m not *moreno*. I’m Black”. Tensions in racial classifications begin to rise, following the participation of individuals and family members in social movements or literacy and Black awareness movements.

**Anderson** — Over the past years, studies on whiteness have been growing, showing a diversity of approaches and perspectives. As a researcher and professor, how do you see this expansion of the research agenda differently from when it began in the 1990s?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — I think the more research there is, the better it will be for a field of research to become consolidated and, therefore, to denounce this structure. The only issue that I see as quite problematic, since I frequently participate in many master’s and doctoral committees, is when the agenda of critical whiteness studies is not centered on anti-racism. The issue is that critical whiteness studies were born in the anti-racism agenda, and it only makes sense to talk about whiteness within a context of thinking about anti-racist actions, to collapse whiteness, or to denounce privileges.

Then you join an examination committee at university, and you read studies about *A minha vida de sinhá* (My life as a lady slave owner) (laughs), which is a kind of study on the subjectivity of white people, guilt, shame, and how I realized that I am white. Seriously? This issue should be debated during analysis, therapy, or something else. Are you going to put the subjectivity of white people back into the field of racial studies again? It is already there. It is on Globo Television and Leblon.<sup>7</sup> White people’s subjectivity is already seen everywhere, so critical whiteness studies are not made for talking about the subjectivity or the feeling of being white, etc. It is essential to think precisely about this construction of individuals through racism, the denunciation of racism, or anti-racist actions. So, this is the only problem with some thesis and dissertations I have examined, when they place white people at the center of the debate, their subjectivity, the processes of realizing things. Yes, white people need to think of this, but it cannot be the center of a study that has the idea of anti-racism as its central point of view. Critical whiteness

<sup>7</sup> [Interviewer’s note]: Leblon is a high-class neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, frequently portrayed on television.



studies were born with the agenda of anti-racism. Therefore, they must denunciate whiteness. Otherwise, they seem to be just like Manoel Carlos' Helenas,<sup>8</sup> in the white environment; theirs, for them.

**Anderson** — It is interesting to think about this issue of denunciation as important to avoid putting white people back at the center of something in which they already find themselves. This highlights how research must situate white individuals and their social location, where their privileges are also found.

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — I do not know if it would be the denunciation of racial tension or privilege. However, when you place privilege only consciously: “Oh, I’m aware of my privilege”, this does not generate any rupture; it is just a narcissistic deception; it seems to me also as a way of putting white people back at the center of the debate.

**Anderson** — When considering whiteness studies in Brazil, would it be possible, in your opinion, to present an overview of the area as a field of study today?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — At first, we have been thinking about how whiteness is characterized, thinking of this as universal. This idea is that only others are read by race — those symbolic and material privileges. There is a second moment when we are able to think from a point of view that comes from literature and then we have authors like James Baldwin and Toni Morrison, an area that thinks about how whiteness is reproduced in discourses.

In Brazil, we have another quite important area: education. It is education that studies whiteness the most. However, there are pioneering works in social psychology. Sociology has also considered whiteness an object of study. The question I think is fundamental to consider right now is how this can be transformed into reparation. If we realize that white people have these privileges acquired during five hundred years of expropriation, what can we think of as reparation? I do not think these studies are meant to be academically hidden for no particular reason. We need to transform things and, at

---

<sup>8</sup> [Interviewer’s note]: Here, Professor Suchman mentions the protagonists of the novel and soap opera writer Manoel Carlos, known for naming the main characters as Helena, who are normally played by white actresses.

this point, I have seen very few people engaged in thinking about material reparation. People do not realize, for example, that these large farms come from years of expropriation of Indigenous lands, which remain with agribusiness and have remained intact. How can we transform this field of expropriation studies into fundamental ways to think about historical reparation? Historical reparation cannot be left aside as something that “has long passed”. There is no such thing as a “time that has passed”, inequality is here. I see only a few works that think about the materiality of whiteness, and many works on subjectivity that fundamentally do not break with this unequal, misogynistic, and racist structure.

**Anderson** — How do you see your contribution to whiteness studies in Brazil?

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — I do not know (laughs). There is a quote that I like by Maria Bethânia - she is terrific -: “I know exactly my size, neither bigger nor smaller”. I am not someone with a false sense of humility. I know that my work has an essential place in critical studies in Brazil. However, I think that it is also, at the same time, the result of conversations with many other Black and white intellectuals on the topic of race relations. This is not something that comes out of nowhere. In this context, my work brings something new: understanding racism and considering the subject that benefits from it.

Previous critical studies were very much theoretical. Therefore, I believe my work incorporates this aspect of interviews, in which I can show a materialized concept that I define as whiteness through the subjects and their privileges. That is my most considerable contribution to the field. I also consider that I have a contribution, which is not so noticeable in the academy but is more evident in agency. I must have visited about a hundred NGOs to reflect on how they could include Black people and anti-racism goals. I have also worked for several, both large and small, companies in Brazil. Here, we can talk about a contribution that is not visible, which has to do with the work on identifying institutional racism, thinking about goals, and fighting racism in institutions.

At university, I try to reflect on the academic contracting process and how we can change its structure. It is something quite tangible, making a diagnosis considering the existence of institutional racism and trying to change this situation. I would say, then, that this invisible contribution is my most significant contribution because it has materiality





in NGOs, companies, etc. It is much stronger than in theoretical research because it really is action.

**Anderson** — Professor, in conclusion, what message would you give to those who have a desire to study this subject? Perhaps you could recommend a specific work for those beginning their studies in this tricky area of whiteness, which you define as “a conceptual knot”.

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — It is paramount to read critical race theory because we cannot begin studies without understanding, for example, *The Racial Contract* from Charles Mills (2023) or, for example, the idea of “racial formation” according to Howard Winant; or even without reading Carlos Hasenbalg, in order to understand class and race structures. Something that bothers me is starting to think of subjectivity without understanding how the economic materiality of racial supremacy becomes this production of subjectivity. Then, do not begin an investigation by subjectivity. Even though I study subjectivity, it is important to think about critical race theory, considering what structures the unequal division of economic, political, and symbolic resources in society. My advice is to begin with critical race theory.

**Anderson** — I would like to thank you immensely for this highly productive and pleasant conversation, which could have continued for hours. I am very happy. Thank you, on behalf of *Revista Caos*, for your acceptance and availability in such a thoughtful way. Our conversation is a substantial contribution to the dossier and whiteness studies in Brazil.

**Lia Vainer Schucman** — Thank you. It is always a pleasure to discuss this subject and see what other researchers are producing so that we can see concrete actions against racism.

## Referências

BENTO, Maria Aparecida da Silva. **Pactos narcísicos no racismo**: branquitude e poder nas organizações empresariais e no poder público. 2002. 185f. Tese de doutorado (Psicologia Social) — Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade de São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo,



É permitido compartilhar (copiar e redistribuir em qualquer suporte ou formato) e adaptar (remixar, transformar e “criar a partir de”) este material, desde que observados os termos da licença CC-BY-NC 4.0.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46906/caos.n33.72216.p328-345>

2002. Disponível em: [https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/47/47131/tde-18062019-181514/publico/bento\\_do\\_2002.pdf](https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/47/47131/tde-18062019-181514/publico/bento_do_2002.pdf). Acesso em 12/11/2024.

DU BOIS, William Edward Burghardt. **Black Reconstruction in America**: toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880. London; New York: Routledge, 2017.

HASENBALG, Carlos. **Discriminação e desigualdade raciais no Brasil**. Rio de Janeiro: Editorial Graal, 1979.

MILLS, Charles Wade. **O contrato racial**. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2023.

SCHUCMAN, Lia Vainer. **Famílias inter-raciais**: tensões entre cor e amor. São Paulo: Editora Fósforo, 2023.

SCHUCMAN, Lia Vainer. “A branquitude não pode ser antirracista...”: um diálogo com Lia Vainer Schucman. [Entrevista cedida a ] Anderson dos Santos Cordeiro. **Caos – Revista Eletrônica de Ciências Sociais**, João Pessoa, n. 33, p. 199-215, jul./dez. 2024. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.46906/caos.n33.70465.p194-210>.

Recebido em: 17/11/2024.

Aceito em: 21/11/2024.



É permitido compartilhar (copiar e redistribuir em qualquer suporte ou formato) e adaptar (remixar, transformar e “criar a partir de”) este material, desde que observados os termos da licença CC-BY-NC 4.0.