Article

Gender, Class, and Ethnicity: Perspectives of White Portuguese and Black African Women on Labor Dynamics in the Cleaning Sector

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Abstract: This study focuses on cleaning services in Lisbon, Portugal, to understand the dynamics of operating in this feminine context, mostly employing women of African origin. From a qualitative and intersectional perspective, the study encompasses 17 semi-structured individual interviews with women working in these services, nine of African origin (Black) and eight of Portuguese origin (White) between 29 and 66 years of age. The thematic analysis returned five themes portraying the specificities associated with women carrying out their activities in a context of low social status, particularly for Black women. Although we verified some of the negative consequences associated with tokenism, the intersections of gender, class, and race/ethnicity generated dynamics that also contradict this phenomenon.

Keywords: gender; class; ethnicity; tokenism; intersectionality; cleaning sector; women

1. Introduction

Professional gender segregation persists as a social problem reflecting on how women remain at a disadvantage compared to men in relation to positions of prestige, power, and levels of pay (Amâncio and Santos 2021; Santos and Amâncio 2014). A tendency prevails for women to be hired for professions considered "feminine", with reduced career opportunities (Casaca and Lortie 2017), as also remains the case with industrial cleaning services.

According to the 2010 Portuguese Classification of Occupations, produced by the (National Statistics Institute INE 2011), cleaning workers class as "unskilled workers" and, according to the International Labour Organisation, women have long been over-represented in this activity (Organização Internacional do Trabalho 2007). Furthermore, Turlan and Kerckhofs (2019) reported that in the European universe of professionals in this sector in 2018, the total percentage of women was "always above 50%, except in Denmark, with peaks above 80% in Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal and the United Kingdom" (p. 19). In fact, after looking at every country in Europe, we are unable to identify anywhere with a proportion of female cleaning workers as high as in Portugal. In that same year, the proportion of women employed as cleaners reached 90% (Carvalho 2022).

According to the Personnel Charts, in October 2020 there were 134,415 individuals working in this profession in Portugal, of whom 20,454 were non-nationals (15%). The Wall et al. (2008) study concluded that the three non-Portuguese nationalities most present in the country were Cape Verdean, Brazilian, and Ukrainian immigrants. These women generally held low-skilled jobs. In turn, Rodrigues et al. (2013) added that the African community emigrating to Portugal derived mainly from the PALOPs, thus, the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome, and Principe and, above all, from Cape Verde. Broadly speaking, women from the PALOPs obtain low-skilled

occupations, especially unskilled service and retail workers, including as cleaners in private homes and companies (Peixoto et al. 2006).

According to Pereira (2010), ethnic-racial belonging constitutes a conditioning factor in the labor market, pushing workers into less qualified sectors with greater precariousness and worse working conditions. African women occupy feminized sectors, such as industrial cleaning and domestic service, while African men tend to work in construction.

This study does not ignore the colonial past of the Portuguese context, which continues to have its mark on the present in different ways and which shapes the relationships that are established with people of African origin or Black people. According to a Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in the European Union (EU), promoted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, in the case of Portugal, 7% of respondents of African origin stated that they had experienced discrimination on the basis of their ethnic origin and 23% on the basis of their skin color (Oliveira 2020). Simultaneously, in Portugal, the Commission for Equality Against Racial Discrimination (CICDR), whose mission is to ensure the application of the legal regime prohibiting discrimination in the exercise of rights for reasons based on race, color, nationality, or ethnic origin, received 436 complaints in 2019, 83 of which were ethnic-racial discrimination. Regarding the grounds of the discrimination complaint, in 2019, "Roma ethnicity" (19.3% in 2019), "black/black/black skin colour" (17.7% in 2019) stood out as the main factors of discrimination (Oliveira 2020). The Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey—Being Black in the EU (FRA 2018), the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, concluded, for example, that the African or African descendant population living in Portugal was the poorest, with about 38% have difficulty paying the bills, while the Portuguese population in general corresponded to 17%; it had the worst jobs, with about 50% of the Black population performing remunerative activities in the manual sector that usually required physical effort, and being the second highest percentage compared to other countries and double the EU average.

The reproduction and even widening of inequalities in the labor market is due, among other factors, to forms of discrimination associated with race/ethnicity. Although there is no official classification of the racial/ethnic population in Portugal and that prevents a greater knowledge of the experiences lived by these people, there are sure indicators that reveal that the color of the skin is still a strong conditioner of the opportunities of people of African descent, regardless of their professional and academic qualifications. From this data we can see the existence of difficulties at various levels, with people of African descent or of black skin color still being perceived as "other" in the Portuguese context (Pereira and Crespo 2022).

Catarino and Oso (2000) have demonstrated how the intersection between ethnicity, gender, and social class places immigrant women in a complex web of discrimination that shapes their access to the labor market. As regards working in cleaning companies, the researchers observed that ethnic and class discrimination emerged in only selecting Portuguese women as supervisors/team leaders and in assigning the heaviest and most dangerous tasks to female workers of African origin. Therefore, alongside gender, race/ethnicity, and social class also stood out as social markers that determined the roles Black women could occupy both in the labor market (Silva and Tédde 2018) and socially with Black women dually exposed to various forms of violence, discrimination, and racism (Hooks 1981).

According to Reis (2019), in Lisbon, where this study focuses, there are more Black and immigrant women than Portuguese women working in the cleaning sector. As discriminatory practices interconnect with social categories, the present study seeks to understand the dynamics operating in cleaning services, as a context of low social status, mostly undertaken by Black women of African origin (Silva and Tédde 2018). This specifically aims to explore the experiences of White women of Portuguese origin (as a small minority or tokens in accordance with Kanter 1977, 1993) and women of African origin (as the dominant group) in these services in order to grasp the main difficulties identified by these women and understand what type of strategies they adopt to manage the situations of inequality

in which they find themselves. Drawing on the theories of tokenism and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), this research strives to clarify which of these groups experience the negative consequences associated with women tokens—high visibility, polarization, and assimilation identified by Kanter (1977, 1993) that we shall now detail.

1.1. Tokenism Theory—From the Numerical to the Gender Perspective

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977, 1993) was one of the first authors to approach gender inequalities in the organizational context, studying and identifying factors explaining discrimination against women in her 1977 book "Men and Women of the Corporation". This author analyzed organizational dynamics in a context marked by the under-representation of one group (women) compared to another (men) and noted the numerical proportion in the organizational structure as a predictor of the "tokenism phenomenon". Indeed, according to Kanter (1977, 1993), discrimination will occur in groups where there are variations in the numerical proportions of people of different social types. More specifically, in "skewed groups", where one "dominant group" prevails over another small group (constituting up to 15% of the group), which Kanter refers to as "tokens", or "solos" when there is only one such person. The name "tokens" stems from how they are usually treated as representatives of their category, as symbols, rather than as individuals (Kanter 1977, 1993).

According to Kanter (1977, 1993), due to their low level of representation, tokens are subject to three disadvantageous conditions: (i) high visibility, which may result in greater pressure to perform and potentially driving increases or decreases in performance; (ii) contrast or polarization, which consists of the dominant group's tendency to emphasize the differences between themselves and the tokens, which may lead to their social isolation and accommodation; and, (iii) assimilation, which involves members of the dominant group distorting the attributes of the tokens so they fit the existing stereotypes for their social group. This situation may lead to what Kanter termed "role encapsulation/role entrapment", not only limiting the working functions of tokens but also their capacity to express themselves freely.

Kanter (1977, 1993) then generalizes these three negative consequences to members of any proportionally under-represented group experiencing similar social contexts. According to the author, organizational contexts that experience a numerical balance of groups should display more positive dynamics.

However, this theory has since been subject to numerous criticisms in subsequent research, especially approaches incorporating a gender perspective that reveal how proportions represent an insufficient variable for explaining the "tokenism phenomenon" as structural, cultural, social, and psychological factors are not taken into consideration in proportion-based analysis (Santos and Amâncio 2014). According to Connell (2006), organizations are "gender regimes" that merely reflect the prevailing "gender order" in society (p. 839), while Acker (1990) and Williams (1995) maintain organizational structures are also gendered. Furthermore, Kanter's theory is devoid of gender analysis and fails to pay due attention to the subordinate status women hold in society (Santos and Amâncio 2014).

Laws had already noted in (Laws 1975) that only "double deviant" tokens, thus individuals proportionally under-represented in the context and attributed a low social status (such as women), are subject to the kind of negative consequences identified by Kanter (1977, 1993). Subsequent research, such as the studies by Floge and Merrill (1986), Heikes (1991) and Williams (1995), reported how when men experience the condition of tokens, they did not encounter the same difficulties as women tokens. Additionally, Yoder and Sinnett (1985) put forward evidence that the numerical factor alone did not explain the negative effects perceived by women tokens. In contrast, when men engaged in a "feminine" profession, they lost neither their gender identity nor their gender privileges (Williams 1992, 1995) as masculinity remained fused with the dominant values of the profession (Amâncio 1989). Hence, instead of the "glass ceiling" phenomenon that often prevented women from rising to senior positions in male-dominated professions, men often encountered a "glass escalator" that lifted them into the prestigious, powerful,

and better-paid positions in female-dominated professions. In other words, in feminine professions, men still gained more opportunities and achieved upward mobility—rapid career progression, especially when compared to the slow career progression of women in masculine professions (Williams 1992, 1995).

The police force context, as a traditionally masculine and white profession, represented one of the professional contexts where the effects of tokenism had been most subject to analysis. This research has explored the different aspects of Kanter's theory of tokenism (Kanter 1977, 1993) for both female police officers (Archbold and Schulz 2008; Martin 1990, 1995; Ott 1989; Stichman et al. 2010; Wertsch 1998) and racial/ethnic minorities (e.g., Gustafson 2008; Martin 1994, 1995). The results conveyed a relationship between women and minorities as tokens and the experiences of discrimination, harassment, and isolation.

1.2. Tokenism from an Ethnic Perspective

Kanter's theory (1977, 1993) has, therefore, been extended to the experiences of racial-ethnic minorities. Another good example of this stems from a case study with African American leaders, carried out by Jackson et al. (1995), which identified how Black tokens in the work environment experienced higher levels of stress and depression. The authors also detailed a loss of "black identity", revealing a sense of isolation and greater pressure to perform well.

Some examples of studies adopting similar approaches focus on African American nurses (Wingfield 2009), African American female firefighters (Yoder and Aniakudo 1997; Yoder and Berendsen 2001), White and African American female college students (Yoder et al. 1996), and White, Black, and Hispanic female and male police officers (Gustafson 2008) to reveal that not only gender but also race/ethnicity account for strong predictors of the presence of tokenism.

An analysis of Black and White women in corporate settings indicates that these women feel quite visible in relation to their male colleagues, recognizing that their successes (or mistakes) will be seen as representative of women's (in)abilities to succeed in their field. This pressure to perform was still more pronounced for Black female executives who became isolated from White men and women and stereotyped as less intelligent, capable, or qualified (Bell et al. 2003).

According to Ong (2005), token women experience the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and class in mostly White male environments. Apparently, Black women experience the "dynamics of tokenism" even more intensely than White women (Martin 1994; Yoder et al. 1996; Yoder and Berendsen 2001). This may be because, according to Collins (2000, 2004), Black women do not fit the general stereotype of woman and, by extension, the dominant concept of femininity. Indeed, empirical research has revealed that Black women face stereotypes of strength, assertiveness, and aggression in addition to perceptions of incompetence (Ghavami and Peplau 2013; Niemann et al. 1994; Rosette et al. 2016). However, the study by Donovan (2011) concluded that Black women were perceived as louder, stronger, more religious, and less sensitive and educated in comparison to White women.

Wingfield (2009) analyses the experiences of Black male nurses and thereby concluded that the "glass escalator" phenomenon was a gendered and racialized concept, as Black men did not receive the same facilitation as generally experienced by White men. Wingfield (2009) furthermore demonstrated how, unlike White nurses, Black male and female professionals were often perceived as less "qualified" and/or "competent". The main contribution of these analyses arose from their understanding that cross-referencing gender and race/ethnicity identified multiple experiences in the workplace as we aimed to confirm in this study.

1.3. Intersection between Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Social Class

The term "intersectionality" was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) with the objective of denouncing the legal invisibility of multiple forms of oppression in the specific context of the rights violations experienced by Black women. Crenshaw (1989) analyzed how the tendency to treat race, gender, and class as mutually exclusive categories of analy-

sis and concrete experience was perpetuated by the single-axis form that dominated not only the production of laws against racial discrimination but also feminist and anti-racist theories. Traditional approaches to racial discrimination would prioritize Black men and members of the upper classes, while gender discrimination studies would focus on White women and other persons from privileged classes.

Fundamentally, Crenshaw's analysis deployed two major structuring axes: the intersection between gender, race and class, justice, and violence. Crenshaw (1989) wrote a short essay putting into perspective "the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (p. 39).

However, the concern with interweaving the distinct forms of social differentiations and inequalities had already been highlighted in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective, a small group of African American women from Boston who published a manifesto called "A Black Feminist Statement" that set out a more comprehensive statement of a black feminism policy framework (Taylor 2017). Within, they advocated not only for the struggle against the sexual oppression of women but also against other forms of domination and inequalities based on racisms, heterosexism and exploitation by social class. The group argued that a race-only or gender-only perspective would advance partial and incomplete analyses of the social injustices characterizing the lives of African American women, and that race, gender, social class, and sexuality all shape the experience of Black women. The manifesto proposed that the separate systems of oppression, as they were then treated, be interconnected. As racism, class exploitation, patriarchy, and homophobia collectively shape Black women's experiences, Black women's liberation requires responses encompass multiple systems of oppression (Taylor 2017).

In the North American context, Angela Davis (1981) and Bell Hooks (1981) have also published, respectively, "*Women, Race and Class*", and "*Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*", both of which made contributions to and criticisms of the need to pay attention to the combined forms of differentiation and inequalities, such as race and social class, determining women's experiences. In 1990, Patricia Hill Collins published "*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*", that also posits oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality as interrelated, constructing mutually implicated systems of power.

According to Collins and Bilge (2016), intersectionality constitutes a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity of the world through individuals and their experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life are formed by various factors that mutually influence each other. When it comes to social inequality, life and the organization of power in society, there are social divisions, whether of gender, race/ethnicity, or class, among other identity markers.

Intersectionality theory "aims to examine how various categories (socially and culturally constructed) interact at multiple levels to manifest themselves in terms of social inequality" (Nogueira 2017, p. 39). Thus, intersectionality also provides an analytical tool for understanding how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities (Women's Rights and Economic Change 2004).

Intersectional research has revealed that social categories such as sex/gender, race/ethnicity, class, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or disability do not operate independently of each other. Instead, these forms of oppression are interrelated, and it is at the points of intersection that we may perceive different experiences of oppression and privilege (Azzarito and Solomon 2005; Browne and Misra 2003; DeFrancisco and Palczewski 2007; Cerqueira and Magalhães 2017; McCall 2005; Nash 2008; Staunaes 2005).

However, we should not look at combinations of different identities as a sum total but rather strive to grasp how their combinations produce different experiences. This enables, for example, understanding as to why some women are marginalized and discriminated against, while others benefit from positions of privilege (Branco 2008). Furthermore, this approach implies thinking about a "matrix of domination" that organizes power in global terms, but which takes on different local manifestations, based on particular historical and

social configurations (Collins 1990). Furthermore, studying these same intersections will enable us to more deeply analyses the types of oppression and issues faced emerging from this case study of Black and White women of low social class.

McCall (2005) set out to define how research on intersectionality should be methodologically operationalized within the social sciences. Based on understanding and applying "analytical categories", the author identified three approaches: the anti-categorial, the intra-categorial and the inter-categorial. We will here adopt the intra-categorial approach as this does not reject the usage of social categories and the reality they reproduce even while acknowledging their limitations.

Starting out from this assumption, that discriminatory practices interconnect with social categories (i.e., race/ethnicity and gender), we aim to grasp the dynamics operating at the level of professional contexts characterized by low status and social prestige, in this case, cleaning and maintenance services in public or private places, exercised mostly by Black women in and around Lisbon (Silva and Tédde 2018).

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Using a qualitative methodology, we chose the technique of semi-structured individual interview. This methodological option was due to the fact that the main objective of the research is to understand the dynamics of gender, ethnic, and social class operating in cleaning services, a professional sector marked by women of low social status. The study, completed as part of a master's thesis without funding, completed 17 semi-structured interviews, in accordance with the saturation principle, with eight women of White Portuguese origin and nine women of Black African origin, employed in the cleaning sector located in and around Lisbon. With their ages ranging from 29 to 66 years (M = 48.59; SD = 12.63), the Black women (M = 41.22; SD = 12.27) are younger than their White colleagues (M = 56.88; SD = 6.69). The women interviewed were working in very diversified contexts, distributed across the academic, hospital, hotel, and service cleaning contexts. They all worked for cleaning companies, performing functions such as cleaning offices, rooms, and/or common areas as well as the respective disinfection of spaces. Table 1 details the characteristics of this sample.

Table 1. Characterization of the origin, skin color and nationality of the interviewees.

Interview Number	Nationality	Nationality of Parents	Origin	Skin Color
1	Portuguese	Angolan and Mozambican	African	Black
2	Cape Verdean	Cape Verdean	African	Black
3	Cape Verdean	Cape Verdean	African	Black
4	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
5	Portuguese	Sao Tomean	African	Black
6	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
7	Portuguese and Cape Verdean	Cape Verdean	African	Black
8	Portuguese	Sao Tomean and Portuguese	African	Black
9	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
10	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
11	Cape Verdean	Cape Verdean	African	Black
12	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
13	Portuguese and Cape Verdean	Cape Verdean	African	Black
14	Guinean	Guinean	African	Black
15	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
16	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White
17	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	White

2.2. Procedures

To carry out the interviews, we contacted female employees in the cleaning sector and applied the "snowball" technique and, thus, began by interviewing persons we knew and then, after these interviews, we requested more contacts from interviewees, colleagues, or people we knew working in the cleaning sector. The inclusion criteria for the research were as follows: (i) being a woman; (ii) working in the cleaning sector; (iii) working in a context with several people (not domestic work or not only domestic work); and (iv) being of Portuguese or African origin. The interviews all occurred face to face in a quiet location, far from their coworkers, between 3 and 17 March 2022, lasting an average of 23 min. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and according to the availability of the interviewees. Before starting the interview, all interviewees read and signed their informed consent, designed in accordance with the guidelines of the University Ethics Committee of the two lead authors. Hence, they were duly informed of the study's objectives as well as its confidential and anonymous character. Prior to the interview, respondents all answered a brief sociodemographic questionnaire. Further, following consent, all 17 interviews were recorded and later transcribed in full.

2.3. Instrument

The main data collection instrument was the semi-structured individual interview. We developed one script, in keeping with the literature review, only with an adaptation to the participant's origin—White women of Portuguese origin and Black women of African origin. The script was divided into four major dimensions: entry into the cleaning sector; in/equalities in the cleaning sector; current professional context; and managing the situation of inequality.

2.4. Data Analysis

The corpus, consisting of the contents of the 17 interviews, was analyzed in accordance with thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). We opted for this methodology as a flexible methodology that enabled the identification of themes/patterns and sub-themes in the data. It was independent of any specific theoretical framework and applicable to a variety of theoretical and epistemological approaches. The analytical procedures were undertaken by the two lead researchers, who followed the six stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (i) familiarization with the data; (ii) initial coding; (iii) grouping of initial codes into potential themes; (iv) review of themes and preparation of a thematic "map"; (v) definition and naming of themes; and (vi) production of a report, by selecting excerpts related to the research question and literature. We adopted a constructivist approach, recognizing the ways in which individuals attributed meaning to their experiences and how the social context interfered with this process (Braun and Clarke 2006). We identified the themes through a mixed approach that initially began with deductive analysis, directed by the theoretical or analytical relevance based on the tokenism and intersectionality theories. The analysis was also partially inductive because, throughout the data coding process, there was always the scope for modifying and altering the main themes in accordance with the emergence of new themes and sub-themes deemed of relevance to the study.

3. Findings

Thematic analysis allowed us to identify a set of themes and sub-themes in the discourses of the 17 interviewees that we entitled and set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-Themes
Awareness of ethnic and gender segregation in the cleaning sector	Explanatory factors of ethnic segregation Explanatory factors of gender segregation Female misogyny
In/visibility of women in the cleaning sector	Dissensus on the visibility of people working in the cleaning sector Men's mistakes are more excused and their successes more valued African women feel a greater need to show their competencies Mistakes by African women are more highlighted
Polarization of differences between people and discrimination against African women	Gender and ethnic differences in the treatment of people Distance between African and Portuguese women Different treatment between White and Black women African women are subject to discrimination
Assimilation or not, that is the question	These women are proud of their work They perceive themselves as symbols of strength Polarization of opinions on the attitudes adopted by women working in the cleaning sector
From a lack of strategies to managing inequality to measures to promote equality	Manage the situation without special strategies Suggest measures to promote greater equality in the cleaning sector

3.1. Awareness of Ethnic and Gender Segregation in the Cleaning Sector

One of the first themes identified in the interview contents conveyed the awareness among the interviewees, both Portuguese and African in origin, of the existence of ethnic and gender segregation in the cleaning sector, perceiving several factors as contributing to explaining its existence, as portrayed by the following sub-themes: (i) explanatory factors of ethnic segregation; (ii) explanatory factors of gender segregation; (iii) and female misogyny.

As regards the first sub-theme, we would note that, in practice, explaining ethnic segregation involved identifying immigration as a trigger. The responses also highlighted the lack of training or education of Africans, the absence of opportunities for them, and the preference of Portuguese women to avoid working in the sector, which were:

> The part where I see a big discrepancy is between African women and Portuguese women. Because, in my opinion, we Africans generally have less knowledge, less studies and most of the people applying for cleaning have just arrived from Africa. They don't have any real education, so they don't risk going to work in another area because they know that cleaning is a simple thing, doing cleaning, that's it, you don't need schooling. (I1, woman of African origin, Black, 30 years old)

> Regarding the fact that there are more people of African origin in the cleaning sector, I think that maybe there is still a little bit of… many people think that working in the cleaning sector "Ah, it's boring". I think that, in this respect, they [women of African origin] are more open to working in this sector than the Portuguese. (I15, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 46 years old)

A second sub-theme reported how explanations for gender segregation noted men's lack of ability or lack of interest in working in the cleaning sector and the greater ability of women for such tasks and that was why women are effectively better than men in performing cleaning jobs. This gender asymmetry was further reinforced by the differentiation of tasks assigned to men and women in the sector according to physical strength, with men generally directed towards heavier services, such as cleaning windows, garages, and large surfaces, while women were assigned to lighter services, such as cleaning offices or rooms, with tools such as brooms, mops, etcetera:

> Mostly, especially for men, it is very difficult for them to do what we ladies do in cleaning, like in the bathroom, in an office, in an office… it is difficult for them. (…) Because they don't adapt that much. (…) No, no, no. Because there are

things we do with our fringes on the floor and the mop. If it's for five or 10 min, they sometimes spend an hour or an hour and a half there. While we're hurrying, they're still there. Why? Because they are not from the area. If I tell a woman and a man to wash a glass window, he does it in two minutes, I can do it in three hours or four hours, because I don't know. I don't know, it's not my area, I don't know. But an office to clean, a floor to scrub, I hurry while he is still there. (I8, woman of African origin, Black, 50 years old)

[There is a gender segregation] Because I think, in the old days, cleaning was for women. The man was more the brute mass. Cleaning was always more for women, even to do at home, men didn't do it. Mothers didn't get them used to cleaning. Women were for cleaning and that was it. But nowadays, we are seeing more and more men in the cleaning sector. (I6, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 53 years old)

The gender differentiation existing in the cleaning sector, a "women's world", was also described as something negative by interviewees of both Portuguese and African origin, within the sense of female misogyny and clearly expressing their preference for working in a more egalitarian sector in gender terms, i.e., in a sector with more men, because women, all together, "are worse than men" and "only cause problems":

In the sense of work, of conversation, those things... men are much better. The women, the girls, they usually just gossip to screw the others with the super-visor. But men don't, they do the job "That's it, let's go". (I3, woman of African origin, Black, 29 years old)

Men are more understanding and more human. Women, all together, only cause problems because they don't know how to put themselves in their place. (...) For me, I think that you work better with men. (I16, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 60 years old)

3.2. In/Visibility of Women in the Cleaning Sector

The second theme identified relates to the phenomenon of visibility as noted by Kanter (1977, 1993) or rather the lack of it. Research conducted in Lisbon had already demonstrated how women in the cleaning sector are invisible (Carvalho 2022). Probably for this same reason, this theme returns rather heterogeneous and sometimes even contradictory discourses in this sector where African women predominate. In fact, visibility is generally perceived as something positive with all interviewees indicating that every colleague knows their names as a positive aspect. They mentioned how this did not happen when their workplace environments were large, as this made it impossible for them to know all their colleagues. In their current workplaces, most of the women interviewed did not feel observed by their superiors or colleagues. However, among the contradictory discourses, four sub-themes could be perceived which revealed: (i) a dissensus about the visibility of people working in the cleaning sector; that (ii) the mistakes of men were more excused and their successes more valued; that (iii) African women felt a greater need to show their competencies; and that (iv) their mistakes were more highlighted.

The first sub-theme encompassed rather heterogeneous discourses among both groups of women: some noted how men were more visible in this traditionally feminine context in which they constitute tokens. In fact, currently encountering a man in the cleaning sector still caused admiration and strangeness, while women pass off as "normal" even though others considered women to be more visible as they account for the majority in the context; others, particularly interviewees of Portuguese origin, maintained it is rather women of Portuguese origin (who we may also consider as tokens in the Lisbon cleaning sector) who are most visible in this sector. One respondent noted a certain sympathy and admiration for these women, White, and already so few in number working in cleaning while other Portuguese and African women understand that women of African origin, Black, were

clearly more visible and attract greater attention as they predominated in the cleaning sector in and around Lisbon:

> When there's a man cleaning, everyone is like "Ah, there's a man cleaning!" But when there are women cleaning, I think it's normal. But in the case of men, a lot of people say 'Ah, did you see the man cleaning?' To me, it's normal, because any work is work. But a lot of people think that a man cleaning is strange. (I3, woman of African origin, Black, 29 years old)

> People notice men more because there's still a lot of admiration and it's noticed. And they notice Portuguese women, yes. (I6, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 53 years old)

A second sub-theme encompassed the discourses of women of African origin who argued that mistakes by men were more excused than those by women primarily because cleaning is "women's work", and that male successes received greater value, particularly those of Black women of African origin, whose successes often received less recognition than those of women of Portuguese origin and especially those of men whose scarcity in the sector in all likelihood explains this increased value:

> I think that, when it is a woman, it ends up being more noticeable (…). Because I think we are instilled with responsibility, mainly here in our cleaning work, which, because it is a "woman's work", we must know how to do more than a man. If a man does it wrong, it is considered because he is a man, he is not used to cleaning, it is not his area, but with the woman, that is already different, because she knows, it is something that women do every day". (I14, woman of African origin, Black, 30 years old)

> I think that if it is in terms of successes, because I am Black (…) it is not so recognised. And if the person is White, it's more recognized. And if you're a man, even more so. In other words, they always give preference because it's rare to have men in cleaning. So, as there are few of them, I think they value a man more. Even if the man is not doing anything. He's a man. So, if that man has lifted one bucket of rubbish, I, who am a Black woman, may have lifted seven or eight, his is more important, which is bad. And I see this here. I have two colleagues, one White and one Black, the Black one works here longer and does the job a thousand times better than the White one, the White one is the boss and she can't stand up. And if there was a man, he would certainly be the one. (I1, woman of African descent, Black, 30 years old)

Another sub-theme highlighted how in the Lisbon area, African women felt a greater need to prove their competencies in the cleaning sector. Indeed, these women reported how, since childhood they have had instilled into them that as Black people, they always have to prove themselves in order not to be left behind in relation to White people, or be mistreated or humiliated. As such, they try their best to show they know how to do their tasks, that they are good at what they do, and that they work fast:

> I think that is instilled in us Black people from the time we are children. If we were in Africa, it would be different, obviously, but we are in a country of White people and we are Black and so it is instilled in us, from birth, that we always have to prove ourselves so as not to be left behind or not to be mistreated, humiliated. I've taken this with me since I was a child. So, here I do what I have always done, which is to always show that I am good, ready, or always try my best. (I1, woman of African origin, Black, 30 years old)

The last sub-theme identified also conveyed how the women of African origin interviewed feel their mistakes come under far greater scrutiny than those of other people (whether men or women); a position confirmed by the women of Portuguese origin. Indeed, respondents stated the mistakes of foreign women, such as these African women, were

always more likely to be noticed in order to blame them, women who come from elsewhere, more than women of Portuguese origin:

> They would notice African women more if they did something wrong. (…) I don't really understand if it's racism…but they would always notice African women. 'Maybe it's the African woman who did it wrong.' (…) They blame them a little bit more. (I7, woman of African origin, Black, 53 years old)

> Yes, there is a difference, there is. (…) They are more downgraded if they make a mistake. They immediately have the tendency to be "marked" because they are African women. (…) In my case no, but in their case [the African and Brazilian women], yes [they are under permanent surveillance]. (I12, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 64 years old)

3.3. Polarization of Differences between People and Discrimination against African Women

The third theme identified related to the phenomenon of polarization as identified by Kanter (1977, 1993). In general, the interviewees from both backgrounds expressed feeling comfortable in their professional contexts and reported no obstacles to integration or adaptation in the cleaning sector. However, the three sub-themes identified confirm there were: (i) gender and ethnic differences in the treatment of people; (ii) a distance perceived by African women and Portuguese women; and that (iii) African women were subject to discrimination.

The first sub-theme unveiled how, in fact, there was differentiated treatment ongoing both between women and men and between White women and Black women, perceived especially by women of African origin. It was correspondingly noted, particularly by the latter, that as cleaning is a women's job, more gets demanded of them than of men, who also end up receiving greater tolerance over mistakes than everybody else in this sector. In turn, the differential treatment portrayed as existing between White women and Black women resulted mainly from stereotypes and differences existing in terms of levels of education:

> Yes, as "cleaning is a woman's work", it is more demanded of women. Maybe it is more expected that a man will work in the jobs that are considered 'men's work', so in the cleaning sector, they end up being excused." (I13, woman of African origin, Black, 29 years old)

> I think there is differential treatment between men and women. And also between women of African origin and those of other origins. (I14, woman of African origin, Black, 30 years old)

A second sub-theme highlighted the existence of a certain distancing between African women and Portuguese women, perceived by the latter, who understood that African women result in talking more amongst themselves as they remain uneasy amongst Portuguese women, who are generally more knowledgeable but also behave as if they feel themselves "smarter":

> The African women don't feel very good in front of the Portuguese women, because they think the Portuguese women are always wiser, have more knowledge. (I12, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 64 years old)

> What happens a lot, but I think it happens here and everywhere, is that the African colleagues tend to talk to each other in their own language, and of course there are many things that we understand, but there are many things that we don't understand. Maybe it's not the most correct thing to do, but that's what happens. (I15, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 46 years old)

A final sub-theme highlighted how in the cleaning sector in and around Lisbon, African women are discriminated against and mistreated, something described by women of African origin and confirmed by women of Portuguese origin. In fact, some women confirmed they had been personally discriminated against, while others stated having

observed other women of African origin targeted by discrimination, specifically because of their color, noting several examples of discrimination against their colleagues, who were, among other events, sent back home to Africa (e.g., either because of their origins or their color, calling them "monkeys" or "ugly"), to the point of having to change their workplaces:

> I worked at Lisbon airport where there were many women, 150 of us, cleaning the planes. And, many times, yes, they were discriminated against (. . .) They treated them badly. It was "look at that Black girl", 'let her go to her country', those things, like this, without any sense. (I9, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 58 years old)

> In another place where I worked there was a woman from Guinea, and there was a man who was also a security guard there. I think that the man didn't like the lady, and called her a "monkey", "ugly" and that kind of thing. The lady became afraid or something like that and ended up giving up the job and leaving. (I11, woman of African origin, Black, 41 years old)

3.4. Assimilation or Not, That Is the Question

The fourth theme identified related to the third phenomenon of tokenism portrayed by Kanter (1977, 1993)—assimilation. This encompassed three sub-themes that revealed that: (i) these women were proud of their work; (ii) they perceived themselves as symbols of strength; and that iii) there was polarization in the opinions about the attitude adopted by women working in the cleaning sector, reporting how stereotypical characteristics of not assimilated women were normally associated to women of African origin.

The first sub-theme highlighted how the women interviewed bore great pride in their cleaning jobs, expressing how they felt good in the cleaning sector and enjoyed what they did not least because this "normal" work was their "livelihood"; it was what gave them everything and, such as any other profession, had obligations and duties:

> Look, I feel good. I like what I do. I do my job without stress, without anything, because I don't get stressed at work. If I stay today, I'll stay tomorrow, there's no problem. (. . .) Look, for me it's normal, it's a job like any other job. I get my salary at the end of every month. I pay my expenses. For me, it is a normal job like any other job. (I3, woman of African origin, Black, 29 years old)

> This job is wonderful. I like what I do, yes, I really like what I do. Ok, I never had any studies, I had to stick to this, but I started to like it. (I9, female of Portuguese origin, White, 58 years old)

Another sub-theme conveyed how these women perceived themselves, and understood they were perceived as such, as symbols of strength, as warriors, particularly women of African origin, which contradicted the female stereotype that held women as emotional, fragile, etcetera. In fact, these Black women of African origin perceived themselves, and were perceived here, as people who suffered greatly in their homeland, as strong women, warriors, more resistant, fighters, multi-skilled, who adapt to everything, and who always manage to cope:

> Because the African woman, in herself, she is strong. She has to be strong to survive. (. . .) We must have to be strong. I think that our existence would not get here. For all that the Black man went through, the difficulties he faced, if he wasn't really strong, he wouldn't make it. (I14, woman of African origin, Black, 30 years old)

> I never noticed that they thought we were more fragile because of this or that. We are warrior women. (I17, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 66 years old)

A final sub-theme presented a polarization of opinions on the posture adopted by women of Portuguese origin and women of African origin working in the cleaning sector. Indeed, some women referred to always adopting a feminine posture whenever the working

context, markedly feminine, would allow it. However, women of African origin defended the adoption of a more masculine posture due to feeling they have to portray that they were stronger as Black people, tougher than White people, and also so they avoid abuse. Other women also described themselves as adopting both feminine and masculine postures as they clean like women but are strong like men:

> Both. (...) Do the job well, clean like a woman and be strong like a man. (I13, woman of African origin, Black, 29 years old)

> I think it is a feminine posture (...), also because of the type of work we do, because it is not related to the type of work that most men do in general and so it is illogical for them to assume a more masculine posture. As our type of work allows us to be feminine, we are. (I15, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 46 years old)

3.5. From a Lack of Strategies to Managing Inequality to Measures to Promote Equality

A final theme identified in the interview material focused on ways of managing the situations of gender and ethnic inequality in which the women interviewed found themselves. Two sub-themes identified highlighted that, with some exceptions, these women: (i) managed the situation without special strategies; and (ii) suggested measures in order to boost greater equality in the cleaning sector.

In fact, the majority of the women interviewed declared they did not apply any type of special strategy to deal with the situation of inequality as they coped well with the situation on a daily basis. Among the remainder, only two polarized strategies were highlighted among women of African origin, who admitted either opting to be more discreet or to pretending to be strong as some described the option:

> I deal well, I don't adopt any strategy. For me it's the same being with Portuguese women, or Africans, or Brazilians, for me it's the same. They do their job, I do mine. If the work is not done well, I tell them: "Let's do it this way or that way". And they do the same thing: "You tell me how it is, and I will do it". I never had problems in dealing with them. (I6, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 53 years old)

> I really prefer to be tough, not to be too confident, not to laugh too much. If my colleague is White as soon as I meet her and see that she's really humble and not one of those people who likes to show off, I change my attitude and go back to being all mushy, playful. Now, if it's not, I maintain a posture that doesn't sound like me at all, but I have to be. Very serious, I don't laugh a lot, I don't give much confidence. I strictly speak only about what is necessary, very direct answers, only about work, I don't talk about my life. I don't want to hear about the person's life either, I make that clear straight away... (I1, woman of African origin, Black, 30 years old)

The final sub-theme set out the measures proposed by the women interviewed for improving existing gender and ethnic asymmetries, as well as normalizing and enhancing the profession, highlighting awareness and training on these issues and the deconstruction of stereotypes or preconceived ideas:

> Maybe with a good training, which is something I insist a lot, maybe that's how we can become aware, because people have the idea that cleaning is, deep down, "cleaning other people's rubbish" and we must realize that we have to clean whatever it is. But I think a good training is also very necessary. (I12, woman of Portuguese origin, White, 64 years old)

> I think, perhaps, through the deconstruction of ideas. There are a number of ideas that are constructed that need to be deconstructed, such as, for example, not all people who work in cleaning are illiterate. Often, it's a lack of opportunities. But

> I'm not referring to cleaning work as a lesser job, because all jobs are jobs. (I13, Woman of African origin, Black, 29 years old)

4. Discussion

This study set out to analyze the gender dynamics ongoing in the cleaning sector in and around Lisbon, Portugal, as a traditionally feminine professional context and mostly exercised by Black women of African origin. Specifically, this study sought to explore the experiences of women of Portuguese origin (as tokens) and women of African origin (as the dominant group) undertaking these services within the objective of understanding both the main difficulties identified by these women and the types of strategies they adopt to manage the situation of inequality in which they find themselves. Thus, we sought to understand whether the results correspond to the premises put forward by Kanter (1977, 1993), that is, whether the three negative consequences associated with women tokens—high visibility, polarization, and assimilation—occur. In line with Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Collins (1990, 1993, 2000), Hooks (1981), Davis (1981), McCall (2005), among others, the study also proposed an intersectional approach, considering gender, race/ethnicity, and class, to the study of tokenism.

Firstly, we would note there is an awareness of ethnic and gender segregation ongoing in the cleaning sector among the women interviewed. The lack of training or low education of African men and women (Pereira 2013), the absence of opportunities, and the general lack of interest among Portuguese women regarding working in this sector emerged as the explanatory factors for the racial segregation highlighted by these interviewees. To explain the sector's gender segregation, respondents identified men's lack of ability and lack of interest in joining the cleaning sector, as well as women's greater ability to perform the functions associated with cleaning. These factors follow the line of thought proposed by some authors, such as Eagly (1987) and Wood and Eagly (2002), who consider that what drives differences in occupational roles between men and women stem from inherent physical sex differences resulting in certain activities to be more efficiently performed by a particular sex. This asymmetry was then reinforced in the sector by the differentiation of tasks assigned to men and women according to physical strength. This differentiation also incorporated the social division of labor concept proposed by Hirata and Kergoat (2007), with its two organizing principles being the separation principle, there are men's jobs and women's jobs, and the hierarchical principle, that a man's job is "worth" more than a woman's job.

The gender differentiation prevailing in the cleaning sector, a "woman's world", was also classed as something negative, within the scope of female misogyny (Bryans and Mavin 2003; Mavin 2006) by interviewees of Portuguese and African origin, clearly reflecting their preference for working in a more gender-balanced sector.

Moving onto the specific study objectives, and on the visibility phenomenon proposed by Kanter (1977, 1993), this receives partial verification through quite heterogeneous and sometimes even contradictory discourses. In general, visibility is perceived as something positive with the interviewees describing how all their colleagues know their name as a positive aspect. However, the discourses revealed a certain dissent around the visibility of workers in the cleaning sector and that men's mistakes (tokens in this context) were more excused and their successes more valued than those of women in general. Another reported aspect reflected how women of African origin (the majority in this context) experienced a greater need to display their skills than women of Portuguese origin (tokens) and their mistakes come in for greater attention, as described in another context by Bell and colleagues (2003). This issue of women of African origin feeling they had to work harder had already been explored with women in token conditions in positions of power and decision-making, in masculine and/or White worlds (Ferreira and Santos 2022). Thus, we may affirm the phenomenon of visibility also occurs with these lower-class women in professional contexts of low social status, thereby demonstrating how this is not only a question of numbers.

As regards polarization (Kanter 1977, 1993), while in general both groups of interviewees expressed feeling comfortable in their respective professional contexts and reported no obstacles to their integration and adaptation in the cleaning sector, they confirmed perceiving gender and ethnic differences in the treatment of people, perceived mainly by women of African origin in accordance with that described by Santos and Amâncio (2014). In fact, particularly the latter group, noted that, given the perception of cleaning as a "woman's job", more was demanded of them than of men who became excused whenever making mistakes. In this case, as a feminized profession, in which men were tokens, the latter benefitted from gender (Williams 1992, 1995; Casaca and Lortie 2017). The different treatments noted between White women and Black women mainly resulted from stereotypes and differences in terms of academic qualifications (schooling). There was also a distance between African women and Portuguese women, perceived particularly by the latter, who felt that African women resulted in talking more to each other. Thus, this conveyed how although women of Portuguese origin are tokens, it is women of African origin who suffer most from the consequences of polarization in their daily lives, thus in contrast to Kanter's assumptions (Kanter 1977, 1993). In line with Hooks (1981), African women were "doubly" discriminated against and mistreated, specifically through differential treatment or the insults they were subjected to. Indeed, some women expressed having personally experienced discrimination, while others said they had observed discrimination against other women of African origin, specifically because of their color, identifying several examples of discrimination against their colleagues. Respondents generally observed that moral harassment and verbal violence towards Black cleaning staff constituted a reality present in different areas of the sector.

In relation to assimilation (Kanter 1977, 1993), we may firstly state that these women are proud of the cleaning work they do and feel good about this sector that provides their source of income. Women in this sector consider themselves as symbols of strength, as warriors, particularly the women of African origin, which runs counter to the female stereotype (Collins 2000, 2004) that depicts women as emotional and fragile. These women of African origin are also perceived by their White Portuguese colleagues as strong women, warriors, more resistant, fighters, multi-skilled, with a high capacity for adaptation and resilience due to their life trajectories. There is an internalization of these characteristics by women of African origin, which may impact on their mental health as they feel they must always show strength and never reveal fragility, thereby potentially arriving in situations of loneliness and isolation (Ferreira and Santos 2022).

In addition, it is important to highlight the opposing views on the stance adopted by women working in the cleaning sector that make it apparent how the stereotypical characteristics normally associated with women are not assimilated by Black women of African origin (Donovan 2011). Indeed, while some women reported always adopting a feminine posture whenever this markedly feminine working context allowed for it, women of African origin advocated adopting a more masculine posture as, being Black, they feel they have to show they are stronger than White people in order to avoid abuse. These discourses conveyed the idea that Black women "can cope with it all" and confirmed the Black women characteristics, specifically as tough, resilient, and strong women (Donovan and West 2014; Yoder and Aniakudo 1997; Yoder and Berendsen 2001). Other women also described adopting both postures, feminine and masculine, stating they cleaned such as women but were as strong as men. Thus, the phenomenon of assimilation occurred among White women of Portuguese origin (tokens) but not among Black women of African origin (dominant group).

Regarding their ways of managing the situations of gender and ethnic inequality the women interviewed have encountered, we grasped how these women generally did not apply any particular strategy as they perceived this as "normal". Only two polarized strategies were highlighted among women of African origin, who described either opting to be more reserved or pretending to be strong. Suggestions were also made for measures to improve existing gender and ethnic asymmetries as well as to normalize and value the

profession, essentially highlighting awareness-raising and training for these issues coupled with the deconstruction of stereotypes and preconceived ideas.

In conclusion, despite the inherent limitations of qualitative studies, the results of this study propose relevant developments for both the theories of tokenism and intersectionality. It has become clear that social markers such as gender, class, and race/ethnicity should be integrated into studies of tokenism and that these intersecting factors may exacerbate the associated negative consequences. As Branco (2008) has stated, intersectionality is indeed an indispensable analytical tool for understanding how the different types of existing identities and the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender create dynamics that make the experiences of women of Black African descent unique. This study enhances our understanding of how racial/ethnic inequalities are reproduced through informal interactions in feminized professions in which women of African origin are a numerical majority among Portuguese women.

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