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DISCUSSION



Against the Grain: Female Grievances towards Feminism in Right-Wing Populist Discourse in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have shed light on the importance of anti-genderism in the articulation of right-wing populist movements. Less attention has been paid to the role that female politicians, scholars, and influencers have played in promoting anti-feminism within right-wing populism. After the right-wing turn in Brazil, female anti-feminists have engaged other women in an anti-feminism campaign. Besides deploying arguments stemming from the classic conservative literature against feminism, they have also shared personal narratives of the pain and suffering that feminism has allegedly caused to them. These narratives have elicited anger, hatred, and frustration against feminism, which is furthermore held responsible for threatening traditional gender roles and feminine subjectivity. Additionally, prominent female anti-feminists have provided alternative narratives, which seek to replace anger, hatred, and frustration with comfort, pride, and joy. This article undertakes a critical discourse analysis of the affective-discursive meanings produced by the emotion narratives of those prominent anti-feminist women who have felt ostracised, persecuted, and humiliated by feminists. This study strives to identify the discursive strategies that conservative women from diverse social positionings have employed to address the grievances they attribute to feminism.

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1. Introduction

Right-wing populist discourses have connected notions of in-group¹ and out-group to nationalism and anti-genderism (Abi-Hassan 2017; Dietze & Roth 2020). Right-wing populism has primarily gained adhesion by forging an identity for the in-group out of the threats that allegedly the gender, diversity, immigration, neoliberal, and minorities policies of an unscrupulous elite pose to it (Canovan 2004; Mudde 2007; Gagnon et al. 2018; Brown 2019). Right-wing populism has thus gained support by exploiting fear and insecurity (Salmela & von Scheve 2018; Kinnvall & Svensson 2022). In Europe, but also elsewhere in the Global North, right-wing populist movements have greatly

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overlapped with nativism. This has been the case since in-groups are mostly conceived of as made up of conservative white citizens, whereas out-groups are mainly imagined as composed of minorities, people of colour, and progressive whites (Betz 2019; Brown 2019; Kinnvall & Svensson 2022). In Brazil, the opposite has been the case. The conservative bloc that supports Bolsonaroism encompasses groups of people who have otherwise been divided along the lines of class, race, and religion (Carbone 2024a). Anti-genderism has played a fundamental role in bringing this contingent conservative bloc together.

In particular, fear and misinformation about gender-mainstreaming has acted as a symbolic glue to bring right-wing populist in-groups together (Kováts & Põim 2015; Kováts 2018). Though the feeling of being left behind or the perception of loss of social status on the part of men has been well researched (Schäfer 2018; Brown 2019), female grievances towards feminism have received less attention. In particular, an aspect that has been under-researched is the role that affective-discursive meanings have played in bringing women from different social classes, religions, and races together in the right-wing conservative bloc.

In Brazil, female anti-feminist politicians, influencers, and scholars, have built on biased interpretations of feminist theory and practices. In that country, feminism has been often kidnapped by discourses that seek to disenfranchise it from the fight for equality and rights (see Campagnolo 2022; 2023). As this article argues, distorted views on empowerment coupled with experiences of ostracism, digital cancellation, and a perceived harm to the dignity of Brazilian women have drawn women from different races, religion, and classes together. According to the narratives produced by female anti-feminists, feminism does not only represent a threat to conservative social identities based on gender roles and femininity, but also constitutes a practice that leads to humiliation, frustration, and even trauma.

This article conducts a critical discourse analysis (Wodak 2004) of content produced by popular female anti-feminists in Brazil. It does so to show how the collectivisation of grievances against feminism has forged a unified identity among conservative women. As aforementioned, this identity transcends earlier racial, class, and religious divisions. In pursuit of this objective, this article first analyses the affective-discursive meanings through which women who perceive themselves as wronged by feminism are interpellated. It then examines how these meanings engage with and rework older discourses of Brazilian national identity to forge connections among conservative Brazilian women. Overall, this article addresses the following questions: In what ways do the affective-discursive meanings promoted by anti-feminists negotiate enduring and deeply rooted divides along class, race, and religion in Brazil? How do these meanings contribute to the consolidation of an in-group identity among right-wing populist women?

The empirical material for this paper consists of narratives published between 2013 and 2024 by the Christian congresswoman Ana Campagnolo, the researchers Patrícia Silva and Geisiane Freitas, and the influencer Karen Marins. Through a snowballing method, the selection process was extended to include the blog *Mulheres contra o Feminismo* [Women Against Feminism] as well as the *Instagram* thread of the same name, since both platforms elaborate on themes raised by the aforementioned politicians, scholars, and influencers in a language that is even more accessible to lay audiences.

2. The Right-Wing Anti-Gender Campaign in Brazil

Anti-genderism has played an important role in the articulation of right-wing populist discourses (Kuhar & Paternotte 2017; Dietze & Roth 2020). Many recent right-wing populist movements share the understanding that gender is an ideology that denies the existence of biological sex to subvert male and female roles in society and family (Garbagnoli 2016). Nonetheless, there are important differences in the discourses, motivations, and conflicts that underlie anti-gender campaigns in different contexts, since gender and nationalism are interdependent and co-produce one another within cultural codes (Butler 1985; Yuval-Davis 2006).

Between 2003 and 2018, several laws and programmes were created to address gender-based violence, reduce the gender gap, combat homophobia, and grant equal rights to same-sex couples (Biroli et al. 2020). These changes sparked heated debate among the conservative sectors of the Brazilian congress and society (Machado 2017; Romancini 2018; Mariano & Gerardi 2019). Up to 2011, said laws and programmes were mainly criticised for either promoting unfair privileges, disrespecting religious views and freedom, and even insulting Brazilian cultural values (Machado 2012; Smith 2019; Miguel 2021; Sales & Mariano 2019). It was mainly after 2011 that the fight against gender ideology emerged as an umbrella term used to frame cultural and social changes attributed to left-wing strategies to gain power (Miguel 2021; Carbone 2024b). According to this narrative, the left is portrayed as seeking to impose gender equality policies and promote a sexual revolution, which, in turn, is believed to free women from caregiving responsibilities and thereby undermine the nuclear family (see Campagnolo 2022; 2023).

To counter this alleged threat, in 2011 Jair Messias Bolsonaro led an anti-gender campaign against the *School Without Homophobia* programme (Balieiro 2018; Junqueira 2018; Miskolci 2023). The programme aimed, among other things, to educate school staff on gender and sexual diversity (Leite 2019). Bolsonaro's campaign quickly evolved into a gender panic that brought groups such as low-income Black and Brown neo-Pentecostals, neoliberal elites, radical Catholics, and white conservative middle and upper classes together against 'gender ideology'² (Biroli et al. 2020; Balieiro 2018; Junqueira 2018; Solano 2018; Borba 2019).

Amidst this panic, a strong female reaction against feminism emerged in the mid-2010s (de Mendonça et al. 2021). On the one hand, this reaction was triggered by the fear that 'gender ideology' would affect children and further the long-standing struggle to legalise abortion in that nation (Miguel 2016). On the other hand, women appeared to feel wronged by feminism (and feminists). This distinction is significant because most studies on female right-wing anti-genderism indicate that conservative women reject feminism because it contradicts their religious views. Therefore, they have often overlooked other personal grievances that are not strictly tied to religion (see for instance Kersh 2021; Rodríguez Gustá 2021; Avelar et al. 2022).

3. Grievances and the Narrative Shaping of Affective-Discursive Meanings

3.1. Politicising Grievances

Grievance was first defined in the pioneering work of Ted Robert Gurr (1970) as an emotional dynamic triggered by a perceived sense of relative deprivation that usually

stems from unmet rights, needs, or expectations. Building on Gurr's approach, research on political polarisation defines aggrieved individuals as those whose relationship to society, the state, and politics is shaped primarily by a sense of injustice and a perception of unfair treatment regarding their social status, rights, or access to opportunities (Capelos et al., 2022). James Jasper (2014) argues that while grievances are always present in society, they do not automatically lead to political mobilisation. Mobilisation depends on emotional narratives that cultivate a sense of indignation, enabling grievances to serve as sources of political action. By bridging the micro-level of personal expectations and the macro-level of socially constructed entitlements that political actors are expected to uphold and protect, it serves as a significant driver of political and social mobilisation (Jasper 1998). This is because, on the one hand, individuals seeking to act on their negative emotions often share their experiences (Rimé 2009). On the other hand, holding relevant actors accountable for perceived violations of rights or perceived entitlements typically requires engaging in collective action (Gamson 1992).

In the current right-wing populist turn, several studies have drawn attention to the importance of strategies of mobilisation that catalyse grievance into broader collective actions (Ivarsflaten 2008; Marcus 2021). To mobilise others, aggrieved individuals typically seek to politicise their grievances (Della Porta 2014). This politicisation happens, inasmuch as individuals produce narratives and arguments that frame the injury or injustice they face as being structural, and, therefore, likely to happen to anyone who lives under the same conditions, urging aggrieved individuals to fight this structural power (Aslanidis 2017). In order to do so, they tend to convey meanings that translate the perceived grievance from a personal aggression into a collective grievance (Shadmehr 2014).

3.2. Narrating Aggrieved Identities

Different than approaches that oppose affect and emotion and separate emotion from discourse, Margaret Wetherell (2013) argues that affect and discourse intertwine in everyday practices of meaning making.³ In a broad-brush approach, affective-discursive practices focus on the patterned ways through which emotions are embodied, performed, and organised through social codes as well as made intelligible through contextual and cultural repertoires (Wetherell 2008; Wetherell 2013). An analysis focused on affective-discursive meaning making seeks to identify the articulation of affective-discursive positions to speak from in a way that impacts the positions and identities of others who are spoken about, creating emotional subjects and emotional others (Wetherell 2003; Calder-Dawe, O., & Martinussen 2022). They generate affective-discursive meanings, understood as embodied positionalities through which emotions and emotional selves are narrated, enacted, and made intelligible in cultural contexts (Wetherell 2008). In the case of grievances, instead of identifying narratives where humiliation, exclusion, or contempt are imputed into someone, an analysis focused on affective-discursive practices seeks to unveil the complex entanglement between affect and acts of subject positioning and identity construction (Wetherell et al. 2015).

Emotion narratives are a particularly suitable resource to create affective-discursive meanings because they connect discourse, emotions, and identities in important ways, shaping in-group and out-group dynamics. Similar to its use in fiction, emotion

narratives engage accounts of emotional experiences, arguments or storytelling in which emotions play a central role (Goodwin et al. 2001). They are aimed to interpellate their audiences emotionally and emphasise affective language, and emotionally charged events (Oatley 1999). Unlike other ways of politically engaging emotions in the public sphere – which entail a strategic use of emotional manipulation and view the engagement with emotions as a means to an end, such as emotional entrepreneurship (McDermott 2010) – emotion narratives build, to some extent, on the narrativisation of the self to an audience (Butler 2005). In that way, emotion narratives become important tools in turning emotions into sources of positionality in identity politics (Gianolla et al. 2024; Gianolla 2025). Identities can be understood as narratives about who you are and who you are not (Bamberg et al. 2007), shaped along intersecting discourses, practices, and positionings that construct a constitutive outside (Hall 1993).

Furthermore, an important aspect of emotion narratives that is often overlooked is their protective function. As Gianolla et al. posit (2024), emotion narratives emerge out of the need, on the part of individuals, to protect something they deeply care about. This is particularly true in the case of identities, ideologies, and discourses that reproduce power asymmetries and confer privileges, such as whiteness and patriarchy.⁴ These systems not only secure material well-being for those who benefit from them, but also provide emotional comfort. In this way, right-wing populist politicians and influencers often resort to emotion narratives to protect the in-group from meanings that debase the identities they care about (Bonikowski 2017; Homolar & Löffmann 2021; Gianolla et al. 2024). In that regard, emotion narratives help to produce affective-discursive meanings to protect or even rescue aggrieved identities, through a shared repertoire, the circulation of affects, and the embodiment of emotional selves and emotional others.

4. Affective-Discursive Meanings in Emotion Narratives of Women Aggrieved by Feminism

In what follows, I analyse *Instagram* posts, books, website content, and *Youtube* videos of Ana Campagnolo, Patricia Silva, Geisiane Arruda, Karen Marins, along with the *Instagram*'s thread *Mulheres contra o Feminismo* and the site [Mulheres contra o Feminismo]. Among the numerous female influencers, politicians, and women-led platforms that have gained visibility by criticising feminism in recent years, this group was selected because its mobilisation is closely associated with narratives of perceived grievances against feminism and leftist politics. This study combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Wodak 2015; 2004) with insights from Wetherell's affective-discursive framework.

Although Wetherell and Ruth Wodak have slightly different analytical approaches to discourse, both see it as a social practice that is productive in Michel Foucault's sense.⁵ Wodak's (2015) CDA foregrounds the power relations and socio-historical meanings through which discourse produces and reproduces inequalities, shaping hegemonic as well as marginalised subject positions and identities. Wetherell, by contrast, focuses on everyday practices of meaning-making that articulate social structures through affective positioning, rendering emotions culturally intelligible. By combining these perspectives, this study investigates how anti-feminist female actors narrate emotions as resources for subject and identity positioning in order to produce protective affective-discursive meanings of a conservative female identity.

First, texts reporting grievances – particularly those expressing offenses, injustices, mistreatment, humiliation, and debasement – were selected. Attention was given to emotionally charged events and expressions of affective positioning. Second, the analysis examined how these texts challenged the alleged harm and hurt attributed to feminists and, conversely, how they built on meanings that conveyed positive positionalities, such as that of a caring and responsible woman. More specifically, texts were chosen that addressed anti-feminist female actors' perceptions of what feminism expects of women, the forms of womanhood it fosters, and the ways in which these expectations and forms of womanhood are perceived as harmful to women in general and debasing to conservative female identities in particular. Third, in accordance with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), these texts were examined in relation to historical meanings associated with Brazilian womanhood. This approach shows how the material contributes to the production of new, culturally intelligible understandings of womanhood. The analysis focused on three main affective-discursive meanings that are particularly relevant to this article: (1) feminism promotes a culture of victimisation; (2) feminism debases women; and (3) becoming the target of feminist rage.

4.1. Feminism Promotes a Culture of Victimisation: Standing for Strong Womanhood and Self-Steem

In recent years, the new right in Brazil has centred its discourse on opposing what it perceives as a culture of victimisation. This discourse denies the need for laws that strengthen women's rights and for affirmative policies to prevent sexism, racism, and homophobia in the country by dismissing attempts to highlight alarming statistics on structural and intersectional inequalities and gender-based violence as mere *mimimi*.⁶ The victimisation discourse takes on an interesting nuance when re-articulated by white women and women of colour. In the view of Black scholars Silva and Freitas (2024), the political left has 'kidnapped' the movement against racism in recent years, as though it had always been the primary force fighting racism. Silva and Freitas (2024) argue that the appropriation of the anti-racism struggle by the left was enabled by a narrative of victimhood, which they, in turn, seek to challenge.

Like many right-wing conservatives, Freitas and Silva (2024) are highly critical of the concept of intersectionality, which, as they argue, dismisses the responsibility of both 'racists' and their victims, in a manner similar to what they claim the notion of structural racism does. In Silva's and Freitas (2024) opinion intersectionality portrays Black women as the ultimate victims of society, disregarding their agency in a debasing way. When analysing the work of Black progressive scholar Djamila Ribeiro, Silva (2024) posits that 'the author (Djamila Ribeiro) uses many feminist references – feminism is, as we know, explicitly anti-Catholic – and insists on the embarrassing idea that Black women are the worst off in society'.⁷ Thus, feminism is perceived as imposing an agenda that limits Black people's freedom to define their own affiliations, interests, ideologies, and identities – even the choice to be conservative. It is also portrayed as denying their individual choices and constructing an identity for Black women that frames Black womanhood in an embarrassing and humiliating way.⁸ Silva and Borges (2024) contend that the imposition of critical theory across Brazilian universities fosters a culture of victimisation. This culture, they argue, can strongly attract Black women by providing an emotional refuge and shifting responsibility for personal advancement away from the individual.

The victimisation attitude ... is easy to reproduce because of the insecurity common among young people, who see taking no responsibility for their own actions as a good thing. Exempting yourself from responsibility is a typical method of this mentality, because by taking responsibility for the events in your life, you reveal yourself to be the captain of your journey, and being in charge means that others are not responsible for you, ... not even morally (such as having empathy), for the challenges you claim to have faced. (Silva and Borges 2024: 187)

The authors do not deny that racism exists in Brazil. However, they argue that the leftist elite and their 'woke' supporters are part of the problem rather than the solution to racism. They claim that, instead of resorting to self-victimisation, Black women should engage in politics of self-reliance and self-responsibility by choosing identities that associate Blackness with pride and strength rather than humiliation and weakness. Similarly, in the Instagram thread *Mulheres contra o Feminismo* [Women Against Feminism], the pursuit of security and emotional protection is portrayed as a force that 'lures' young women toward feminism.

Like every feminist I've ever met, I joined because of the speeches, the beautiful phrases, I also wanted equal rights, more justice, more security, and I preferred the speech of we have to change men's minds, rather than I have to change myself. It's very difficult to change. And it's even more difficult to accept that it's YOU who needs to change, while the feminist discourse veers towards conformism and self-acceptance.⁹

According to this narrative, to reject feminism is to avoid self-victimisation and an easy path to conformism in favour of identities that bring more agency, responsibility, and stronger self-esteem. Interestingly, this view builds important continuities with a liberal subjectivity, thus bridging gaps between Black and white conservatives of different classes. Young Black women are seen as particularly prone to feeling sorry for themselves and falling for the feminist discourse of 'victimisation' which, in their views, is taught in schools and universities. According to Patricia Silva and Geisiane Freitas (2024), racism is framed as an individual behaviour rather than a structural phenomenon. It is also portrayed as a problem rooted in self-centred and privileged attitudes, which they contend are exemplified by feminism. To put it differently, in their view there is no structural racism or inherent privilege, but only the privileges people claim for themselves – for instance, when they portray themselves as victims in order to obtain special treatment. This argument ends up absolving white people from the charge of inherent white privilege.

Moreover, this narrative provides women with seemingly valid reasons to reject feminism: taking responsibility for one's own life as well as fostering feelings of self-worth and contentment. The rejection of victimhood narrative creates a shared subject position that allows conservatives to move beyond class and race divisions. This identity instead aligns with the neoliberal ideal of the self-made individual and with Brazilian Christian culture.

4.2. Feminism Promotes the Oversexualization of Women's Bodies: Rescuing Brazilian Women's Dignity

Antifeminists have argued that the feminist sexual revolution that was supposedly deeply implanted in Brazil during the Worker's Party government (2003–2016) has led women to abandon virtue and pursue an oversexualized behaviour (see Campagnolo 2022; 2023;

Solano et al 2023). A post on the website *Mulheres contra o Feminismo* reads that ‘women who complain about being “objectified” and feminists who cry about women being “oppressed” are in reality types of a lowlife woman who victimises or capitalises on sex and vulgarity.’¹⁰ Anti-feminist female discourse deflects the issue of objectification from the historical oversexualisation of women’s bodies in Brazil, rooted in a hypersexual, masculinist national identity¹¹ (Caulfield 2000; Aidoo 2018). Twentieth-century media and cultural production reinforced this legacy by depicting Brown Brazilian women as products of miscegenation and as symbols sustaining the myth of racial tolerance. As is widely known, this myth has been constructed through narratives of Brazilian men’s sexual behaviour (Caulfield 2000; Caldwell 2007; Aidoo 2018).

However, in the female antifeminist discourse, the oversexualisation of women’s bodies is construed as a legacy of the feminist sexual revolution. Freitas adds to this point that ‘feminists do not know what freedom means, and worse, they confuse it with vulgarity and lasciviousness.’¹² In her view, feminists even made objectification worse by actively promoting the deterioration of sexual behaviour.

As the website *Mulheres contra o feminismo* puts it, ‘the image of Brazilian women around the world is of being vulgar, who have sex easily, wild, prostitutes who sleep with anyone.’¹³ Besides giving the country a bad reputation, years of left-leaning education and feminism fostered deviation, persuading women to pursue their sexuality rather than education. As the conservative congresswomen Julia Zanatta states, ‘Brazil continues to be seen as the country of asses and carnival. This isn’t education, it’s indoctrination. Years of policies have corroded the intellect, promoting moral and academic degradation.’¹⁴

As many of the posts on the website *Mulheres contra o feminismo* maintain, the women who have taken up Anitta and Valeska as role models of female empowerment contribute to reproducing what the authors denounce as ‘the animalistic behaviour’¹⁵ and alleged vulgarity displayed during Carnival. As they put it, during Carnival, ‘once again Brazilian women disgrace themselves. But then they start whining about being ‘objectified by the world.’¹⁶ In these narratives, feminist celebrations of sexual freedom and bodily expression are reframed as complicity in moral decline. This ill reputation is a source of shame and anger to conservatives who feel that, though they do not lead a ‘promiscuous’ life, they anyway suffer from the consequences of the supposed vulgar behaviour of feminists. In their words: ‘my fellow Brazilian women – childish, vulgar, and irresponsible – who outdo themselves in making me and a few others feel ashamed, both in Brazil and abroad.’¹⁷

Before the right-wing turn, it was common among the white upper and middle classes to accuse low-income Black and Brown women, especially those who lived in the suburbs and shanty towns, of being indecent and vulgar (Joyce 2012; Soares 2012; Moreira 2014). After the right-wing turn, vulgarity was no longer blamed solely on the African and suburban legacy that allegedly tainted the dress code, moral conduct, cultural expression, and musical or dance preferences of Black and brown Brazilian women. Instead, white and upper-class conservatives came to associate vulgarity with the empowerment promoted by feminism and feminist performers such as Anitta and Valeska Popozuda.

Therefore, by placing the blame for the ill reputation of Brazilian women and the assumedly depraved behaviour of some Brazilian women on feminism, this affective-discursive meaning replaces a discourse that sees all low-income Black and Brown women as

essentially ‘vulgar’ and prone to ‘promiscuous’ and ‘indecent’ behaviour. This shift allows for an important allied subject position in which the identity of the decent and respectful woman can be taken up by any woman, regardless of her class and race, as long as one adheres to the conservative right-wing movement and repudiates feminism.

4.3. *Becoming a Target of the Feminist Rage*

In 2013, after failing the exams for her master’s degree, Ana Campagnolo decided to fight and expose what she deemed an experience of discrimination against her due to her religious and political views (2022; 2023; Sparemberger et al. 2021). Campagnolo reported that during her studies she had to withstand the hostility of classmates and professors.

I was a poor girl. My family made a lot of effort so that I could study in the capital and I was already very alone in my surroundings, both in the city, where I didn’t know anyone and had no friends, and at university. On top of all this, I didn’t open my mouth in class to say anything, I didn’t criticise anything, I didn’t debate anything, I resigned myself and did everything the professors told me to. I just wanted my master’s degree so I could earn a better salary. And even my insignificance in that scenario didn’t make anyone, no one, absolutely no one feel sorry for me.¹⁸

For Campagnolo, feminism resorts to cruelty to persecute women, even when they are vulnerable and not even trying to fight back. Her narrative evokes indignation by presenting a scenario in which a young woman from a low-income family had to confront, on her own, a group of individuals who, unlike her, enjoyed institutional power and economic privilege. By highlighting the loneliness she experienced among raging feminists (of all genders), she also creates an affective subject position for other women who may have felt the same way. Campagnolo actively redefines her subjectivity as a worthy woman who has been wronged and who has gathered resources to fight against institutional and epistemic injustice. In her opinion, feminism is not a movement for women, but rather a series of dogmas that exclude women who, like her, fail to conform. As she argues, ‘I know this for two reasons: firstly, because I am a woman and, secondly, because I have experienced the persecutory rage of feminists first hand. It is another ideology like so many others, it classifies, segregates and imprisons’ (2023: 8). In addition to persecuting women who dare to deviate from feminist orthodoxy, according to Campagnolo, feminists also level deeply hurtful accusations, driven by their intolerance toward differing worldviews. As she puts it ‘anyone who researched and dared to demonstrate the subversive nature of feminism was accused of legitimising violence against women or of being complicit in female suffering throughout the entire history of humankind’ (77). Campagnolo’s narrative seeks to appeal to all women who, like her, have felt wrongly accused of being indifferent to, or even complicit in, female oppression because they hold a conservative point of view.

Similarly, the influencer Karen Marins, a self-declared ex-feminist, drew on her personal experience to attack feminism. Marins was a witness in the high-profile lawsuit that saw the influencer Mariana Ferrer accusing a businessman of sexual assault. As Marins accused Ferrer of lying about the sexual assault in her social media and website, Marins became the target of Ferrer’s supporters. In Marins’s view, the ‘cyberattack’ and harassment she suffered after expressing doubts and making accusations in the Ferrer case were sufficient to prove that feminism is not there for every

woman. She argues that it supports only those who follow the majority opinion without question.

I suffered a lot. As I said, I used to be a feminist. So, for me it was a movement that defended all women. But no, I saw the naked truth. I experienced what feminism is capable of doing to another woman. There were six girls who were witnesses, all of whom were attacked on the internet, having their lives exposed, being called everything you can imagine ... A supporter of rapists was the most basic thing that these women could pass off as. It was a wave of good hate ... I've had a few panic attacks, and every message from a person saying, 'I hope you get raped', I'd reply: 'I've been raped, and I know what it's like'. That's why I'm here.¹⁹

Marins, herself a survivor of sexual violence, positions her personal experience as a legitimate basis for evaluating the reactions and legal actions taken by Ferrer. She felt entitled to question Ferrer's account because her own experience informed her judgment more strongly than feminist theoretical principles. This reliance on personal emotion rather than on dominant feminist frameworks exposed her to intense criticism and, at times, outright hostility from feminist circles. In her account, she argues that access to feminist empathy is conditioned upon strict adherence to the dominant feminist stance on a given issue. Marins rose to prominence during the aforementioned trial, appearing in interviews and documentaries produced by the platform *Brazil Paralelo*, where she appealed to women who have also felt betrayed, excluded, or even ostracised within feminist circles.

For the Black scholars Freitas and Silva, feminism in Brazil is mainly an elitist white movement, carried out by women who have little knowledge of the lives of the majority of women. As Freitas puts it, 'Feminists are spoiled, elitist and have no sense of proportion when they equate marriage with slavery.'²⁰ In the view of Freitas and Silva, feminism and 'woke' culture, in addition to being portrayed as elitist movements carried out by spoiled students and bored upper-class women, may also resort to racism to silence Black women and men who hold conservative or right-wing opinions. These two scholars make a fair point when they argue that conservative Black people tend to face debasing criticism and even racial slurs when expressing their opinions about racism and sexism. In their words 'the cancellation applied to Black people who express divergent thinking is accompanied by a *Dantesque* level of fury and rage' (Silva and Freitas 2024: 66). Henceforth, Silva and Freitas (2024) argue that feminism seeks to protect feminists not women.

To conclude, according to the views of Campagnolo, Marins, Freitas, and Silva, feminism is unable to acknowledge any form of suffering or trauma that does not serve to advance its own agenda. In addition to lacking empathy, feminists are said to weaponize feminism to target conservative women, in clear contradiction to the ideal of sorority. Consequently, by opposing feminism, women would be protecting themselves from cancellation, public shaming, and even racist attacks.

5. Conclusions: The Bounding Power of Grievances Against Feminism

After the rise of the right-wing movement that brought Bolsonaro into the presidency of Brazil in 2018, large sectors of the population, including women, came together to reflect upon their perceived need for emotional safety and well-being. Anti-feminism became part of the discursive and emotional strategies that helped right-wing populists to find a common language, a shared experience and identity in the defence of their political

values and worldviews. Instead of relying solely on a conservatism grounded in Christianity – which in the past has failed to unite low-income women of colour, white Protestants, and middle-class Catholics into a single political movement – right-wing populism now preys on grievances associated with feminism. Conservative women play an important role in the strategy of further delegitimising feminism. Firstly, anti-feminist women are better positioned to comment upon matters such as slut-shaming and women’s sexual behaviours. Secondly, by recounting personal experiences that portray feminists as hurting other women, they project anti-feminism as a subjectivity that offers joy, pride, and safety.

Thus, anti-feminism brings about a community of women who feel aggrieved by discourses that either promote hostility towards conservative women’s values and ways of living, provoke the exclusion of conservative women from cultural and educational settings, or conceive of conservative women as being either perpetrators of sexism or complicit in the suffering of other women. The affective-discursive meanings promoted by anti-feminist women have brought together women from very different backgrounds, largely by appealing to their desire to belong to a shared womanhood. This womanhood extends dignity, self-worth, self-reliance, and a sense of decency to all conservative women, regardless of class or race. Against the odds, anti-feminist women have successfully rehabilitated old forms of classist and racialised sexism by shifting the blame for oversexuality, vulgarity, and victimisation onto leftist feminism.

Notes

1. The in-group defines itself as the true and rightful people of a nation by virtue of preserving its way of life and culture (Mudde 2004).
2. Contrary to popular belief, these groups have not always been united by faith or moral conservatism. Before the right-wing turn, they often met in relations of subordination and built identities along axes of differentiation such as class, race, religion, and ethnicity (Carbone 2024a).
3. For Wetherell (2013), as for many others, to be emotionally affected by something and to give that emotion meaning through discourse are parts of the same process.
4. I thank Cristiano Gianolla for drawing my attention to the protective power of emotion narratives in securing gender and racial privileges.
5. Foucault (2002) does not see discourse as a symbolic relationship between linguistic units that simply reflect ideologies and the author’s world views. Rather, he sees the text as producing subject positions, which importantly influence how reality is perceived and lived as well as create the author as someone with the entitlement to speak.
6. Mimimi is a common expression among right-wing populists that seek to disavow any mention to oppression, meaning that people are just whining and victimising themselves.
7. Posted by Patrícia Silva- profile Preta de Rodinhas, 01.11.2024, http://www.instagram.com/pretaderodinhas/p/DB0qxP8MEe/?locale=no&hl=af&img_index=1
8. For a discussion on the embodiment of black identities see Johnson (2003).
9. Post “Perguntas: Perguntas para Ex-Feministas”, profile Mulheres contra o Feminismo, 21.02.2021, URL: www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17860974227341633/.
10. Post “Mulher Brasileira marmita de Gringo Bandido: Carcereira Brasileira faz Sexo com Detento em Londres”. 04.07.2024. Mulheres contra o feminismo | Orgulhosas e felizes de sermos mulheres, mulherescontraofeminismo.wordpress.com.
11. This legacy particularly blames Black and brown women for contributing this trait to Brazilian womanhood. It is deeply sedimented in the Brazilian anthropological tradition shaped by Gilberto Freyre and in literature such as Jorge Amado’s, which depicted brown

Brazilian women as the “true” Brazilians – exotic and unrestrained in their sexualities (Aidoo 2018, Carbone 2024b). In the past, this representation legitimised their role in populating the country and birthing the new nation. At the same time, however, it denied them the possibility of meeting the standards of a “civilised” moral life (Sheriff 2001).

12. Post “Objectificação do Corpo Feminino e a Hipocrisia feminista”, 06.06.2024, Geisiane Freitas (@ageisianefreitas, www.instagram.com/p/C72UIWApAWv/?hl=de&img_index=1).
13. Post “Mulher Brasileira marmita de Gringo Bandido: Carcereira Brasileira faz Sexo com Detento em Londres”, 04.07.2024. Mulheres contra o feminismo | Orgulhosas e felizes de sermos mulheres, mulherescontraofeminismo.wordpress.com.
14. Post “Educação Brasileira vira notícia internacional”, 19.10.2024, Júlia Zanatta @juliazanattasc, www.instagram.com/p/DBSLjxtOZ97/?hl=de&img_index=1.
15. Post “A hipergamia de modernetes como Megan Fox mas que apoiam a mensagem do filme Som da Liberdade”, 11.10.2023. Mulheres contra o feminismo | Orgulhosas e felizes de sermos mulheres, mulherescontraofeminismo.wordpress.com.
16. Post “Feministas apoiam o turismo sexual ao “empoderar”o vulgar clipe da Anitta”, 02.01.2018. Mulheres contra o feminismo | Orgulhosas e felizes de sermos mulheres, mulherescontraofeminismo.wordpress.com.
17. Post “Clipe de Anitta: péssimo exemplo para educar meninas mas que modernetes feministas passam pano”, 11.04.2022. Mulheres contra o feminismo | Orgulhosas e felizes de sermos mulheres, mulherescontraofeminismo.wordpress.com.
18. Campagnolo, A., 2022. *O que as feministas fizeram por mim* [video]. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INSERT_VIDEO_ID [Accessed 6 September 2025].
19. “Como o caso Mariana Ferrer prejudicou a vida de alguns envolvidos na investigação?”, Brasil Paralelo, 18.07.2022, available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzBzY11ERAU.
20. Geisiane Freitas (@ageisianefreitas) • Instagram-Fotos und -Videos

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