



Revista Estudos Feministas

ISSN: 0104-026X

ISSN: 1806-9584

Centro de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas e Centro de
Comunicação e Expressão da Universidade Federal de
Santa Catarina

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Revista Estudos Feministas, vol. 31, no. 1, e83154, 2023

Centro de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas e Centro de Comunicação
e Expressão da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9584-2023v31n183154>

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=38175658015>

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Black women in nursing: *escrevivência atrevivida in oralitura* on COVID-19

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to problematize the mortification of Black lives and enunciate traces/residues of memories that produce new imaginaries, in a polyphony of voices of women nursing workers on the front line of care and confrontation of COVID-19. Our writing is permeated by the affirmation of a science constituted by the complementarity between reason and emotion. We begin from an articulation between the concepts of *escrevivência* [writing of life] – as a political act of Black women who empower themselves with writing; *atrevivência* [living boldly] – proposing a language that is felt and vocalized; and *oralitura* [oral literature] – that uses memory as an oral and corporal afrodiásporic repertory that inscribes knowledge, values, and ways of being in the world. As such, it is an *escrevivência atrevivida in oralitura*. Black-bodies in nursing denounce in polyphony policies of enmity in a necropolitical state and enunciate new imaginaries that instigate reinvention in pandemic times.

Keywords: COVID-19; nursing; necropolitics; writing policies; *escrevivência*.

Mulheres pretas da Enfermagem: *escrevivência atrevivida em oralitura na COVID-19*

Resumo: Neste artigo, objetivamos problematizar a mortificação de vidas pretas e enunciar rastros/resíduos de memórias produtoras de novos imaginários em polifonia de vozes de mulheres trabalhadoras da Enfermagem, atuantes na linha de frente do cuidado e enfrentamento à COVID-19. Apresentamos uma política de escrita encharcada pela afirmação de uma ciência constituída pela complementaridade entre razão e emoção. Partimos da articulação entre os conceitos de *escrevivência* – enquanto ato político de mulheres pretas que se apoderam da escrita; de *atrevivência* – propondo uma linguagem sentida e vocalizada; e de *oralitura* – que lança mão da memória como repertório oral e corporal afrodiásporico inscrevendo saberes, valores e modos de ser e estar no mundo; portanto, uma *escrevivência atrevivida em oralitura*. Corpos-pretos da Enfermagem em polifonia denunciam políticas de inimizade em um Estado necropolítico e enunciam novos imaginários que instigam a reinvenção no tempo pandêmico.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19; enfermagem; necropolítica; políticas da escrita; *escrevivência*.

Mujeres negras de la Enfermería: *escrevivência atrevivida en oralitura en la COVID-19*

Resumen: El estudio objetiva problematizar la mortificación de vidas negras y enunciar pistas/residuos de memorias productoras de nuevos imaginarios en polifonía de voces de mujeres trabajadoras de la Enfermería, atuantes en la línea de frente del cuidado y enfrentamiento de la COVID-19. Presentamos una política de escrita encharcada por la afirmación de una ciencias constituido por la complementaridad entre razón y emoción. Partimos de la articulación entre los conceptos de *escrevivência* – mientras ato político de mujeres negras que se apoderan de la escrita; de *atrevivência* – proponiendo un lenguaje sentido y vocalizado; y de *oralitura* – que lanza mano de la memoria como repertorio oral y corporal afrodiásporico registrando saberes, valores y modos

de ser y estar en el mundo; conquie, una escrevivência atrevivida en oralitura. *Corpas-pretas de la Enfermería en polifonía, denuncian políticas de enemistad en un Estado necropolítico y enunciaron nuevos imaginarios que instigan a la reinvencción en el tiempo pandémico.*

Palabras-clave: COVID-19; enferméria; necropolítica; políticas de la escrita; escrevivência.

Friction I: A problematic field presented by Dandara

The scene: a house with seven rooms. One is an office. In it we find Dandara, a pretty woman with thick lips. Her grandeur flows to her shoulders, accompanied by long *nagô* braids.¹ She unlocks the office door, wearing make-up, as she does every day, "Dress well to not get ill". Dandara whispers quietly: "it will go away...". Startled by the hour, she calls out: - Children! Breakfast time is now, I have a meeting soon. Did you hear me? - Ah, OK, why didn't you answer? We've talked about what silencings mean for our *black-body*,² right? So, out of respect for all of us, we will not reproduce silencings, not here at home.

- Sorry I'm late, I was busy with some house chores. Let's begin? We're already at the third meeting of the support group for frontline professionals in the care and confrontation of COVID-19. I would like to hear, how have these meetings have been for you? - - Hum... I think I froze here! - Ah, ok. Can you hear me? - Does anyone have news from Nzinga? She didn't enter the meeting today. Is Ayo Fayola better? And Aisha, is she here?

Dandara was always a leader. A Black woman who, just as she braids her hair, she also weaves articulations: her tasks as mother, as a nurse who works in the national Unified Healthcare System (SUS), and as a teacher and researcher at a large university occupy all of her time. She enunciates as an activist in movements of Black women, and is currently a coordinator of the National Policy for Integral Health of the Black Population in a municipality in the Porto Alegre metropolitan region. In her fifteen years of research and work, Dandara has reflected on what she calls "politics of the voice of Black women" as an act of transforming silences into action. Dandara supports her work with that of Audre Lorde (2020), problematizing: "What words are you still missing? What do you need to say? What tyrannies must you swallow day after day and try to take upon yourself, till you get sick and die because of them, still in silence?" Beginning with these questions, Dandara has created her strategies both in research, and in work. She always fought for the right to vocalize and have her voice resound with intensity, at the service of care, to strengthen other voices of Black men and women in the national healthcare policies.

New problematic fields emerged in March 2020. Dandara was convoked to work at the front line to face the new coronavirus. It was a year of the unexpected, of misfortune throughout the world, and in Brazil, produced by an illness that prevented us from breathing. It must be shouted that COVID-19, already captured as a *commodity* at the service of white supremacy (hooks, 2019a), used bodies and *black-bodies*, as determined by the colonial logic, to expand the genocidal policy of extermination against which we have struggled for more than 500 years - racism.

Early autumn marked the moment of a new threat to Brazilian society, the time of a new Coronavirus that invaded our homes and bodies, once again challenging our Black existence. A new enemy entered the scene, jumping in front of those who we already knew hunger, violence, unemployment, racism, and sexism. As a nurse on the frontline, Dandara was concerned, she was disturbed with the speed with which some information became truths and spread on social networks: "The virus is like that, it lurks, invades, spreads and attacks, without looking at who it targets". Is that true? Some affirmed that the virus that shook the world was democratic, and did not choose race, class, gender or territory to infect people. From the mouths of specialists, epidemiologists, we heard that the new coronavirus was democratic enough to affect any man or woman. Without distinction, we were all equal in a single global nation, with all its sovereign power. How insulting!

It did not take long for this truth to be questioned and dismantled. Researchers in the human sciences and healthcare began to affirm that no, it was not possible to have a democratic virus in societies marked by social, racial and gender inequalities (Hebert Luan Pereira Campos SANTOS *et al.*, 2020). We are facing a virus that moves through a necropolitical state whose production of death of undesirable bodies is concrete in the light of the colonial inheritance, but is also subjective, that is, from the dimension of desire, of death in life, of the mortification of life (Achille MBEMBE, 2017a). The virus showed us not only its anti-democratic face, but its violent and mortal face, represented in the limited offer of tests, hospital beds, and healthcare supplies, and in the

¹ These are braids that start at the roots of the hair and are fixed to the scalp.

² Considering that "language, as poetic as it may be, also has a political dimension of creating, fixing and perpetuating relations of power and violence" (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 14) and, even knowing that the word "body", in the Portuguese language, does not have gender variations, we decided to inscribe and write "black-body", announcing the place of a subjectivity.

near inexistent articulation with the primary healthcare system, penalizing the most populated territories in which the large majority of the Black population are inserted.

It is in this context that racism became the armed wing of the new coronavirus, advancing upon vulnerable groups. And today, we are certain that the substrate of COVID-19 is directly related to the multiple crises of the state involving sanitary, social, political, economic, and ethnic dimensions, as well as migratory flows and the global crisis, which wound up influencing the direction of public policies to confront the pandemic in Brazil (Márcia SANTOS *et al.*, 2020). Decidedly, there is nothing democratic in the relationship between *black bodies* and the new coronavirus.

In a situation of uncertainty and fear, we arrive at December 2020. Dandara, with her eyes filled with tears, is in an online meeting with other municipal departments. She is presenting sad and difficult facts. After nine months of the pandemic, the nurse makes a point of naming each Black professional, men and women, who in name of healthcare, lost their lives confronting the new coronavirus, especially the women on the nursing staffs. In addition to lamenting, Dandara calls on the other administrators to critically reflect on the professional experiences and lives that have been felt and mobilized to their limit. Lives of Black women – *back-bodies*. What do these women think? In what constructions, routes, crossings, paths, gestures, movements, memories and vocalities do these *black-bodies* of Nursing perform? What singularities and collective agencyings can be declared in a polyphony of voices?

The challenge of confronting the new coronavirus for Black women workers in nursing was greater than it may have appeared or could be predicted by anyone one day. The virus does what it knows by nature, and we do not know what to do with it. It is fear! Fear of dying. Which is not rare, along the hallways of the Intensive Care Units for COVID-19, and it can be heard: “And let’s live like the virus wants”. The only desire is not to die, it is to live. This comes to be the only dream, the only project – to stay alive. Is this a facet of the mortification of life announced by Mbembe? What is the scope of desire in these conditions of existence? What are the possibilities for life? It is amid this very sentiment, this emotion, that the new emerges, the creative as light healthcare technology, as taught by Emerson Merhy (1997) and Merhy and Túlio B. Franco (2003). The technique of the *mãozinha* [the little hand],³ created by a nurse to comfort people hospitalized with COVID-19, is an example of this creative and inventive capacity, of this power of life amid misfortune. Can we call it an insurgent light healthcare technology in revolution? And Dandara’s support group?

At the end of an administrative meeting, Dandara emphasized:

I am tired of these meetings! It is dishonest to attribute to the virus a democratic space. It is necessary to racialize experiences with the virus, after all, I am mediating a support group for women workers in nursing. I am not interested in Cloroquina. I have observed, on the nursing staffs, Black women, who are the only references at home, placing themselves, despite fear, on the front line to confront the virus. And supporting these women is announced as an urgent situation. It is these women who live the intersection of inequalities of race, gender, and class; they are the ones who earn little (mainly those with high school education) and who have little autonomy at work; it is they who must travel far to reach the healthcare services where they act professionally; it is they who live on the peripheries of cities and work in the large urban centers. And the politicians want to discuss treatment with cloroquina?⁴

Dandara’s dialog with her administrative colleagues marks a time when relations lose their poetry; a time that drives us to reinvention, because to live without the poetics of relations, as Glissant (2005) teaches us, is to live without the possibility to create new imaginaries. We speak of *black-bodies* in Nursing that are announced as a life force which confronts a state that advocates for the “relationship of enmity” and mortification of life (MBEMBE, 2017a). With Glissant (2005), we are not engaged in closing or weakening living experiences and places. We are interested in opening paths along with Black women nurses, and from these sensitive openings, support the insurgencies of poetics of the Relation that is announced beyond absolutisms or exclusivities of being.

We invest in frictions (MARTINS, 1996) between the erasures of lived experiences and histories that escape, from the sensitive to the traces/residues of memory in polyphonic narratives of *black-bodies* of Nursing lived in a pandemic context. We use Leda Martins’ (1996) concept of friction and in a process of critical re-elaboration, we consider as movement of contact and a rubbing of lived experiences and memories of the present and the past that are heated in and for the production and announcement of a *devir*, of a becoming.

In this light, in this study, our objective is to problematize the mortification of Black lives and announce traces/residues of memories that produce our imaginaries in a polyphony of voices

³ See article “Técnica da ‘mãozinha’, criada por enfermeira para dar conforto a pacientes com Covid, viraliza”, do Portal G1, published 23 March 2021. Available at <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2021/03/23/tecnica-da-maozinha-criada-por-enfermeira-na-zona-norte-do-rio-para-dar-conforto-a-pacientes-com-covid-viraliza-foi-em-momento-de-desespero.ghtml>.

⁴ See article “OMS: Hidroxicloroquina não funciona contra Covid-19 e pode causar efeito adverso”, in Jornal CNN Brasil, by Raphael Coraccini, published 2 March, 2021. Available at <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/saude/2021/03/02/oms-cloroquina-nao-funciona-contr-a-covid-19-e-pode-causar-efeitos-adversos>.

of working women in the field of Nursing who act on the front line of care and confrontation of COVID-19.

Friction II: Methodological Gestures in the steps of Ayo Fayola

The scene: Ayo Fayola arrives home after working a twenty-four-hour shift. It is Monday. Her back and eyes are tired, the sunlight enters through the window that she left open when she left yesterday morning. She turns on the computer after a slow and reinvigorating bath. She adjusts her chair towards the camera, speaks with the support group for professionals on the front line of care and confrontation of COVID-19.

- Good day, girls! Dandara, I am better, yes. It was just a scare, I tested negative...Did you see this study organized by the Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas E'léékò at the Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPel) and the Graduate Program in Social and Institutional Psychology of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (PPGPSI/UFRGS)? The title of the study is "Necropolitics and the Black Population: problematization about racism and anti-racism and their consequences in times of pandemic and post -pandemic of COVID-19".⁵ What do you think about us participating? I have already checked and the study was approved by the Committee for Research Ethics of the School of Medicine at UFPel. From what I saw, it is an on-line questionnaire, it is a bit long, but emphasizes narratives by Black people. I think that our decision should be guided by the following question: Who (what) does this study serve?

From the place of affirmation in which we are cognoscente male and female Black subjects⁶ taken by the gesture of research with and along with others who are also cognoscente male and female Black subjects, we challenge ourselves to construct a study committed to a policy of writing permeated by the affirmation of a science whose rationality is not linear, but constituted by the complementarity between reason and emotion. We demand, with Fanon (2008), that this world of non-linearities operates from the realization of poetic potential, which separate similarities of preconceived and prescribed while thinking about how we should be. We run from exercises of capturing that try to collect us, lease us, as objects, seen to be either endowed with exaggerated emotion, or irrational, and who have nothing to contribute to science. We assume that we are incarnated, living, men and women, sensitive in our scientific tasks and practices. This science and this we are not distant from the world; we are the world. Like the stones, the rivers, the forest, because, as Fanon reminds us, between us and the world is established the relation of coexistence (Frantz FANON, 2008), where we do not need to exclude, or expropriate, to exist. That is, we are diverse, and when we assume our presence, and in these presences, the coexistence between reason and emotion, we invest in unpredictability as a force of creation, a poetic act of realities (Édouard GLISSANT, 2005).

Our methodological gesture is based on an articulation between three concepts, of which we first express the *escrevivência* [living writing] of Conceição Evaristo (2017) as a political act of Black women who empower themselves with writing, and writing about themselves, which is simultaneously agencied by a collectivity and permeated by social, racial and gender relations. *Atevivência*, [living boldly] in turn, is a term coined by Ademiél de Sant'Anna Junior (2020), which combines the Portuguese verbs *atrever* [to be bold] and *viver* [to live] as an expansive investment of the body, beyond the meanings scripted by racism and colonial reason. For Sant'Anna, exercises of *atevivência* are vocalities that flow from the body, affirming the collective encounter of voices, as a political and poetic act, or even, as a bold movement by the body that through spinning around, transgresses its meanings through which escape ancestral voices and gestures that compose languages. Sant'Anna asks us:

And if instead of looking, I could dare to see in the dark? And if instead of only hearing, I could dare to hear songs and pulsations? And if instead of only touching and or picking up, you could dare to probe? And if instead of only swallowing or spitting, I could dare to taste while I discover new flavors? Shouldn't these be the expressions of the clinic and of research? (SANT'ANNA, 2020, p. 143).

And, finally, the *oralitura* [roughly oral literature] by Martins (2003), which invokes the writing of the body, the faded vestiges that became secret since the TransAtlantic violence, but resist escaping as insurgent performances that connect Black bodies in the diaspora. The author, by using memory from an oral and corporal repertoire, presents us performances of *oralitura*, that is, the memory that is inscribed "by the written word, [and] and is thus articulated to the field and process of vision mapped by the look, understood as a window of knowledge" (MARTINS, 2003, p. 64). From the articulation of these three methodological gestures, we propose to operate a

⁵ Approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Medicine of the Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPel), *parecer número* 4.127.275.

⁶ The word "sujeito" [subject], in the Portuguese language, does not permit variations in gender, and is reduced to the male gender and, from the perspective of subverting the power relations fixed in it, we opt to write and inscribe in this article the word "sujeita".

escrevivência atrevivida in oralitura [a living writing, boldly living in oral literature]. To connect with this production,⁷ we listen to Ayo Fayola:

My name is Ayo Fayola which, in the Yoruba language means “she who has happiness and walks with honor”. This name was given to me by my grandmother, an activist in the Black women’s movement of the 1980s. I do not consider myself an engaged activist, as was my grandmother, but I like to participate in street demonstrations to enrichen and reinforce my ideas. I am proud to present myself as a black woman. I am 39 years old, 18 of which were dedicated to nursing. I am a nurse technician, I work in a public hospital, 100% SUS, in the COVID-19 ITU. Like many Black sisters who are nurse technicians, I live in one of the so-called dormitory cities located around the large capitals that serve as residences for workers. With public transportation, it takes me two hours to reach the hospital; when I use my car, I can get there in an hour and fifteen minutes. I have a degree in nursing, which makes my family proud. Because I am a civil servant, I did not want to give up my job as a nurse technician, but I am looking for new job openings to work as a nurse.

I do not need to say that, as a frontline worker in the care and confrontation of COVID-19, I did not have the privilege of physical distancing. I needed to leave home to work. I have been in the COVID ITU for a year and have seen everything, really everything, unimaginable things. I decided not to get a doctor’s statement for my comorbidity [so I could take a leave from work]. I made myself available to contribute to society, based on my professional education. Sometimes I think: why did I do this? Why did I immediately offer to work at a place that many people wanted to get away from? I have no answers...It’s something I still need to think about, reflect on...

For a year I have been totally immersed in this context of care for people in the COVID ITU and the realities I have observed and lived through always leave me quite sad. I am sad from the discrepancy in access to healthcare. It is clear that middle and upper class whites get care more quickly and of better quality in the hospital. To the contrary, “the Black population has greater risk of disparities in access to services because of the pandemic, both in the quality of care received and in results in health” (Emanuelle Freitas GOES; Dandara de Oliveira RAMOS; Andrea Jacqueline Fortes FERREIRA, 2020, p. 3). I am sad about the lack of information about the pandemic, I am speaking of information accessible to poor people, from the peripheries, mostly black. Here where I live, I have often heard: “Either I die of COVID, or of hunger”. What country is this? What state is this? Is it the necropolitical state? Can we call this the production of death of a poor and black population? Are they the ones without rights to education, sanitation and basic income? It’s not hard to answer, because I accompany this reality from my place of speech – I am a Black woman and resident of the periphery.

I can offer various examples about how I have been interpellated by racist violence, but two situations are frequent. The first is to be followed in a supermarket or a store and not be attended to by salespeople who think that I cannot pay for a product. The second is to perceive that a person holds their bag more firmly in my presence or when I come close. Evelyn Rosa and Miriam Alves (2020, p. 5) conceptualize racist violence as “the action or effect of using the idea of race and hierarchization of the human in social and interpersonal relations, producing the invisibilization, silencing and subalternization of the racialized Black male and female subjects”. These two situations express a pandemic that we Black men and women experienced before the new coronavirus – the pandemic of racism. I believe that one of our greatest challenges, laid bare since the beginning of the pandemic, is to overcome inequalities in all senses, above all, racial, social and gender inequalities.

Even so, I try to maintain my mental health, continuing my studies and work, and as strange as it may appear, it is work that keeps me going. In addition, I strive to hear the meaning of the name that my grandmother gave me: “She who is happy and walks with honor”. And it by hearing this message that I nurture the hope of a post-pandemic with greater love among people, without distinction of income, gender, race, or place of residence.

Ayo Fayola calls on us to walk towards an *escrevivência atrevivida* [bold living] forged in memories and gestures in *oralitura* [oral literature], whose performance indicates the presence of a residual *Afro-diasporic* trait, which in the writing and language of the body in movement and in vocality inscribes knowledge, values, concepts and modes of being, and inscribing oneself in the world (MARTINS, 2003, p. 77). Thus, considering the contemporaneity of *ladinoameficano* bodies-politics, as conceptualized by Léila Gonzalez (1988 (2018)), we propose an *escrevivência atrevivida in oralitura* of black-bodies of Nursing, whose daily performance speaks of the “being-in-the-world” (GLISSANT, 2005) amidst a virus that lays bare a necropolitical state (MBEMBE, 2017a).

This *escrevivência atrevivida in oralitura* emerges from the friction between narratives of two participants in the study Necropolitics and the Black Population, and two fictional characters constructed through the living experiences of the authors. The participants in the research responded to an online questionnaire, promoted on social networks from July to September 2020. The narratives of the participants were also fictionalized, performing memories and gestures that

⁷ *Feitura* is used here as a concept lived by those men and women who nurture traditions of African matrix, that is, who are nurtured by a “process of initiation”. As an analogy, we are nurtured through initiation on a methodological path.

are interlaced in the complexity of Black existence in the world, which does not fit into hegemonic thinking. Therefore, it was in the construction of scenes, landscapes, and frictions that we invested in *escrevivências atrevidas* in *oralitura* which since Glissant (2005, p. 30) have been inscribed: "permeated and sustained by the trace/residue, the landscape is no longer a convenient scene and becomes a character in the drama of the Relation". The landscapes performed by Ayo Fayola operate in the creation of new imaginaries and invite us to look back as a gesture of re-elaboration of the past, to see the present and prospect the post-pandemic future. The "imaginary of the trace/residue thinking is consubstantial of us. When we live a poetics of Relation in the world today" (GLISSANT, 2005, p. 30).

Friction III: Politics of enmity and poetics of Relation

Aisha wakes up in the morning after a twelve-hour shift, a night of sleep in her warm bed is reinvigorating. However, she still feels anguished, scared and without faith. She needs to speak with someone before going to her mother's house, she does not want to collapse in front of her mother. She wants to shout, cry, but thinks she can't. Aisha is one of those people who care for everyone around her and, yet does not feel cared for. After a delicious breakfast alongside her companion Foluke, she goes to her room, puts her laptop on her lap, turns it on, and gives into the arms of other Black women like her – in the support group.

Good morning, my name is Aisha. I got this name from my uncle Otaviano, after my mother Joana went through twelve hours of a difficult and painful childbirth. After me, she had no more. My grandmother Amélia said that she dried up. Today, I call this obstetric violence. Only at 36 years of age, of which 10 have been working in the field of healthcare and many others refining my listening in our conversations in the kitchen at home, did I discover that my mother had to travel far to find hospital care, that is, to find a bed when she was in labor. My uncle told me that it was raining hard, it was one of those days when Rio de Janeiro was flooded and the people of the periphery suffer. After going from hospital to hospital, my mother found a maternity ward, but the doctor refused to do a cesarian, and said; "she is strong, she can handle it". My uncle fought for my life and that of my mother. For all this, uncle Otaviano gave me the name, Aisha, which means: "she is life". I am life for my mother and for uncle Otaviano. Aisha, a Black life in progress.

At this moment, I am a bit without faith, but I have not given up on prayer, lighting candles, and a small *patuá de morim* [a small white sack], which are made with care by my mother, full of secrets, of small objects that protect me from this virus. I work in a university hospital as a nursing technician. I entered nursing because of conversations in the kitchen, the stories of my grandmother who was a midwife and the desire to have a job when I was young and move from the small, cramped home in the periphery. Here at home, it is I, Foluke, a dog and many plants. I met Foluke at the market at labás, in Madureira. He cooks, sews, and came from Nigeria, in Africa, to bring joy to my life. But the pandemic left him without work and it is very difficult to find work here. In the affliction of unemployment, I showed Foluke a newspaper that points to the second quarter of the year, the first under the effects of the pandemic, with a general unemployment rate of 14.7%, according to the Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios COVID-19 (PNAD COVID-19).⁸ And looking at skin color, the unemployment rate for Blacks was 17.8% and for *pardos* [brown-skinned] 15.4%. While for the two together (blacks and browns) the rate is 33.3% for us Blacks, and 10.4% for whites. "A Black without a job can never rest", said Dona Ivone Lara.⁹ There are times when Foluke accepts this, makes cakes and sells them, there are days when he doesn't. I say that it's ok, and that what I earn is enough, but he knows I am tired after each shift.

If I could, I would shout. I would shout out my anguish, my fear, and the sensation that death is lurking around me at every shift. There are so many people getting sick around me that I think it is a question of days, hours until my turn to get sick. The worst of the fear is to contaminate Falouke and my mother. According to the Federal Nursing Council (Cofen), the number of Nursing professionals who fell to the disease produced by the virus is growing again in the country.¹⁰ Since March of 2020, 564 nurses died of Covid. At my work alone there were four. I see myself in these mortality statistics, because I am the one who cleans, gives food and bathes the COVID patients. At the time I forget, because it is my profession. But when I get to the door of the house, I remember. I take off my clothes in the backyard, I put them in a pail with soap and water, and then I get a chill when I enter the house. Falouke already made the meal, and wants me close, hugged, caressed, but I can't take a risk, I sleep in the back room. Lately, we hardly meet in the

⁸ See the channel of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), which combines the initiatives realized and the actions in development in relation to its studies and research, to support the efforts to confront the pandemic, among which we highlight the PNAD COVID-19. Available at <https://covid19.ibge.gov.br/>.

⁹ This is a refrain from the song "O Sorriso Negro", composed by Adilson Barbado and Jorge Portela, sung by Dona Ivone Lara. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVt0wndTtIE>.

¹⁰ See the article at Cofen, "Número de profissionais de Enfermagem mortos por Covid-19 volta a crescer", published 8 February 2021. Available at http://www.cofen.gov.br/numero-de-profissionais-de-enfermagem-mortos-por-covid-19-volta-a-crescer_85150.html.

house. I will not contaminate my love, but I am scared of losing him. My head cannot handle all of this.

I count on my mother's prayers, her baths, her *mandingas* and magic. She always says: "*Obalúaiyé* protects you daughter, you will see". *Ẹ̀ṣ̀p̀ò̀nà – Obalúaiyé* is the one who cares for epidemic diseases, "the only one who has the power to overcome them" (Miriam Cristiane ALVES; Olorode Ògiyàn Kálàfó Jayro Pereira de JESUS, 2020, p. 132). I look for energy to care for my mother, to show trust and courage. I put on makeup and an apron and go to meet her to check her pressure, give a shy caress, in addition to checking her needs for medication, food, and especially to talk and hear stories. She stays strong, and I, even without faith, I believe in the faith that she emanates. The Black woman is like that: "she is the one who survives by providing services, holding down the family practically alone" (Lélia GONZALEZ, 1980 (2018), p. 199).

Then, for me, the challenge has been to keep my mental health, to escape affliction, the banzo (Ana Maria ODA, 2008)¹¹ that suddenly got me. And reading the books that uncle Otaviano left me, I am beginning to understand some things about racism and racial relations. I am giving name to my fears. Just yesterday, I asked Falouke to not go into the street with a black mask and gave him one from the hospital – no black mask or cap. There are no police who resist suspecting a black man in the street. Yes, Black people are always the targets of racism. White fear makes us a target: "Mommy, look at the Black man, I am afraid!" (FANON, 2008, p. 105). We are targets of the white fabrications, that is, of the strategies to present as real, true, correct, facts that are often invented, constructed in name of Western, commercial Eurocentric reason, (MBEMBE, 2017b). The white fear and fabrications silence us, make us invisible, exclude us: "In the train, instead of one, they left me, two, three places" (FANON, 2008, p. 105). In the clothing store in the shopping center, they do not serve me or they follow me, suspicious of my *black-body*. My tension was alleviated after I participated in the street march, I joined some friends of my uncle Otaviano, some new old ideas and headed for the "Vidas Negras Importam (*Black Lives Matter*)".¹² We live in a country where an umbrella is confused with a gun¹³ and a Black person is killed, not because of the object, but the skin color.

Another shift, another day. The street is dark and Foluke sleeps at my mother's house. I am scared for myself, when I enter the dark street that goes to the bus stop, more than once I begin to walk quickly, with my nursing coat on my arm and the feeling someone is behind me. I squeeze the purse in my hand. After the twelve-hour shift, When I return home, the fear gives way to anger. I am angry when walking in the street, early in the morning, and see my white neighbor having a party in the middle of the pandemic with loud music, lots of laughter and a large gathering. Doesn't he know that it is we who are dying? Dying and caring.

In Brazil, the COVID-19 pandemic developed amid a state structure that has as a premise to govern by terror – from drug dealers, militias, crime factions – intensifying its capacity to kill (from the state-virus), and the possibility to be killed (of black and poor people). "To govern by terror is no longer related to repression and discipline, but above all to killing, whether in mass or in smaller doses" (MBEMBE, 2017a, p. 61). We live in a country where for years the Black population has been killed with the justification that it is because of the war on drugs, the war between crime factions, and since March 2020, the war against the new coronavirus.

The massacre at "Jacarezinho",¹⁴ a community in Rio de Janeiro, RJ, that caused 28 deaths after a police operation, as well as the "herd immunity"¹⁵ defended by Jair Bolsonaro since the beginning of the pandemic (and has already caused more than 500 thousand deaths¹⁶), are strategies whose state sovereignty is based on the power of "manufacturing an entire mass of people accustomed to living at knife point or, even at the margin of life" (MBEMBE, 2017a, p. 64). Those men and women who live in the periphery, whose Black political-body goes to the front without asking for a leave and whose job (nurse technicians, cleaning, and security workers, for example) demanded serving on the front line of care and confrontation against COVID-19. It is these men and women that the state considers superfluous lives in which living is temporary, at any moment, paying their dues to death. Black bodies "whose price is so low that it is worth nothing, not even as a commodity and is even less human – it is a type of life whose value is outside the economy, corresponding

¹¹ Banzo refers to the nostalgia, the melancholy of Africans enslaved in the transatlantic trafficking. See Ana Maria Oda (2008).

¹² Despite gaining notoriety and global adhesion after the murder of George Floyd, on 25 May 2020, the *Black Lives Matter* movement was created in 2013, by Alicia Garza, from the National Domestic Workers Alliance; by Patrice Cullors, from the Coalition to end Sheriff Violence in Los Angeles; and by Opal Tometi, from the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. Available at <https://www.uol.com.br/universa/noticias/redacao/2020/06/03/black-lives-matter-conheca-o-movimento-fundado-por-tres-mulheres.htm>.

¹³ See article "PM confunde guarda-chuva com fuzil e mata garçom no Rio, afirmam testemunhas", from El País Brasil, published 19 September 2018. At https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/09/19/politica/1537367458_048104.html.

¹⁴ Data from the Gazeta do Povo on 12 June 2021. At <https://especiais.gazetadopovo.com.br/coronavirus/numeros/>.

¹⁵ See article "CPI da Covid: como 'imunidade de rebanho' pode virar arma contra Bolsonaro", from BBC News Brasil, published 6 May 2021. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-57004708>.

¹⁶ See article "Brasil registra mais de 500 mil mortos por covid-19", da Agência Brasil, published 19 June 2021. Available at <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/saude/noticia/2021-06/brasil-registra-mais-de-500-mil-mortos-por-covid-19>.

only to the type of death inflicted on it" (MBEMBE, 2017a, p. 65). We speak of a mortified living of *black-bodies* in Nursing whose traces/residues of memories in polyphonic narratives announce and denounce their inscriptions and their daily struggles to stay alive. We are certain that racism and sexism are key to this belligerent state power that kills us with a concrete death, and with death in life. As Miriam Alves, Eliane Costa and Marilda Castelar affirm:

The intersectioned domination drives a blow to civil, social, political rights of the Black population and the effect can be so deep and devastating that it often reaches the intimate dimension of the person: affects the right to belong to the history of a people, a community, affects the right to be human, to exist, to have peace (ALVES; COSTA; CASTELAR, 2020, p. 2).

Friction IV: Nzinga, a *black-body* in Nursing and the possibilities for transition

In scene, Nzinga... a Black woman, at 58 years of age, challenges herself to *transition*. With an uncommon beauty, she looks at herself in the mirror and no longer likes what she sees. She looks beyond the material beauty. Nzinga sees traces/residues of a *black-body* that insurges on the racist and sexist violence that she lived with until then, although sublimated. She takes a sharp scissor, divides her long straight hair in tresses and begins her insurrection. She *transitions* in her ethical-aesthetic-political positioning about being a black woman in the pandemic, in the post-pandemic, in the world.

When Dandara called me I immediately accepted to participate in the group. I like this woman, her confidence. I have been a nurse for 29 years, working in the same hospital. Dandara passed by here one of these years, she knew what to say, raising her voice, as bell hooks says (2019b), standing alongside everyone. She is certainly an incredible woman. It was Dandara who explained to me the origin of my name. She said that Nzinga is the name of a queen, a warrior in Angola, who fought against Portuguese traffickers. I always thought it was ugly, strange. I had many nicknames, with my kinky hair that didn't stay put in a ponytail, contrasting with my light skin and "white person's nose" as my maternal grandmother said.

I remember a text that Dandara gave me. I saw myself written in a passage that said, "why do they want our hair to be good, smooth and soft, huh?" (GONZALEZ, 1980 (2018), p. 203). Lélia was very bold for her time, a great intellectual, a great thinker, an interpreter of Brazil, as Raquel Barreto said (2018). I did not know how to locate myself critically in this society before I discovered Lélia through Dandara. Moreover, she realized how I was good at everything: Portuguese, math, sciences, history, sports, tag; whatever came around, I was always ready, I loved a challenge. That's how the nickname stuck, my name came to be Zinga. I thought my name was ugly, but my mother, who is German, wanted to please my father, who is Angolan. That is all I knew about him, Angolan, nothing more. It was a prohibited subject in my house, because we Black people are often "raised to believe that there are many things that we should not speak about, not in private and not in public" (hooks, 2019b).

The only thing my father left with my mother was a photo, me, and my strange name. After he left, we went to live with my grandmother. I was well accepted by my mother's white family, as long as I always had my hair straight or pulled back. As Kilomba says, the hair was never tolerated, it became "the most powerful mark of bondage during the period of enslavement", it was considered "a symbol of 'primitivity', disorder, inferiority, uncivilized". (...) "Bad hair" that had to be straightened "with the right chemical products, developed by European companies" (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 127). I became the brown girl of the family, and in all the social circles that I participated in. The women thought I was an exotic beauty. And as soon as I entered adolescence the men saw me as a sexual object. I had to be smart, run, avoid harassment, come-ons, and loose hands.

As Grada Kilomba affirms (2019), the whiteness inscribed in our Black body all that which it transformed into taboo: sexuality and aggressivity. It was on the stage of *whiteness* that the "Cinderella of the asphalt, [is] adored, desired, devoured by the eyes of the tall blond princes" (GONZALEZ, 1980 (2018), p. 196), exotic and objectified, forged in my body the *moreninha* [brown-skinned] identity. A body marked by a Western awareness of the Black formed by fabulations, that is, a set of discourses and practices in the daily strategy of "inventing, telling, repeating and placing in circulation formulas, texts, rituals, with the objective of having the Black occur as a subject of race and wild exteriority" (MBEMBE, 2017b, p. 58). These fabulations are charged with exoticism, carnal elements of sexual drive and sensuality where Black men and women are subjectivated amid this Western awareness of the Black. The Black man is taken as a reproducer, as the phallus in its primary existence, and the Black woman as a depositary of sexual fluids of the white man, a body considered to be open to all kinds of violations (MBEMBE, 2017b). *Black-body* of Nursing forged by racist and sexist violence.

I did not have financial difficulties, my mother was a civil servant, we had our own home and my grandmother took care of me. With my grandmother, I experienced a mixture of love and hate. She complained about my hair – the hair of a broom – my body – offensive – and – my

exaggerated rear. At the same time, with all the love she could give, my grandmother taught me the German language, to do needlepoint and she made traditional German food on Sunday to please me. Our love hate relationship was crazy, built on racism. At 18, I went to nursing school, it was a relief. In class, my eyes only found women, all white, middle-class girls like me. But I was not like them, I was not white like them. I never saw maliciousness in being politely led to the service elevator. The main elevators were always in maintenance. You know that song, *Identidade*, by Jorge Aragão? "The Elevator is nearly a temple /An example to disturb your sleep/ Give up the commitment / Don't take the service car / If the social one has someone, don't go", well, I went... Today, I can read the scene and don't go. I understand it's not enough to be polite, well-dressed or have light skin, because "if you're Black, you can only be a maid, so, take the service elevator" (GONZALEZ, 1980 (2018), p. 199). It took many years to free myself of this torment.

I got married, separated, and was alone in my large apartment. I have one child living outside the country and another who is out of the house more than at home. The hospital took care of keeping my life busy. Then came the pandemic, killing specific groups of people with greater intensity and I was on this list: a Black woman with high blood pressure, diabetes, close to 60, working on the front line of care and confronting COVID-19. I got scared. My boys got scared: "stay home, mom, you're at risk". But I was 58 and not 60. Sometimes I asked myself: To what degree does the fact of being on the front line in confronting COVID-19, associated to the excessive domestic chores, the chronic illness and being above 60, raise the risk of contagion at home and having professionals become ill? Other colleagues, even in a risk group, were not removed from their activities. I kept working.

The public recognition of my years of action in nursing, my courage, like so many other women in the field, although deserved, did not lead to effective changes in our working conditions. Since the pandemic we struggled to gain personal protection equipment, training and qualified personnel to handle the emerging situation. The racism and sexism found in the conduct and structures of management suffocate and violate us each day. It was in this process that I came to solidify a "black awareness of the Black", as Mbembe (2017b) refers to, that is, an effort to evoke, construct, assume an experience that allows a restitution and re-inscription of our history, our territory, our narratives, our *devir*. It was in this movement of reappropriation of my story that I cut my long straight hair. All of this during the pandemic. I challenged myself to *transition*. While the hair was growing, I left it natural, although the comments hurt, everyone said: "It's different, but it's pretty", "Ah...you're pretty with any hairstyle", "This hair is in fashion". I even had a comment from my mother: "What style is this my daughter?" Finally, I was becoming a Black woman, that person who for years I was not allowed to see, feel, touch, examine in the mirror. The white aesthetic, the beauty persecuted for more than 50 years was broken. It has been a painful process, although supported, cared for, listened to, strengthened, in this group, with you Black women.

I'll never forget the happy day when I met Dandara again. It was at the end of an exhausting shift and when I saw her I hugged her and cried. It was a sublime meeting, beautiful, soothing. We spoke a bit and we promised each other that we would return to the conversation. The next day, she kindly sent me some books and articles. I read ...devoured all of them. Like in a film, I visualized and gradually elaborated my wounds from racism and sexism. I was beginning to realize many things, but now I was able to name the experience. And today I am here, in this group of Black women that has allowed me to follow traces/residues of memories that had been forgotten, sublimated. Dandara encourages us to enter a process of critical re-elaboration of what it is to be Black in this country. Along with her I learned the importance of Sankofa: "If you forget, it is not prohibited to turn back and reconstitute" (Wade NOBLES, 2009, p. 277); because of her and this group, I came to reinscribe my lost stories. Our meetings and the readings indicated by Dandara are causing a revolution inside me. Moreover, I feel like I am participating in a movement of insurgence against what racism and sexism did to me, against this virus that aims at Black people, against this colonial logic that insists on killing us in life. As Belchior sang: "Last year I died, but this year I did not die".¹⁷ And here, along with Ayo Fayola, Aisha, and Dandara, I am sure that I am not alone because the year 2020 certainly has not ended.

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¹⁷ Verse from the song "Sujeito de sorte", composed by Belchior, in 1973, which was released in 1974, on the album *Alucinação*. In 2019, this song by Belchior was sampled by Emicida on "AmarElo". Available at <https://www.letras.mus.br/blog/sujeito-de-sorte-belchior-analise/>.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE ACCORDING TO THE JOURNAL'S NORMS

ALVES, Míriam Cristiane; SANT'ANNA JÚNIOR, Ademiél de; IZIDORO-PINTO, Cecília Maria. "Mulheres pretas da Enfermagem: escrivência atrevida em oralitura na COVID-19". Revista Estudos Feministas, Florianópolis, v. 31, n. 1, e83154-en, 2023.

AUTORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

The authors contributed equally.

The original version of this article was translated into English by Jeffrey Hoff (jeffhoff@floripa.com.br).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Not applicable.

CONSENT TO USE IMAGE

Not applicable.

APPROVAL BY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The study to which the article is linked, "Necropolítica e População Negra: problematizações sobre racismo e antirracismo e seus desdobramentos em tempos de pandemia e pós-pandemia da COVID-19", was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculdade de Medicina, UFPel, in parecer número 4.127.275.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Not applicable.

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BACKGROUND

Received on 02/08/2021
Resubmitted on 18/02/2022
Approved on 18/02/2022