

“One Thousand Liters of Black”: A Poetics About Necropolitics

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Abstract | This article will analyze the performance-installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*, by the performer Lucimélia Romão, whose guiding axes are the genocide of young black Brazilians by the military police, the systematic violence of the State over black bodies and the omission of part of Brazilian society. For this, it focuses on the concept of necropolitics (MBEMBE, 2016) and its surroundings, to trace the developments of such performance-installation.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary scene. Genocide. Necropolitics.

“Mil Litros de Preto”: Uma Poética Sobre a Necropolítica

Resumo | O presente artigo analisará a performance-instalação *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*, da performer Lucimélia Romão, cujos eixos norteadores são o genocídio dos jovens negros brasileiros pela polícia militar, a violência sistematizada do Estado sobre os corpos negros e a omissão de parte da sociedade brasileira. Para isto, esta pesquisa debruça-se sobre o conceito de necropolítica (MBEMBE, 2016) e de suas adjacências, a fim de traçar os desdobramentos de tal performance-instalação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cena contemporânea. Genocídio. Necropolítica.

“Mil Litros de Negro”: una poética de la necropolítica

Resumen | Este artículo analizará la performance-instalación *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*, de la intérprete Lucimélia Romão, cuyos ejes rectores son el genocidio de jóvenes brasileños negros por la policía militar, la violencia sistemática del Estado sobre los cuerpos negros y la omisión de parte de la sociedad brasileña. Para ello, se centra en el concepto de necropolítica (MBEMBE, 2016) y su entorno, para rastrear los desarrollos de dicha performance-instalación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escena contemporánea. Genocidio. Necropolítica.

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Introduction - About performance-installation

Drawing on the analysis of the performance-installation¹ *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*², by Lucimélia Romão, which, roughly speaking, portrays part of the violence practiced against black bodies through Brazilian State, we seek to reflect on the concept of necropolitics, coined by Achille Mbembe (2016) – a black Cameroonian philosopher and university professor – in order to present the straightening out of necropolitics in the context of contemporary Brazilian society. This author discusses the issue of State power and its control over the bodies of citizens, deciding – based on a genocidal policy – over who lives and who dies within a nation. Mbembe (2016) questions the State policies and decisions about life or death decisions based on the ideology of bodies that matter, and therefore deserve the careful look of public institutions, and bodies that do not matter, therefore, are disposable to the point of being neatly eliminated: "[...] sovereignty is the ability to define who matters and who does not matter, who is 'disposable' and who is not." (MBEMBE, 2016, p. 135).

Given this, the deaths portrayed by *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré Está Cheia* denounce the necropower present in the Brazilian State and its actions of violence and extermination in the face of "bodies that do not matter" - peripheral black bodies - seen as a threat to State.

In this regard, we cannot understand necropolitics as a mere exception, as something beyond State control. In contrast to this logic, necropolitics operates revealing the consequences of mass extermination bureaucratization towards exterminating part of the population. Therefore, it is expanded as war machines become more sophisticated throughout its apparatus. Such machines, ideologically allied to the policies of social control, create a condition of permanent combat, reducing the political capacity of many subjects in order to transform them into mere "killable" biological bodies (MBEMBE, 2016). Thus, fortifications are created that protect certain subjects, and shoot at other human beings who are seen as regular targets.

Mbembe (2016) brings up again and updates part of Foucault's studies on death policies for population control, nationalizing the disposability of bodies that either do not generate profit for the State or interrupt the neoliberal logic of privileges for an elite: the erroneously so-called meritocracy. Notably, a paradox is established where the sacredness of certain lives is worth the death sacrifice of other lives, which promotes torture and massacre that are justified by the idea of abject bodies, outsider beings, easily disposable by capital. As Alves (2011) states, "the calculated distribution of death is what is configured as the modern (necro)politics management and control of territories and bodies seen as violent" (ALVES, 2011, p.119).

¹ This term is used by performer Lucimélia Romão herself, author of the work. The name justifies the materiality of the work during the action (performance) and after its completion (installation), leaving plastic traces after the work has been completed.

² Translation of the performance-installation title into English: "Thousand Liters of Black: The Tide is Full". From now on the title will be referenced in the article in Portuguese.

About Genocide Narratives

Standing, the performer Lucimélia Romão holds a black bucket in her hands, containing a red liquid inside, whose viscosity and color refer to human blood. In front of her, there is a thousand liters rectangular pool filled in the bottom by a liquid that is similar to the fluid in the bucket she holds. Arranged around the pool there are another hundred and forty-two black buckets, all filled with the same red liquid. The performer remains static. Wait for something. Tension. Every twenty-five minutes an alarm rings. After each alarm bell, the performer carries a bucket to the pool, pouring the liquid into it. She perform this action countless times. On the metal handle of each bucket there is a label with the real names of young black person murdered by the Brazilian military police in recent years, revealing the systematic genocide of black people.



FIGURE 1 · Performance-Installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*. Hang tags. Performer Lucimélia Romão. Photography: Priscila Nathany.³

The work briefly described above is the performance-installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*:

The image is strong: black buckets, with red water representing the blood of the deaths of young blacks in massacres across the country [...]. The accordionist, street artist and performer Lucimélia Romão joined the case with the influences of her reading of *Genocídio do Povo Brasileiro*⁴, by Abdias Nascimento, to deepen her studies on black genocide in the country. Figures from the 2017 Atlas of Violence show that every 25 minutes a young black person died in Brazil, with black men aged 19 to 29 years as the most affected⁵.

³ Source: Image provided by the author Lucimélia Romão.

⁴ Translation of the title of the book into English: "Genocide of Brazilian People".

⁵ No signed authorship. Source: <https://entretenimento.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2019/10/02/mostra-em-sao-paulo-retrata-chacinhas-e-mortes-de-negros-com-baldes-de-blood.htm>. Accessed on: July 13, 2020.

Such work echoes about the silencing processes perpetrated by the public authority about such deaths, whose justifications almost always come up with the idea of criminalizing the victim, or indicating the deaths were mere mistakes committed by the police during a street action. The death of young black people remains masked under the false aegis of justice, trivializing homicides due to the growing militarization of the country. Lucimélia Romão gushes the pain of omission in a pool. Gushes all prosecutions loaded with shrapnel, where there are no culprits.



FIGURE 2 · Performance-Installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*. Performer Lucimélia Romão. Photography: Edouard Fraipont⁶.

Such aforementioned silencing processes refer to ancestral, familiar crossings, which were partial sources for the production of this work. The performer makes this systematization a particular struggle, whose time frame portrays taking a position on the present time. However, such work goes back to slavery processes, whose traces established a horizon of legitimation of structural racism as an inheritance of a Colonial Brazil, whose roots generated a kind of death in life (MBEMBE, 2016) to enslaved human beings.

In order to integrate the work's analysis process and its relationship with the necropolitics, a brief overview of violence in its different forms will be presented. Violence committed against the black body is present in our historical context since the arrival of Europeans on our continent. The domination, violence and deaths to which the black body was subjected during Brazil-Colony crosses contemporaneity through the military forces and the power of the State, revealing faces of the necropolitics that connect with the narrative of Lucimélia Romão's work, being of great importance for the reflections to come.

Colonial Brazil and tactical extermination actions to achieve necropolitics

The hegemonic speeches, dating from the period of Brazil-Colony, whose political, economical and social principles obeyed European sovereignty, left evident traces of today's necropolitics. As a result, there is a growing practice of institutionalized violence. In the colony, the practice of necropolitics was present, establishing terror as a motto for the validation of the policies of the Portuguese Crown, raised by the

⁶ Source: Image provided by the author Lucimélia Romão.

exploitation, enslavement and killing of national territory original indigenous peoples. The imposition of European culture on native peoples aimed to eliminate their cultural references, traditions and customs, as a way of imposing a new way of life, based on European economic and political purposes, a point of view defended by Ribeiro (1995), when talking about the native peoples of Brazil, the author classifies them as a people:

New, inclusively, due to the unlikely joy and amazing desire for happiness, in a people so sacrificed, that encourages and moves all Brazilians. Old, however, because it becomes viable as an external proletariat. That is to say, as an overseas implant of European expansion that does not exist for itself, but to generate exportable profits by exercising the function of colonial supplier of goods for the world market, through the wear and tear of the population that recruits in the country or imports (RIBEIRO, 1995, p.19-20).

In a second moment, the slavery of the African peoples came to sustain the growing production demanded by the Portuguese Crown, whose enslaved black subjects were the labor exploited in the crops, mining, and later coffee and other farms. Exposed to acts of cruelty, many subjects were murdered or constantly punished with lashes, mutilations, deprivation of food, water, etc. In this way, the bodies of enslaved human beings supported such practices as part of the palpable forms of sovereignty of one people over another, in a logic of genocide, committed deliberately. According to Ribeiro (1995), black and indigenous people were seen as animals, compared to a human cattle, which served only for slavery, in a justification given later under the aegis of eugenics.

This allows us to understand that necropolitics was present since indigenous and African peoples were murdered without any type of punishment for those who committed such crimes, unlike what happened to the bodies of European white subjects. In other words, the lives of enslaved human beings were seen as mere tools, as objects of work, under the expectation, in part, of generating profit and social status for their dominators.

Given the brief context presented about Brazilian society, it can be said that the sovereignty of one people over another is related as part of the notions of necropolitics, whose conditions of life and death of the subjects, that is, the power of choice about who lives and who dies are established by ingrained limits where violence is justified by rules that were pre-established by an elite. Mbembe (2016) describes that "The exercise of sovereignty, in its turn, consists of society's capacity for self-creation through the use of institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary meanings" (MBEMBE, 2016, p.124).

This means that cruelty actions can be tolerated and even legalized in the face of a predefined social context. In this spectrum, the sovereign being, materialized here by white representatives of an European elite, has been exercising genocidal practices throughout our history, carried out under the power of the State, performing systematic practices of violence during the domination of non-European peoples. In this direction, the domination process has been extended to a diversity of peoples throughout our history, always linked to a racist stereotype. Thus, necropolitics has always been associated with a condition of sovereignty, whose control – exercised by the power of the State – justified the violence based on productivity and profit criteria, associated with dominant interests.

The necropolitics in contemporary Brazil

With the end of the slavery period in Brazil, violence against black subjects takes on new shapes and lasts through other forces. In particular, the forces arising from public security, through military corporations, led by the power of the State, whose performance is strengthened in the political and social scenarios from the marginalization and criminalization of such subjects. The practices adopted by public security in Brazil are largely based on militarized training, considering many citizens as enemies of the State.

By these means, a segregationist policy is built, placing certain human beings as targets to be eliminated, in order to guarantee “law and order”. As already mentioned in the previous item, it can be said that the violence practiced against the black body in contemporary Brazilian society dates back to the beginnings of Colonial Brazil, and, when considered in relation to the abuse of power exercised by military police practices, we find a direct link with the first police forces, originated in the 19th century, with the arrival of D. João VI in Brazil. Subsequently, with the long period of Military Dictatorship in Brazil and its end, which left roots of profound violence, a wide debate was created about the modus operandi of military approaches in different social spaces.

In addition, the idea of a patrimonial state also dates back to the long colonial period when property was overvalued at the expense of life. Thus, it can be said that the defense of property, as well as the considerable increase in violence in urban centers during the last decades, and also the processes of exclusion, gentrification and cities hygienization that “push” many human beings to the edges (for the peripheries of cities), in addition to the surveillance policies extended through different security technologies, together with police corporatism that is omitted in the face of the orchestrated violence in the peripheries and in poor communities in general, end up distorting the idea of defending the polis citizen, to carry out war tactics:

The Military Police, the main police corporation in the country, responsible for ostensive and preventive policing, is militarily organized and subordinated, in the last instance, to the Brazilian Army. The most evident discussion about militarization refers to

the definition of crimes committed by military policemen as policing functions, as military crimes and, therefore, as disciplinary transgressions, that are subject to their own code, process and military justice. (SOUZA, 2015, p. 209).

The slow and gradual end of the military dictatorship in Brazil, did not cause major changes in the patterns of police approaches with respect to civilian citizens, it did not generate a more humanized mentality, giving vent to the warlike conduct that remains until today. The police force is employed in such a way that, even after redemocratization, Brazil is internationally recognized as one of the countries with the highest numbers of police violence and police crime. It is noteworthy that this repression also has its consequences in the violence against the police themselves, whose methodologies of oppression, financed for the protection of an elite, make the police – above all, the low-ranking police officers – victims of the system that employs them. In this configuration, in which war strategies are incorporated into police actions in the daily life of the streets, there is an endless cycle of deaths in which the other is treated as an opponent in combat:

Militarization, in a way, frustrated expectations of adopting security guidelines consistent with democracy and the fundamental precepts of the freedoms and protections of a Legal State. The path to professionalizing the police, as well as linking public security policies to the inflows and demands for equity of the broader Brazilian society, is divided between democratic security government and the logic of war, so insistent among those who defend the fight against terrorism and the war against drugs, as a model to be followed in the country. As a result, there is a debate about the paradigm shift in modern wars and the role of armies and weapons in achieving a global armed order that still intends to defend borders and flows of wealth. There is a large local and global market that feeds on military logic and strength. The militarized security device reinforces these trends insofar as it appeals to the symbols of military power, to the metaphor of permanent war against the internal enemy and to the growing need for available financial resources, as well as the suspension of rights to achieve its objectives. (SOUZA, 2015, p. 209-210).

State violence, orchestrated against the citizen, becomes more visible in peripheral neighborhoods and areas bordering on poverty. Abuses of power, illegal uses of brute force, as well as blackmail, extortion, threats in general, are used daily in spaces where the poorest people are located, where the majority places of housing and living of black and Afro-descendant population are located. The origins of these dwellings date back to the post slavery abolition life which was permeated by social injustices and neglect of state power, denying the minimum to survive for ex-enclaved human beings, causing unemployment, hunger and misery etc. It is necessary to also consider police violence against black and Afro-descendant peoples in contemporary times, in order to justify the initial ideas of the performance-installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*, by performer Lucimélia Romão (Minas Gerais state), whose initial trigger

to make the work was the systematic death of young blacks in the periphery.

The performer based her work on the above assumptions – among others – in order to discuss the logic of violence against black and Afro-descendent, poor and peripheral people, whose constitutional premises are constantly disrespected by the materialization of serious violations of rights through police approaches. In this perspective, the police corporation guarantees or tries to guarantee the internal security of a small portion of the population, the elite and the middle class, white in general, creating a panorama of fear and terror on the peripheral communities, thus sabotaging the principles of ethics, rights and equality. This reveals actions that go beyond the characteristics of the rule of law to form a kind of extrajudicial demand, generating as a consequence a high degree of omission or, even worse, the permanence of Dictatorship remnants:

The state military police, which have the function of carrying out ostensible policing and ensuring public order, have characteristics similar to those verified in the Army, since they use barracks, uniforms and military equipment, including weapons of great destructive power and armored vehicles. These institutions, normally structured in battalions commanded under a rigid hierarchy, where agents receive military training aimed to face the enemy, naturally establish the pattern of violent action verified in ostensive policing, considering that the agents, called soldiers, are prepared to face war and not to carry out policing respecting the fundamental rights and citizens guarantees. (SILVEIRA, 2013).

In this spectrum, in which the perpetuation of violence is controlled by power agencies, there is no escape from the concepts surrounding necropolitics, coined by Achille Mbembe (2016). In an attempt to understand necropolitics beyond Europe – whose studies are already very comprehensive, with recurrent and referential authors Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin among others – Mbembe (2016) proposes a diasporic black peoples cut, explaining their bodies were associated with the logic of the necropower:

First, in the context of colonization, the human nature of the slave is depicted as a personified shadow. In fact, the condition of a slave results from a triple loss: loss of a “home”, loss of rights over his body and loss of political status. This triple loss is equivalent to absolute domination, alienation at birth and social death (expulsion from humanity in general). (MBEMBE, 2016, p. 131).

The enslaved human beings, whose bodies went through all kinds of torture and deprivation, began to live – in a post-slavery period – almost always on the margins of capitalism, in the face of a scenario of evident danger. With the advent of modernity, Mbembe (2016) shows that racism started to be better elaborated, as the State began to undertake not only the physical domain, but also expanded the practices of cultural and black intellectuality denial. In this respect, state necropolitics has tried and still tries to incarcerate, to annihilate, to deny the bodies of black subjects, creating a kind of physical and also symbolic annulment of them. The markers of violence against black and Afro-descendent

peoples reveal the features of coloniality still present in the heart of Brazil, maintaining the precarious contexts of post-colonial life.

In view of these statements, the racism maintained by the State is directly reflected in prisons, where incarcerated and huddled bodies reveal unequal opportunities and rising crime – in workspaces – whose precarious jobs are mostly occupied by black people – in the bad houses – such as communities and slums, and in the murders of the black and poor population by the police, being this last one the fundamental focus of the work of the performer Lucimélia Romão, since it is based on genocide against the black people statistics. The black artist researched for years the increase in the murders of peripheral young blacks and poor people by the police, focusing her work on the banality and naturalization with which such bodies are seen by the State, extending this aspect to public security, as it will be better indicated in the table that follows below.

Following the performer's line of thought, it can be noted that violence against black and Afro-descendant people reaches an ascending scale (as shown in the table below), according to data arised from a recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Health that analyzed the deaths of children and adolescents up to 19 years old, and was published by Carta Capital Magazine in April 2019. The data were analyzed between 1997 and 2017:

Percentage of homicides in the year 2017 (between whites and blacks)

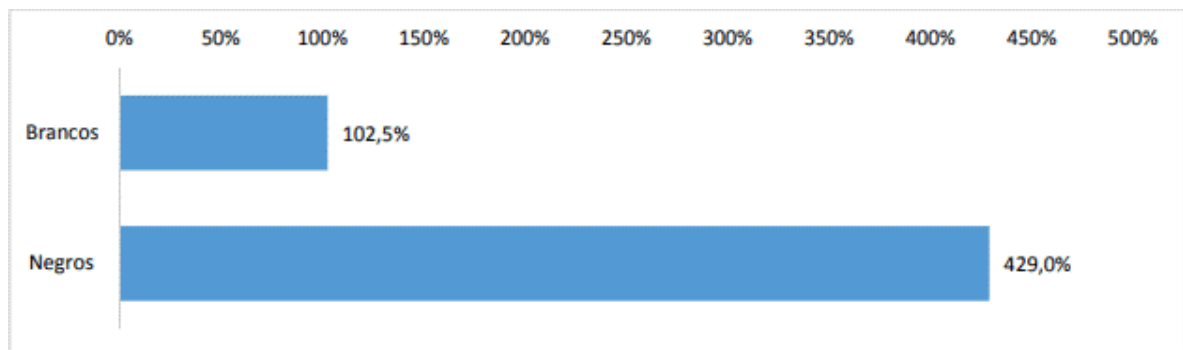


CHART 1 · Source: PUTTI, 2019.

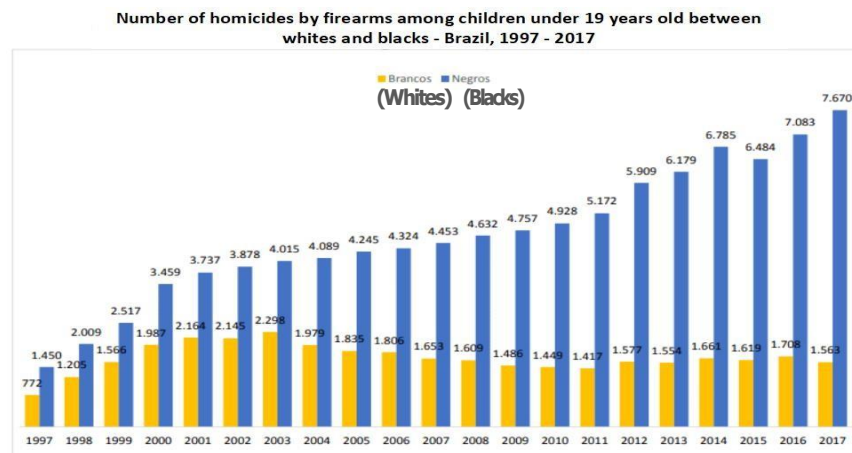
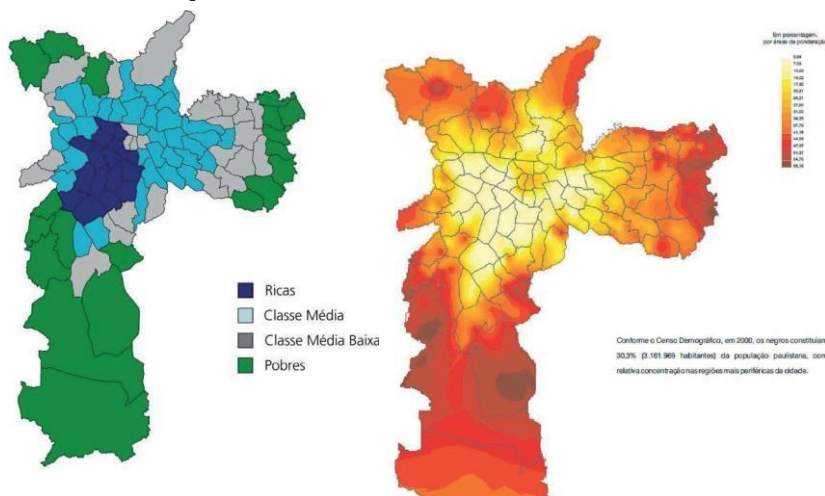


CHART 2 · Source: PUTTI, 2019.

Regarding the state of São Paulo, there was a spatial approach addressed by the presentation of the installation performance *Mil Litros de Preto II: O largo transborda*⁷ that will be analyzed below. The differential homicide rates between whites and blacks can be seen in the article *Topografias da violência: necropoder e governamentalidade espacial em São Paulo*⁷, by author Jaime Amparo Alves (2011). The author presents a map - Juvenile Vulnerability Map, organized by the Seade foundation - in which it is possible to identify indicators such as unemployment, educational inequalities, homicides, early pregnancy and premature death in the greater São Paulo.

Youth Social Vulnerability and Black Territory Map - Family Income and Racial Composition

CHART 3 · Source: SEMPLA / São Paulo City Hall and Seade Foundation. Available at: <http://infocidade.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/>

⁷Translation of the performance-installation title - when it was performed in São Paulo city - into English: "Thousand Liters of Black II: The square overflows". From now on the title will be referenced in the article in Portuguese.

⁸ Translation of the title of the article into English: "Topographies of violence: necropower and spatial governmentality in São Paulo".

Analyzing these maps, Alves (2011) reveals the articulation between urban space and the social vulnerability present in São Paulo, as well as its relationship with the inequalities between whites and blacks, as shown below:

In the painted green areas, the number of young people out of school is twice as high as in the wealthiest areas (14% and 7%, respectively). Also, in the poorest districts the rate of early motherhood is much higher: for every 1,000 young people aged 14 to 17, 19 had children in the wealthiest areas and 41 in the poorest regions. In these districts, homicide rates among young people aged 15 to 24 years remain high, although there was a 38% reduction in the number of deaths between 2000-2005. Also according to the Youth Vulnerability Map, the average is 189.4 deaths per 100 thousand inhabitants, a rate 3.3 times higher than that registered in the richest regions, where the homicide rate among young people in the same age group is 57,1/100 thousand inhabitants. (ALVES, 2011, p. 120).

However, even considering the horrible picture presented throughout the history of Brazil, it can be seen that the speeches on necropolitics, briefly explained above, have loopholes, cracks, that let everyday experiences connected to the ideals of change, therefore escaping the logic behind society structuring. In other words, the power speeches are unable to control all the discursive plurality that appears to be contrary to their authoritarian political regimes. Even if there is an incisive monitoring from an elite over the bodies, there are speeches against hierarchization. They operate at much smaller scales than elitist speeches, as they do not have equal accessibility to certain spaces, such as the mainstream media. However, they operate in their niches of belonging, contrary to certain forms of power.

Yet, by searching for the demarcation of spaces, the divergent statements reveal other possibilities for daily experiences, not conforming to what is called "truth". Discourses opposed to hegemonic statements are, on several occasions, marginalized, and in certain social spaces they are also seen as mere utopias. However, they resist the domestication of bodies, unbalancing forms of modern colonization. Therefore, part of the citizens who do not fit the current discursive dimension creates other forms of social participation, producing knowledge that escapes authoritarian logic.

The transformation of citizens' speeches into a kind of resistance proposes other perspectives on the functioning of cities, subjecting certain statements to imbalance, what makes it necessary to be redone or, at least, reorganized. The statements that escape the totalization forms emerge as a contrast to the current status quo, giving a set of possibilities to places that were demarcated by elite colonialism. The appropriation of certain spaces through the use of opposing speeches gives rise to new practices for using the city. This transit between the hegemonic discourses and their small ruptures becomes fundamental for people coexistence in daily life, placing democracy as a synonym of conflict and constant struggles between different social subjects.

In order to artistically discuss the demarcated territories of cities, in order to broaden the debate about the potential force of bodies in the urban fabric, many performance artists propose a dialogue between urban space and artistic action, enabling the creation of places in the city with otherness intersections.

In this context, the performance-installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré Está cheia* relates black bodies political and social issues from a context standing point of violence, marginalization and inequality. The work also shows a manifesto against the murders of young blacks, mostly peripheral, carried out by the police, revealing aspects of institutionalized and rooted racism in our society.

Thousand Liters of Black: The square is full

The chosen performance-installation was held at Largo do Batata in São Paulo city⁹(SP), it took place in September 2019. The choice of the performance action in a specific period and location was a singular occurrence, differentiating this action from its previous presentations, in order to integrate the Mostra 3M¹⁰ 2019 Art Exhibition:

The 9th Mostra 3M Art Exhibition was born with the theme "Manifestos for other possible worlds". Thinking of breaking the dominant paradigm, also opening space beyond the hegemonic axes Rio-São Paulo, the concept defined to govern this edition of the Exhibition discusses aesthetics and proposition of actions for other possible worlds, which accepts and encompasses differences, whatever they are. With the provocation of the manifesto, it builds new perspectives of existences and leads to reflection. The idea is to give a voice and contemplate people who encourage and struggle to affirm groups that are minorized, in addition to proposing the occupation of public space. (WITHOUT AUTHOR. Source: Gazeta Pinheiros, 2019).

This exhibition becomes more relevant to the present investigation, since it had the special participation of thirty mothers from a social movement called Mães de Maio¹¹, performing the action as mothers of murdered youths:

[...] the idea was to represent these deaths and bring awareness to them with a thousand 7-liter buckets - the approximate amount of blood from the human body - of water tinted red, each labeled with the name of a victim who died violently. The contents of the bucket were poured into a 7,000-liter pool last Saturday by Lucimélia and members of the Mães de Maio movement - a group that fights for justice in the cases of the murder of their children. The pool is still exposed on site. (WITHOUT AUTHOR, Source: UOL, 2019).

It is worth mentioning that Mães de Maio is a movement founded in 2006 in São Paulo, after the slaughter of 564 people in the same state. Considered one

⁹ Largo da Batata is a public place located in the Pinheiros district, in the city of São Paulo. It is located at the confluence of Avenida Brigadeiro Faria Lima and the streets of Pinheiros, Teodoro Sampaio, Cardinal Arcoverde, Baltazar Carrasco, Martim Carrasco, Chopin Tavares de Lima and Fernão Dias. Available at: <http://spcultura.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/espaco/580/>. Accessed on: June 18, 2020.

¹⁰ Translation of the art exhibition name into English: "3M Art Exhibition". From now on it will be referenced in the article in Portuguese.¹¹ Translation of the social movement's name into English: "Mothers of May". From now on the it will be referenced in the article in Portuguese.

of the greatest atrocities in Latin America in recent decades, the slaughter became known as May Crimes, carried out by police and paramilitary agents:

Between May 12th and 20th, 2006, at least 564 people were killed in the state of São Paulo, according to a survey by Harvard University, most of them in situations that indicate the participation of police officers. Most of the cases, researchers point out, were part of a revenge action by State security agents against the so-called attacks by the First Command of the Capital (PCC) faction, which were concentrated in the first two days of the period. That year's slaughter became known as May Crimes, the largest in the 21st century and perhaps the largest in the country's history - for the sake of comparison, in the last 21-year civil-military dictatorship, 434 people were killed by the state. A decade after the 2006 massacre, only one public official was held responsible for the deaths. Convicted, he responds to a free appeal and continues to act as a military policeman. (BRITO, 2016).

The aforementioned violence is directly related to the so-called "death squads", responsible for summary executions since the Military Dictatorship, commonly known as "Death Squads". Such groups invade houses, attack the periphery - whose targets are black and poor in general - executing targets and possible witnesses. They are true parallel powers, formed by military and ex-military personnel who act without great retaliation on the part of public security, being even defended by some parliamentarians, as we can see in the historiography of our recent democracy.

Mães de Maio acts as a network against the arbitrariness of justice that does not punish criminals. The abusive action of the police is justified by repeated allegations of a supposed "resistance on the part of the victims", or "deaths related to police confrontations", something that is reiterated by the term "resistance followed by death". The aforementioned allegations made by the police has immediate acceptance of justice and accompanied, in part, by the slowness of the judicial system, generates greater impunity, what provides means for summary executions continuity.

In this spectrum, the omission and violence practiced by the State were part of the revolt that propelled the origin of the Mães de Maio. Such mothers intertwined their narratives of violence, sharing the subjectivity of their pains, fighting the silence about deaths. Thus, the movement has gained international visibility and is still fighting against the attempt to erase the memories of the dead. Therefore, the movement is composed of women and mothers who seek justice for their children, aiming to combat the crimes committed by the State during the democratic period, as claimed by Débora Maria Silva, founder of the movement, in an interview:

Mães de Maio is a movement of women homemakers, but who has learned over the years to work with this system. And when the housewives leave their homes and start militating before Brazil, they end up crossing borders. Our cry is a cry that has to be echoed because our country is a silent country. (BRITO, 2016).

With this in mind, the performance-installation had the participation of the victims' mothers at the scene of the action. The expressive strength of the manifest is enhanced with such participation, making the context of necropolitics closer to the public's experience, to the political assumptions proposed by the work, and also to this analysis, proving to be substantial for the present study: "The work *Mil Litros de Preto II - O largo transborda* is one of five that is on display at the 9th Mostra 3M Art Exhibition, in São Paulo, which selected, through public notice, Brazilian works that generate reflections on relevant contemporary themes"(UOL, 2019). And still:

The Exhibition prioritizes ethnic diversity to dialogue with everyone, aiming to express itself within contemporary art and debate, in a poetic way, a new world beyond the political, social and economic. The activation promotes a collective participation in public space during the period of one month while it stays in Largo da Batata, with five works of character of denunciation and announcement, stimulating the observation of our own contradictions, relationships, dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and intervention in urban areas. (WITHOUT AUTHOR. Source: Gazeta, 2019).

Therefore, this performance-installation, in particular, brings to the scene a swimming pool with a capacity of seven thousand liters and, as previously said, a quantity of a thousand black buckets, sometimes carried by the performer, sometimes by the Mães de Maio, mixing the analogies between denunciation and social spaces.

The action itself - About liters of blood

First beep. A black bucket. Performer Lucimélia Romão gets up and carries it. Inside the bucket there are seven liters of red liquid which is then poured over a large blue plastic pool. A long wait. Twenty-five minutes. Second beep. An audible warning that is repeated throughout the action, determining the time interval for each pouring of such liquid. There are many black buckets that make up the scene. Up to a thousand buckets are counted around. The action of transporting each bucket with seven liters of red liquid into the blue pool is tirelessly repeated:

The black buckets lined up caused some strangeness in those who passed through Largo da Batata, west of São Paulo, last Saturday (9/28). An empty plastic pool in the middle of the buckets made the scene even more unusual. A loudspeaker announced the name and the age of a victim of the state and ended with the phrase "police homicide". Also from the sound system, from time to time, it was possible to hear helicopter and siren noise from the PM¹³. (CRUZ, 2019)

¹² Unlike other presentations, whose pool had the dimension of a thousand liters.

¹³ In English PM means Military Police.

The aforementioned statistical data are part of the work, intensifying the meaning of the scene by the time intervals in which a young black man is murdered in Brazilian territory by the State, counting more names to victims of homicides. The extended time can also refer us to the dimension of the brutality declared by the performance-installation in relation to the bodies of the black subjects. Furthermore, time reveals the long wait for measures that are never taken. A tortuous time, almost impenetrable, that surrounds the action and that happens regardless of the public's choice:

In an interview to Ponte, Lucimélia tells that she thought about the performance after knowing the story of Marcos Vinicius da Silva, 14 years old, who died on June 20th last year, with a shot in the belly inside the Ciep Operário Vicente Mariano school, where he studied, in Complexo da Maré, north of Rio. 'I was doing a study on structural racism in Brazil and this death hit me very hard because I saw the theory in practice. I went to try to purge what is this violence that black, poor, peripheral women have been suffering throughout the history of Brazil. And so I put together this work, a performance-installation to try to scale and show to society what has been happening and that the black movement has been denouncing for so long', explains Lucimélia. (CRUZ, 2019).

The relationship established between the narrative used and the plastic elements provided by the work takes shape through the set of choices and actions proposed by the performance-installation and also through its connection with the spatial time, in a diffusion between the scenic environment and closeness to the public.

Each reference chosen to compose the performance-installation promotes different intensities between the social and political realities immersed in the work. We can see then that the approximation of these elements with the audience of the work can occur in different ways, due to the peculiarities contained in each action performed by the performer.

The names of the murdered youth are described in each bucket inside yellow labels, where the name and age of each teenager and/or black youth – that is, of each victim murdered by police officers – can be read. The bucket then represents part of the identity of each of the slaughtered youth, expanding the historiographic and thematic contexts of the action. In this way, the buckets leave the mere character of inanimate objects to become embodied symbols of violence, being enumerated, quantified and poured out with the naked eye, thus narrowing the relationship of the work with passers-by, passers-by in general and invited spectators.

It can be said that the dead victims are connected to the bucket through these tags that have now become a kind of human remains, in a pitiful estimate, thus expanding the scale of genocide caused by the police. The seven liters of red water and its symbology with the blood express part of the content for which

the victims come to be remembered, especially by the presence of the Mães de Maio.¹⁴ The seven liters of red liquid in each black bucket present in the action also reveal the injustice of a corrupt system that acts with impunity and in the name of the State, thus showing contempt for the black and peripheral population.

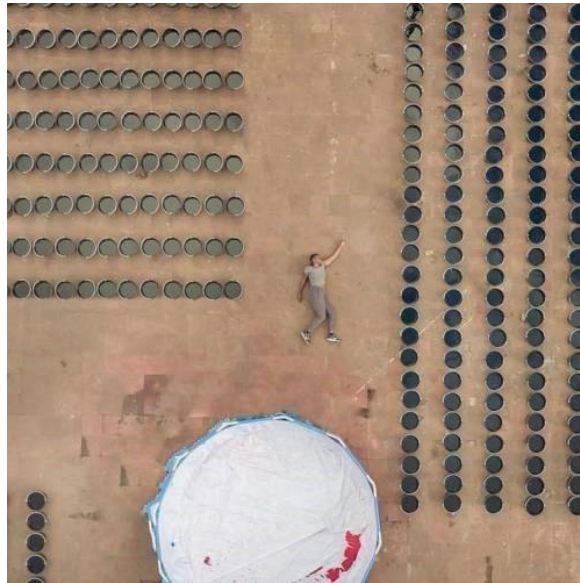


FIGURE 3 – Performance-Installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré está Cheia*. Performer Lucimélia Romão.¹⁵

In this direction, the sound signal, the heap of black buckets, the black body, the red liquid, the actions of the performer, among other elements present in the scenic space, are in charge of constructing and revealing aspects of a barbaric narrative, in which each element chosen to compose the action gains a different context of massacre, composing the logic of an artistic manifesto. In this way, it is through the intersection of all elements of the work and its distinct sounds and repercussions that part of Lucimélia Romão's purpose is drawn:

Who is entitled to life in Brazil? Which children and adolescents should be protected? In Brazil a white child is a child, a black child is a minor (offender). A black baby is born a "bandit", a white baby is a "fruit", "our future". White families, stay at home in the quarantine, take care. I'm sorry, black families, the state will invade your homes and end it. There is no empathy, they will mow down our youth before the Coronavirus. If this is not a war with attack on several fronts, I don't know what is! (ROMÃO, 2020).¹⁶

Lucimélia Romão reinforces above the discussion about black bodies seen by the capitalist system as disposable objects, making it possible to show that

¹⁴ "Near the pool, about 30 women from the Mães de Maio Movement are getting ready for the start of the performance. The thousand black buckets contained 7 liters of water tinted red in reference to the blood spilled by state violence. The volume is the same that, on average, the human being has blood in the body. On the handle of each bucket, a name, age and cause of death tag: police homicide." (CRUZ, 2019).

¹⁵ Source: Artist's personal blog. Available at: <https://www.tumgir.com/lucimelia-romao>. Accessed on: June 9, 2020.

¹⁶ Text by Lucimélia Romão. Source: Artist's personal blog. Available at: <https://www.tumgir.com/lucimelia-romao>. Accessed on: June 9, 2020.

violence is repeatedly applied without almost any penalty or punishment for offenders. As Mbembe affirms: "in the biopower economy, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the State" (MBEMBE, 2016, p.128).

Thus, the performance-installation builds an act of manifest through its poetics, exposing the political situation of the black body within our society. Necropolitics associates deaths with a condition of power, with the ability to decide who lives and who dies within society from the exercise of distorted sovereignty. The state of exception established "ceases to be a temporary suspension of the rule of law [...], it acquires a permanent spatial arrangement, which remains continuously outside the normal state of the law" (MBEMBE, 2016, p.124). From Mbembe's thought, the idea of domination of a people is not related only to the act of killing, but to the exercise of power that involves social, political, economic, cultural factors; and, when applied to the performance-installation context, it refers to social groups – the black body – which, in a way, present some kind of threat to the State related to these factors, because, as Alves (2011) states, the "Necropower emphasizes the primacy of death as a strategy for the exercise of modern power in territories and populations considered to be a latent threat" (ALVES, 2011, p.118).

In this way, this thinking is also associated with a condition of inequality of bodies in society "an unequal relationship is established together with the inequality of power over life" (MBEMBE, 2016, p.132). In this respect, the structural racism revealed in the work in question accompanies the black body since the colonial period and remains strengthened in our society until today, as a factor that intensifies the thought of domination and corroborates with social inequality.

Costa and Dias (2016) relate existing inequality to a long process of social exclusion. For the authors, inequality is a kind of compound of governmental actions that grant privileges to some and, at the same time, disregard others, what associates the concepts of domination and violence to the lack of opportunities for black subjects in society. Poverty, violence, misery, crime surround the existence of the black body not by choice or by fatality:

The body is the existential condition of life and social life. It is socially constructed and it is submerged in discourses, ideologies and verticalization processes that define its existence or non-existence. It personifies worlds, forms of life, and its existence or non-existence is an outcome of the space that is socially assigned to it, of the bodily characteristics that have social meanings and of its materiality - constituted by the way the body presents itself. Thus, there is the body that exists socially, which is acceptable and, therefore, subject to respect, recognition and rights, but there is also the body that does not exist socially because it is unacceptable and different from the normative domain. This is the body without rights, which can be violated, disrespected and, compulsorily, hurt. (COSTA; DIAS, 2016, p.2-3).

Once rejected by the notoriously racist capitalist system, the bodies of black subjects do not share the same social conditions as the bodies of white subjects, remaining in a constant state of exclusion and inferiority. For Costa and Dias (2016) the black subject often does not have access to education in the same way as the white subject. They do not have the same opportunities, occupying risky informal jobs and abusive jobs, without guaranteeing decent conditions and quality of life. The place of speech of the black subject is often removed, having part of his culture despised, resulting in the occupation of disadvantageous social and political positions and subordination in relation to white subjects. They hardly reach a place of representation and notoriety in the cultural, political, scientific and technological construction of the nation.

Santos (2010) says that "non-existence means not to exist under any form of being relevant or understandable. Everything that is produced as non-existent is radically excluded because it remains outside the universe that the accepted conception of inclusion considers as the Other" (SANTOS, 2010, p. 32). It is from all the elements present in *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré Está Cheia* that the discussion about the current state of exception is established, allowing the debate about the practice of institutionalized violence.

As the time of artistic action goes by, it can be seen that other aspects added to the work reinforce the tension environment created by the scene, such as, for example, the fatigued body of the performer. It is noted that such a body is left in a state of exhaustion, in which each pouring of the liquid into the pool becomes increasingly difficult, tiring. The exhausted body of the performer, due to excessive repetitions, also shows an analogy to real tiredness in the face of repetitive killing, without any structural change in the social fabric.

Following the work, the names of the children of each Mãe de Maio are announced. Upon hearing the names of their children, mothers carry their respective black buckets with their labels, dumping them in the plastic pool, as yet another act of protest against the strongholds of violence and injustice committed by the State.

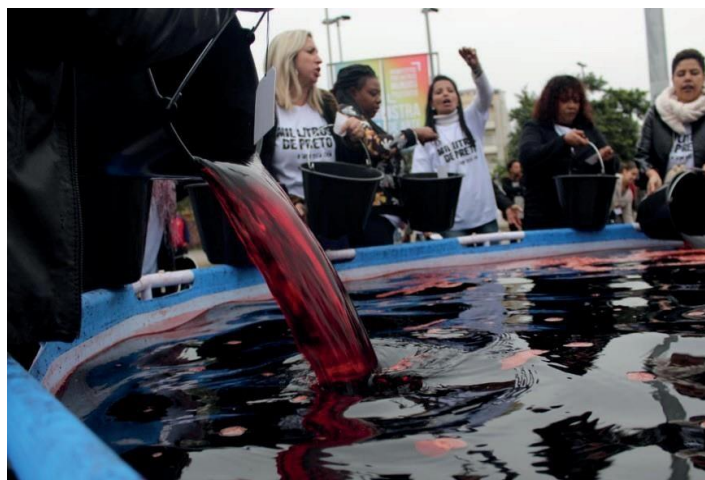


FIGURA 4 - Performance *Mil Litros de Preto, a Maré está Cheia*. Largo do Batata-SP. September/2019.¹⁷

¹⁷ Source: Ponte newspaper. Available at: <https://ponte.org/mil-litros-de-preto-uma-performance-sobre-a-violencia-do-estado/>. Accessed on: 25 May. 2020.

Débora Maria da Silva, founder of the Mães de Maio movement, is invited by Lucimélia Romão to hold the microphone and interfere in the work, reciting a final manifesto, connecting her pains to action:

They took our children, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. All on the same day that insists on not ending. It is the hand of the captain of the bush¹⁸ behind the man in uniform. Our children did not become a monument or a street name. We carried them in our belly. How dare they deny the grave of ours? We cannot be afraid of the bullet or the whip. But remember: if they died as a son, brother, parents and grandparents, don't let my cry become a silent word. Our dead have a voice, they have a mother, said Deborah. (CRUZ, 2019).

Therefore, Lucimélia Romão shows a flawed and factional system, which carries racism and social differences as one of the main generating elements of this violence. *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré Está Cheia* shows the layers of the necropolitics, the bodies in a state of imminent mortality, missing the law effective applicability, denouncing the irregularities present in the actions of the State and part of the population that consents to these violent practices.

Final considerations

Structural racism has been present in our society throughout our history. The practice of violence, the abuse of power, inequalities, among other aspects, highlight the faces of colonizing thinking. The political hegemony established in the colony highlighted and nurtured something that lasts until today: the necropolitics.

In this sense, the performance-installation *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré Está Cheia* addresses the attacks on young blacks from the periphery. Therefore, the work reveals a poetics that exposes, that highlights inequalities and the practices of violence. *Mil Litros de Preto: A Maré Está Cheia* reveals the doctrine of a dominant system and the deliberate violence that goes beyond the margins of the laws, applied to the young and peripheral black population. The work reveals the vectors that originate the great problematic about ethnic-racial issues in Brazil, resulting in demands of an educational, economic, cultural and political nature. Hence, Lucimélia Romão strips everyday racism, showing her art engaged in the pains that bother her.

¹⁸ Usually the captain of the bush was a freed black man responsible for the capture and punishment of enslaved people who fled large farms.

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