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Becoming Somebody: Black Women's *escrevivências* and Politics of Resistance

by

Irimara Gomes Peixoto

Under the Direction of Stephanie Y. Evans, PhD

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Assata Shakur and Marielle Franco were activists fighting for racial and gender equality in the United States and Brazil. This work aims to observe their life stories and legacies, analyzing the documentary *Marielle: The Crime That Shook Brazil* and Assata Shakur's memoir *Assata: An Autobiography*. This study will focus on the differences and similarities in their countries' justice systems and how Franco and Shakur built strategies of resistance to navigate their homeland's necropolitics and also focus on the process of recognizing the self, using the concept of *escrevivências*. Therefore, observing how their political views and positions directly cause their exile and death. Two methodologies, narrative analysis and analysis of the discourse will uncover the similarities between the discourses presented in the documentary and the autobiography. Pointing out how political consciousness is a significant factor in the life of Black women both in Brazil and the United States.

INDEX WORDS: Brazil, Black women, Intersectionality, Necropolitics, Escrevivência

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2023

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August 2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Black women activists all over the world. Even though you have to go through intense hardship to be acknowledged by a racist and misogynist society, you do not hesitate to keep doing extraordinary work, breaking barriers, and challenging the status quo. I wish you could see how essential you are. I see you, I commend you and I respect you.

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The university is a space of transformation, not only of ideas and perceptions or professional paths but also of emotional and internal growth. Getting to this point was not easy, however, my prevalence in this path is linked to many people who walked beside me, even though standing on a distant continent. Those important individuals faced similar paths, confronted some of the same battles I did as a Black woman, and managed to escape the ordinary assumptions of this racist and misogynist society through the cracks. First, I would like to thank my family, my mother Selma, who once had a dream to be a teacher, but never had the chance to be in school. She made sure I had all the tools to get into school and university even though she did not know exactly what those spaces meant. She is the first Black woman in my life who inspired and taught me to live my truth and seek my answers, who taught me how to love, not just myself, but the world around me. To *endurecerse sin perder la ternura*. To my father Irineu for introducing literature into my life very early on and encouraging me to subvert all the rules imposed by the injustices of the world. To my siblings: Selmira, Iris, Iriane, and Selmar who in their way strengthened and cared for me, providing shelter, love, and support ensuring that I remained firm during all these years. To Jéssyca, Caroline, Alessandra, Júlia, Marcelo, Douglas, and Júlio who came into my life through academia, however, remained for the equal desire to work for a better world. To Bárbara, whose kindness and support helped me increase my belief in myself and my work as an activist and an artist. I also thank my friends Hayane and Júnior who have walked with me since my teenage years in the *favelas* of the south of Brazil. Friends who naturally respected my growth, my change of plans, intensity, and political views while aligning their own with mine. Finally, I want to thank my committee for believing in me and making sure I had the support and the materials needed to keep producing and being authentic

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1 INTRODUCTION: ASSATA SHAKUR AND MARIELLE FRANCO

As an Afro-Brazilian, I know many examples of Black revolutionaries who lived their lives struggling inside challenging territories. Those revolutionaries usually found their construction of autonomy and freedom in activism. Revolutionaries such as Marielle Franco and Assata Shakur, among many others, saw class, racial, and gender struggle as a way to fight for themselves and garner rights for their respective communities.

Even though I am Latin American, I grew up with references to the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panthers Party in the U.S. when discussing Black liberation. Through those movements, I saw how power relations surrounding racial dilemmas affected other diasporic people outside my territory, especially when they were looking for freedom. However, we are all fighting the same enemy: racism, this enemy per se does not have one unique face. Thus, we need different strategies of resistance and resilience to survive its traps.

History has shown me that the results of the fight for justice and freedom, which implies questioning and revolting against racism and patriarchy, result in one of three options: jail, exile, or death. This phenomenon can be observed through the history of other Black liberation movements. Ex: Apartheid, Haitian Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th century, etc. These outcomes are seen for the likes of Steve Biko in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, and most importantly for this study, Marielle Franco and Assata Shakur. This fact shows how Brazil and the United States have many similar tensions in their race relations and produce violent political strategies against some specific individuals. Thus, the way Black people in both of these countries constructed themselves politically is affected by their unique relationship with colonialism, sexism, and racism. Frantz Fanon refers to these lingering issues as the “germs of colonialism.” According to Fanon (1952), imperialism leaves behind “germs of rot which we

must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well.” The traces that slavery left in their country's history create and perpetuate multiple politics that decimate, hurt, and demobilize Black communities socially, psychologically, and politically (Shakur 1973; Hanchard 1994). The choice of these two revolutionaries for this thesis, Assata Shakur and Marielle Franco, is aligned with the fact that they show through their life stories how Black women struggle to build themselves as subjects within the diaspora. Thus, with much resilience and resistance, their existence was still constantly threatened and their narratives were constantly silenced by the necropolitics of their countries.

To psychoanalysis, the best way to understand how an individual is subjectively constructed and is affected by power relations is by listening to his voice and understanding his narrative (Kilomba, 2008). Choosing Marielle Franco's documentary *Marielle: The Crime That Shook Brazil* and Assata Shakur's memoir *Assata: An Autobiography* as subjects of my analysis I aim to engage in an exercise of producing knowledge and visibility to Black revolutionaries and also building power through essential characters of the world's Black feminist history.

Shakur and Franco were activists fighting for racial and gender equality. The first, born in Queens, New York, in 1947 is on the list of most wanted terrorists by the FBI. On the official website of the United States government organization, Shakur is described as “part of a revolutionary extremist organization known as the Black Liberation Army” a group described as having radical and anti-U.S.A government ideology. In the early 70s, she was already a leading name in the Black anti-racist movements in the U.S.A, linked to the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, until she was sentenced to life imprisonment for the death of a police officer – despite the case lacking sufficient evidence for a conviction. For four decades, she is still considered a fugitive, and the FBI offers a reward of up to a million dollars for information

that can lead to her apprehension. Between the years of 1971 and 1973, she was charged with various crimes, from an armed robbery at a hotel to the kidnapping and murder of a drug dealer. After trying, unsuccessfully, to prove her innocence through the United States justice system and being a victim of numerous violent acts inside prison, she had to flee the country and seek exile in Cuba in 1980. The information we have today is that she still lives in the country. Exile was the only possible way out of imprisonment and the only way she could survive and search for a possible “freedom.”

The second, Marielle Franco, was a 38-year-old councilwoman, queer, and openly feminist activist who became a national symbol after her murder on March 14, 2018, in Brazil. Marielle's death remains a mystery to this day. However, the several pieces of evidence left after the execution led her family and many politicians, activists, and members of the Brazilian population to believe that she was murdered by the police. More precisely, her death was part of a grand scheme devised by the *milícia* involving even former president Jair Bolsonaro, a fact that gives her death an even greater political meaning. *Milícias* are armed groups, almost always formed by police, members of the armed forces, and/or ex-police and ex-military, who terrorize *favela* residents in Rio de Janeiro into paying for their safety inside their own communities. Franco had a major concern with ending police brutality in the *favelas* of Rio, besides being an active politician who fought constantly against sexism and racism through public policies and actions. Bringing attention to the injustice happening inside those communities may be the major reason behind her persecution and death.

The objective of this study is to analyze the possible encounters and cultural mismatches between Assata Shakur's autobiography and Marielle Franco's documentary, showing how both figures were persecuted and targeted for their social position and political beliefs. Both American

and Brazilian justice systems failed to judge and act judiciously in their cases, leading these women to different violations, such as exile and death. The necropolitics in both countries are marked by the judgment that was made in these two lives based on racist and sexist premises. These same systems mark Black bodies as dangerous, unimportant, and invisible. Bodies that have no right to life, freedom, or redemption.

Through analyzing their narratives, this thesis will focus on the political fight for equality in their lives as a process of recognizing the self and gaining autonomy. Black Feminist Thought and other racially and politically inclined theories will be used in this work to analyze the strategies these women built to find authenticity and new ways of surviving in an unsettling environment. I aim to demonstrate the discourses surrounding their existences and how they influenced their construction of self-identity and the production of their *escrevivências* (Evaristo, 1994). Even though they were both constantly silenced they found a way to be heard and make their voices echo for future generations.

This work is an exercise to point out different narratives surrounding bodies and minds who lived their lives fighting against racism and patriarchy, it is an anthropological analysis of how society affects the existence of Black women and how we interact with the politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, our survival strategies remain in this world due to our politics of resistance and authenticity. With them, we find gaps within a system that constantly suffocates us and aims to erase our existence.

Thus, this work investigates examples of Black womanhood in the United States and Brazil, aiming to flourish this discussion into a political manifesto. A manifesto on navigating a territory embraced by a system of oppression. Therefore, fomenting more conversations about

Black diasporic people, especially about how we build community and new ways of living in extremely different, but yet similar, territories.

1.1 Literature Review

This literature review will go through some concepts regarding race, gender, and psychoanalysis in the past fifty years, aiming to explore how the subjectivity of diasporic Black women both in Brazil and the U.S.A. are affected by racism, patriarchy, necropolitics, and colonialism. Another point is to explain the process of the construction of racial identity and racial identification in Brazil and in the United States, especially the distinctions between the two nations. The literature review will summarize the authors that explore how political ideology, gender, and racial consciousness interact. Lastly, this will point out different aspects of the memoir of an African American Revolutionary and the Documentary of an Afro-Brazilian politician which shows the differences and similarities in their social construction and how their countries' justice systems affected their political fight for equality and freedom.

1.1.1 What does it mean to be a Black woman? Escrivências and Authenticity

The Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo coined the term “*escrevivências*” to represent the process Black women go through to write about themselves and put their stories into the world. The term points to a double dimension: it is a life written in each person's experience, as well as someone who writes about their world from a particular perspective. *Escrivivências* can evoke a voice of a collective self through a singular narrative, a story that can be shared through others from similar backgrounds and experiences of culture, gender, and race (Leite & Nolasco, 2019). The term created by the Brazilian intellectual is the combining of the words “to write” and “to live” in Brazilian Portuguese and it is linked to the idea of a narrative contaminated with the subjectivity of exclusively Black women. This idea can also live outside literature since Black

women can tell stories through their voices. In this concept, creating narratives is the search for one's unique perspective of existence beyond the social stereotypes attributed to them.

Escrevivências evoke authenticity, mainly the aspect of finding the self within the racist and sexist structures that name and define unreal constructions without allowing the individual to make their own choices and follow their own directions. The concept can be linked to the work *Becos da Memória* (1980) by Conceição Evaristo, which was published in Brazil for the first time in 2006, despite having been written in the 1980s. In *Becos da Memória* the author created a narrative that would allow the real history of people in the *favelas* to circulate aligned with memory and fiction. Evaristo was in a way rewriting the history of Afro-Brazilians from the *favelas*. As an attentive and caring spectator, she creates *escrevivências* of narratives from individuals made invisible by a racist and perverse system. Along with *Quarto de Despejo* (1960), the first book written by a Black woman *favelada* Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Becos da Memória* is one of the most important works created by Black women in the country. Conceição Evaristo's work is inhabited, above all, by socially excluded people from the *favelas*, street dwellers, and prostitutes who compose a picture of a portion of society that is often ignored showing the relationship with the other side of the sphere, composed of businessmen, wealthy women, police officers, government officials, among others (Oliveira, 2019)

Despite the multiplicity of terms and interpretations applied to authenticity, ultimately, what is consistent across the literature is that authenticity encapsulates what is genuine, and true (Newman, 2019, p.2). When Black women write their memoirs, talk about themselves, and search for Black spaces they search for ways of fighting the status quo and choosing their own path. Therefore, authenticity in the narratives of Black women mainly is the identity they can build beyond the racial and gendered stereotypes surrounding their history and culture.

Narrative inquiry is the epistemological assumption that humans make sense of random experiences by the imposition of story structures that rely on social events (Bell, 2002, p.207). A particular narrative is structured through the memoir of Assata Shakur and the documentary of Marielle Franco. It relates to the social and psychological experiences of Black womanhood in two major countries that have particular post-slavery and diasporic realities. Their stories contain similarities but simultaneously share unique views of a separate existence that can not be replicated, explained, or objectified. Thus, there is a need to examine their stories and become aware of their underlying assumptions to understand their social context and how this context affected the outcome of their lives. Stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events; they do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong peers and community narratives (Bell, 2002, p.208).

The narratives of these two women were also created in the context of marginality. Marielle Franco, as a woman born in a *favela*, was an exception to the rule for having an important space within Brazilian politics. In "A Black Feminist Statement" of The Combahee River Collective it is stated that "Black women have a good understanding of both racism and sexism, but because of the everyday constrictions, their lives cannot risk struggling against them both," therefore inserting the Black women's agenda of struggle in any debate is fighting patriarchy and racism at the same time. Black women's periphery position or their placement at the bottom of society's pyramid of power is brought to attention as a situation that implies a position of an outsider. This position of an outsider can produce a leap into revolutionary action, also through Black women's freedom can create the destruction of all systems of oppression leading to the freedom of others who are not in the same political category (Smith & Smith, 1977, p. 5,6). Thus, Franco made creative use of her marginality, gaining the status of the

“outsider within” in the Brazilian political context. A position that gives Black women a special point of view regarding the self, family, and society (Collins, 1986). By living on the margins, Black women develop a particular way of seeing reality.

Inside this perspective, a few concepts of Black Feminist Thought will be explored to understand how authenticity is built in the reality of Black women, such as 1. the self-definition and self-evaluation of Black women; 2. the interconnected nature of oppression; and 3. the importance of Black women's culture (Collins, 1986), both within African-American and Brazilian societies.

What is it to be a Black woman? There are socio-historical definitions from different theories, such as psychoanalysis and sociology, which view and try to define multiple answers to this question. What it is to be a Black woman is a question with no singular answer. Angela Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), questions this place of the feminine and describes an unusual differentiation. There is a difference between what femininity means to white and Black women. Sojourner Truth, a militant of the American abolitionist struggle, gave a speech in 1851 at the Women's Convention in Ohio, raising a question: Ain't I a woman? In that historical speech, Sojourner Truth vehemently argued the place in which Black women were thought of and understood within American culture at the time. She pointed out that white women received privileges such as not having to perform paid tasks or having men open doors for them to enter without effort. Treatment resulted from a supposed belief in these women's intellectual and physical inferiority. However, these behaviors were never extended to Black women, which brought the question: Are Black women part of womanhood too? If so, do they belong in a different category?

In Freud's *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1901-1905), we observe the feminine term as a position, and this position is a synonym for passivity. According to the psychoanalyst, if it were necessary to give the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" a more specific content, the libido would be normatively masculine. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud explains that women would have fewer social interests than men, and among them, the faculty of sublimating instincts became weaker (Freud, p. 119, 1923). Diverting sexual instinctual forces from sexual goals to new goals is a process which is called "sublimation", a concept understood as one of the leading destinations of the libido; it is a process in which the libido is channeled to a non-sexual target, such as intellectual work and activities valued by culture (Freud, 1901-1905, p.80). Freud explains in this same text that after the birth of the family and in the course of history: "women enter quite early in opposition to the current of culture and extend their retarding and diminishing influence" over the development of civilization. Within this logic, Freud explains to us that "women would represent the interests of the family and sexual life; cultural work is increasingly transformed into the duty of men, it assigns them ever more difficult tasks, forcing them to carry out instinctual sublimations, to which women are less apt." Women did not sublimate because they were trapped in a single place of existence; they could not make the same psychic movement as men (Freud, 1923, p.119).

Work always occupied a significant space in the lives of Black women, and this fact comes from a pattern established and inherited from slavery. As enslaved people, Black women had every other aspect of their existence overshadowed by compulsory labor. Therefore, the starting point of any exploration of Black women's lives in slavery would be assessing their role as workers (Davis, 1986, p.17). This demonstrates a difference not yet observed by

psychoanalysis: the Black woman has never occupied this psychic place of passivity because, for her, work has always been a common demand. In slave labor, Black women experienced equality with men, in production, in force, in beatings, many of which were followed by death. Also, the non-submission of enslaved women, during and after abolition, points to the anti-slavery movement, which gave rise to Black feminism, despite the inclusion of white women in these movements (DAVIS, 1986, p. 47). Black women have always been equally responsible for the survival of their community.

Gwen Berger (1995), in the article “Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks” draws attention to the relationship of the Black female body as nonexistent within psychology. From a dialogue with readings of Freud and Fanon, the author points out how the fantasies produced in the white imagination are capable of delimiting the place of the Black person in the enunciation of his history. Berger describes that when Fanon talks about Black people he uses the nomination of Black men. Similar to when Freud refers to humanity as mankind, but in this case, the white masculine. In both cases, Black women do not exist, except when they are in a close relationship with manhood.

The reference to the title of this work “Becoming Somebody” emerges from the discussion of how Black women build their subjectivities in a society that constantly destroys their psyche. The Afro-Brazilian psychoanalyst Neusa Santos Souza in the book “*Tornar-se Negro*” highlights the idea of an unattainable ideal of the Ego for Black people. For the author, the Ego acts as a mediator between the Id (unconsciousness) which represents the primitive and instinctual part of the mind, and the Super-ego a moral conscience based on laws and cultured beliefs of the external world. The Ego creates a game of forces between the Id's instincts and the world's external demands, which rules based on the set of laws that constitute us as individuals

(Santos, 1983). However, this relationship is different for Black people because racism constitutes our psyche from the moment we face culture through contact with language. For instance, in a Eurocentric society, Black people are not the standard of beauty, intelligence, and success, therefore they feel disadvantaged compared to white people and are unconsciously aware of this phenomenon since early childhood. Thus, these social and psychological aspects affect the way Black people introject ideas in their minds, reject their own characteristics, and face psychological suffering due to feelings of invisibility and lack of recognition.

Grada Kilomba (2019) states that this relationship with racism was born with colonialism. The book *Plantation Memories* by Grada Kilomba says that the process of speaking in Black people's lives was affected and legitimately negated by colonialism. Thus, it is necessary to reclaim and rename the self through discourse, talking about the self is a process of becoming which can be related to the title of this work. To become somebody is also to reclaim and own Black people's existence through their own definitions. Kilomba states that she wrote *Plantation Memories* in the process of knowing herself. For her, writing was a form of becoming a subject and giving light to the psychological reality of everyday racism. Through Kilomba's narrative, we can see the great importance of creating a different story based mainly on the knowledge of Black people's own reality and perspectives (p.173). The way Kilomba draws attention to the idea of silence as a norm in the lives of Black people and portrays speech and creation as power can be related to the writings of Katherine McKittrick in *Dear Science* (2020) and *Demonic Grounds* (2006). McKittrick aims to bring a way of fighting for liberation through narratives and stories, demonstrating different forms of Black humanity and Black "livingness." Therefore, she references citations and communication as a process of sharing what we know, as Black people, those exchanges are practical ways of living in this world (McKittrick, 2020,

p.xv). This thought can be immediately associated with the way Kilomba talks about history, trauma, and language. This thesis proposes listening to and writing about Black people using their own words and memoirs; exploring the Black experiences and their ability to find a living in a Eurocentric world. For Kilomba, this process characterizes identity and marks colonialism's presence in contemporary society while it dismembers its power. Memory is important as an instance of suffering and also emancipation in Black women's lives, McKittrick draws some symbolism around the memory of the slave ship. This memory comes as a sort of materiality that contains and regulates and sometimes hides Black humanity. The slave ship is part of the geography of Black bodies, as much as colonialism, however, the individuals that stayed inside were bound to the walls of the ship; they were neither seeable nor liberated subjects (McKittrick, 2006, p.xi). Memory is linked to geography, since Black people produce space, thus producing the meaning around the space they create surrounding the memory of slavery. The physicality of the slave ship contributes to the process of social concealment and dehumanization; however, Black subjectivity is not swallowed up by the ship itself. Rather, the elements surrounding the ship including Black people themselves make geography what it is, as the author states "a location through which a moving technology can create differential and contextual histories" (McKittrick, 2006, p.xii). Thus, thinking in the states of "Becoming Somebody," Black women and their lives are necessarily geographic and struggle with discourses that erase and "despatialize" their sense of place (McKittrick, 2006, p.xiii).

1.1.2 Racial Relations and Racial Identity in Brazil and the United States

Several historical and sociological studies speak about the false racial democracy in Brazil (Nascimento 1978; Jessé 2000; Hanchard 1994); despite claims of the contrary from people who see Brazil from the outside, the racial tensions there produce an unsettling

environment for the healthy development of racial identity among Black Brazilians. The interactions between Black and white people may be seen with fewer boundaries and major separations compared to the United States (Hanchard, 1994, p.5). Racism operated for both countries through necropolitics, racism inside this mechanism is a policy that presupposes the distribution of the human species into groups and subgroups, seeking to establish a biological break between one and the other (Mbembe, 2003, p.128), a structural logic that chooses who should live and who should die.

The United States had the Jim Crow laws which separated Americans by race from 1881 to 1964 in 26 southern states. The term “Jim Crow” commonly refers to a system that preserved white supremacy from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The most familiar features of the Jim Crow laws were: segregated spaces, racial discrimination, disfranchisement, and lynching—which functioned together to solidify and extend white political and economic power. However, Jim Crow is more closely associated with the South, it was a national institution in which the practices and policies that protected white privilege varied by region (Stephen, 2015, p.3). Segregation formed a different construction of community and racial identity among Black Americans. However, Brazil, even though they do not have an openly segregated society, they have historically allowed the reproduction of social inequalities while simultaneously promoting a false promise of racial equality. This notion was linked to the fact that white and Black people shared all spaces and were never segregated through law in the country. Brazil has the largest population of African descent outside of Nigeria. Today, 50.7% of the population define themselves as Black or mixed race, compared with 91 million or 47.7% who label themselves as white (IBGE, Census, 2010). Most Black Americans identify as Black alone and non-Hispanic (Cox & Thamir, 2022). Americans had a shared history with social and

collective racially specific places such as churches and schools where they could share and discuss subjects related to racial identity (Hanchard, p. 83). Brazil did not have this collective space structure. The inaccessibility of spaces to gather, discuss, complain, or acknowledge racial problems in Brazil exist in order to promote a greater social alienation over racism and the country's history. Silence is one of the multiple forms in which the power derivative of a colonial past behaves (Loureiro, 2020, p.54).

In Abdias Nascimento's book *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro: Processo de um Racismo Mascarado* (*The Genocide of the Black Brazilians: Process of a Masked Racism*), the author defines the concept of racial democracy as a policy that is infiltrated deeply into societies' discourses. He explains that if there is any reaction of Black Brazilians to the dreadful situation of racism in Brazil they would automatically face two drawbacks: an official position of the country's policies which would consider racial activities subversive and dangerous, and the general attitude of the population that would consider any collective actions constructed by Black Brazilians something that would lead to division and hate of their opposites (Nascimento, 1977, p.92). The author also points out that the unspoken objective of this ideology is to deny Black Brazilians the possibility of self-definition, removing from them the means of racial identification, therefore demobilizing their tactics of social organization. Thus, in Brazil, it is rare to have a space where Black people can feel safe to discuss racial issues without feeling intimidated or demobilized by white people who, inside and outside institutions, judge their practices as reverse racism. This fact can be associated with the absence of major social movements questioning the racial inequalities of the country such as The Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), the Black Panther Party (1966-1982), and the Black Lives Matter Movement (2013 - present).

The myth of racial democracy and the denial of genocide against Black people strengthen racial inequalities and reinforce the silencing of the importance of race in social relations. In the U.S.A., the church is one of the examples of places that many Black people consider racially safe. In some states in America, it is possible to find schools and social spaces that are only frequented by black people and have the purpose to acknowledge the existence of racism which indeed can affect the construction of their self-esteem and racial identity. Munanga (2003) conceptualizes identity in three ways. The first is the legitimizing identity, which is formed by dominant institutions and aims to maintain the status quo. The second is the identity of resistance, which is elaborated by people who are devalued, and humiliated and seek claims to survive in the face of oppression by dominant institutions. The third is the project-identity, it is the construction of a new identity, which is a consequence of the political claims that this subject makes within society. Those identities are dynamic. Thus, one is a result of the other. Freire (1987), in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, narrows the relationship that the oppressor has with the oppressed in society. He states that there is a structure that sustains this context, and this structure consolidates and maintains the dominant reality, regardless of who is the oppressor and who is oppressed. For Black Brazilians, the control of their identity by the discourses of racial democracy is one of the structures which sustains their oppression. The knowledge of who you are and the history of your community is an important fact for the construction of political conscience and racial identity. Thus, the primary purpose of this politic was to end the possibility of constructing a racial conscience among Black people to make their actions impossible (Souza, 2000, p.2).

Personal self-esteem is strongly influenced by micro-social relations with family, friends, and the community. The article “Self-Perceptions of Black Americans: Self-Esteem and Personal Efficacy” explains that many empirical studies show that African Americans have self-esteem equal to or greater than that of white Americans. However studies of race and self-esteem exhibit a contradictory pattern, early studies argue that being Black is associated with poor self-esteem while later studies suggest the opposite (Hughes & Demo, p. 133, 1989). Thus in the late 1960s and early 1970s, sociologists argued that Black Americans were keenly aware that discrimination affected how they were perceived by society, therefore they were responsible for the failure of the average Black individual to enjoy life (Hughes & Demo, p. 135, 1989).

For African-Americans racial self-esteem is produced by a combination of education, interracial contact, and ideological processes, thus they understand their racial identity related to their community. Self-esteem is a product of how that person believes others see him, also a consequence of individuals comparing themselves with others and making positive or negative evaluations (Hughes & Demo, p. 134, 1989). In Brazil, studies on the self-esteem of Black people are few, which already denounces the lack of access that those individuals have to the academic and research environment and to think about themselves and their relationship with the racial system of their country. However, the studies found that the self-esteem of Afro-Brazilians is affected by the lack of possibility of building a critical awareness about what it means to be Black (Julio, 2011).

There is a greater sense of identity in the United States, producing major importance to Blackness compared to Brazil. For instance, no matter who they are, their economic circumstances, or their educational backgrounds, most Black Americans say being Black is extremely important to how they think about themselves (Cox & Tamir, 2022). In Brazil, the

misleading aspect of self-identity leads a part of the population to deny their blackness. When affirmative action came along in 2003, 41 years after the United States implemented its policy, more social and political discussions about race and white privilege started to happen nationally. Compared to the intellectual production of critical race thinking in the US, the idea of a Black race has only recently gained importance in national debates about inequality in Brazil. (Azevedo, 2018).

1.1.3 Daughters of Diaspora: Body, Mind, and Territory

Black women undergo a process of constructing consciousness distinct from other women. Race, class, and gender are one of the articulations that mark this subject. Thus, their lives are seen through intersectionality, a social and political position where power relations come, collide, interlock, and intersect (Crenshaw, 1989). This particular way of existing is traced by body, mind, and territory. Black women in Brazil have a lot of elements in their language and culture inherited from African countries and Indigenous people, for this reason, they created a distinct identity for Black womanhood (González, 1988). Black American women have their realities shaped by imperialism and Westernized conceptions of gender, race, and social relations. In the United States, a Black feminist presence started in a connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s, although racism and elitism within the movement diminished and erased their participation (Smith & Smith, p.2). In 1973 Black feminists felt the necessity to start a Black feminist group, a space where they could address their particular issues and engage in their own politics. Black feminist politics in the United States were also active and connected to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. These movements included Civil Rights, Black Nationalism, and the Black Panther Party (Smith & Smith, p.2).

Thus, for Western culture bodies depart from two conceptions: the body with biological characteristics and the body that is occupied by the Western culture, which can be such an example with expressions like "political body" and "social body" (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Both Brazil and the United States created different senses of what this political body is, and each built a consciousness of what the feminine is. However, Black women from both countries find similarities in the way they create a revolution and resist and struggle against patriarchy and racism.

The concept of feminism emerged as one of the ways Black women could help each other to resist male domination and racism, reeling against patriarchal thinking (hooks, 2014). The creation of Black women's identity is deeply rooted in controlling images and harmful narratives that target them in different dimensions. However, those tropes also help them search for emancipation and self-representation (Collins, 1986). The stories of Shakur and Franco help us understand how controlling images work in a racialized society and how they redirected Black women to know themselves and find authenticity in territories that are extremely different although carrying the same oppressive and complex structures. Terms such as "self-definition" and "self-evaluation" can explain a Black women's process of understanding their place in the world, this process of becoming can be transnational and not necessarily linked through territory but through gender and race. Self-evaluation is a tool used to know the self and find their identity inside a "misogynoir" society, a mechanism we use towards authenticity and self-recognition (Collins, 1986).

Moya Bailey, with the term misogynoir, points out how social media and tv can shape prejudiced ideas about Black women; this term centers on how Black women experience misogyny. Bailey discusses and analyzes the negative images of Black women in traditional

media, such as their depiction as angry and hypersexual individuals (Bailey, 2021, p. 11). Often these representations, through visual culture and digital spaces, harm the way these women see themselves, affecting their mental health and construction of identity. The feminist ideology of Black women emerges as a possibility of facing the structures of racism and denying the discourses that limit who they are. Black women also do this through the act of occupying spaces of power and fighting against social and political oppression. Katherine McKittrick (2006) states that rebellions, slave narratives, fiction, political work, feminist/womanist criticism, and academic endeavors are also some of the ways Black feminists respond to oppression (McKittrick, 2006, p.45).

For Sueli Carneiro (1995) the rape of Black Brazilian women during the colonial time by white masters constitutes the reality of an instrument of exchange for this woman within Brazilian society until today (p.546). There is in the country a hypersexualized exaltation of Black women which inserts her in a role of exotification and sexual servitude. Therefore, at the same time, this notion is seen as a devaluation of Black Brazilian women's place in the social field. In the same article, the author points out the dehumanization of Black women, which sometimes works as an element of affirmation of the humanization of the Black man, inscribing him in the dominant male white logic, an instrument also reinforced by the policy of miscegenation and the myth of racial democracy (Carneiro, 1995, p.551).

For Lélia Gonzales (1985), racism is constituted as a symptom that characterizes a Brazilian cultural neurosis. It reinforces an idea of the invisibility of race, at the same time race issues constitute the history of the country. All these aspects constitute the place of Black women within the Brazilian context. Sexism includes this woman in fixed categories in the discourse with the notions of *mulata*, or housemaid, and the Black mother, which can be associated with

the stereotype of the “mammy” here in the United States. The ‘Black Mammy’ was a household servant who generally had specific duties to perform, her caricature implied that Black women were only fit to be domestic workers. Their duties during slavery were connected with the care of the children of the white family and being an expert in the home; thus she filled any role that white people needed in the house, including being the family’s wet nurse (Sewell, p. 310, 2013)

The book *The Sisters are Alright: Changing the Broken Narrative of Black Women in America* by Tamara Winfrey Harris demonstrates how different stigmatization narratives are inserted in Black women's history. It was always accepted that Black women can care for other people’s children, as a role that became natural. During slavery, cooking, cleaning, and *mommying* was a task strictly for Black women (Harris, 2021, p.74). Those ideals inside the discourses of both countries became an ethnic character and an obligatory profession (Gonzales, 1985, p.224).

Black women often find that their sexuality and bodies are perceived through society’s biases rather than on their own terms. Colonialism has a role in shaping this idea of viewing the shape of Black women's bodies as a confirmation of innate hypersexuality (Harris, 2021, p.36,37). In Brazil, the term *mulata* has a similar perception as shown through the example of Saartjie Baartman, to many known as Sarah Baartman, a Khoisan South African called Hottentot Venus, who was stolen from her country and dragged to Europe to serve as an experiment by white scientists. Sarah Baartman died on December 29, 1815. Her brain, skeleton, and sexual organs continued to be displayed in a Paris museum until 1974. Her remains were only returned to Africa in 2002. She was an object with no subjective value to the colonialism agenda.

In the article “Colonialismo, Gobernabilidad y Feminismos Poscoloniales” the author Liliana Suárez Navaz points out that colonialism is not an outdated historical period, it is still

present in our reality and actively dictates social structures and how women navigate in their territory. For her, colonialism is a seed that still bears fruit, reproducing a characteristic administration of thought which sustains a system of extraction of the majority of the population of the world, including the Americas (Navaz, 2008, p.21). Thus, there is a globalization of this colonialism that has perverse effects on women. These dynamics push women, especially Latin American and Black women towards poverty, new forms of migration, control, and violence. It is necessary to propose a postcolonial space marked by linguistic-cultural bridges, which could generate spaces of protagonism, response, and resistance to the people who always stayed at the bottom of the pyramid. A more fertile ground for resistance, what Boaventura de Sousa Santos defines as an “epistemology of the south,” to draw up alliances and multiple decolonization strategies (Navaz, 2008, p.22).

1.1.4 Triple Consciousness; Fallings and the Subjectivity of Afro-Diasporic Women

People of African descent, especially diasporic, have been subjected to a peculiar form of racial slavery through cultural and political forms of inequality that are put upon their community. The sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B Du Bois defined double consciousness as the psychological conflict experienced by Black Americans in an oppressive society (Du Bois, 1903). Black men live with what he calls two souls, wearing two ideas in one body: Americanness and Blackness. Double consciousness is a position not only occupied by Americans but occupied by Black individuals living in diasporic societies (Fanon, 1952). A Black person born in a racist society who suffered the consequences of the diaspora is thought to negate their identity and connect with ideas of whiteness. Black people are confronted by the idea of being accepted into a white society because they are inserted into this narrative from the

moment they encounter language. This third-person understanding of identity refers to the world's knowledge of Black people; this identity unfolds through legends and myths, narratives that remained as a direct legacy of slavery. Thus, changing this narrative is the only way to claim the right to humanity (Lorde, 1997).

American Black feminists came up with the concept of triple consciousness, arguing that Black women view themselves through three lenses and not two: Americanness, Blackness, and womanhood (Welang, 2008). These women are confronted with an impossible task. If they are rescued from the myth of Blackness, the myth of the woman traps them, and the same happens the other way around (White, 1994). One of the lenses of triple consciousness is nationality since America represents the position of a subject in a colonized society. To address this phenomenon in Latin America, the work of Lélia Gonzalez, a Black feminist and Brazilian anthropologist, creates the concept of *Amefricanidade* (Gonzales, 1988). Gonzalez negated the idea of a unique identity of *latinidade* from the Americas (South, Caribbean, and Central), arguing that Indigenous and African elements structured the culture of all Afro-Latinos, different from what it does to Latinos of European descendants. She defines *Amefricanidade* as a historical process of intense cultural dynamic (which includes resistance, reinterpretation, and creation of new forms) referenced in African models that shape the construction of ethnic identity (Gonzalez, 1988).

Anthropological psychology analyzes the policies and discourses that surround racial and sexist notions and practices that affect Black women's mental health and well-being. The policies of resistance (authenticity) are the narratives and actions created against the discourses surrounding people marked by gender and race.

Psychological Anthropology points out that patterns of culture can instigate or influence a way of life. People use some principles in cultures to guide their actions, build their lives, and

help make sense of their existence (Tomas, 1975, p.46). Thus, centuries of living under the psychological stresses of slavery, politics of segregation, colonialism, and genocide are bound to impact cognitive functioning and manifest in what we know as mental illness (Joseph, 2022, p.31). Emotional experiences are constitutive in constructing the political sphere. Emotions can be potential resources for political thought and practice (Ahmed, 2004).

A view of mental health involving politics is centered in the book *Public Feelings* by Ann Cvetkovich. In this book, she argues that discussing Depression among women is also an act of activism. This discussion emerges from the necessity of finding ways of surviving disappointment and reminding ourselves of the persistence of radical visions and ways of living. When we talk about Depression, we pass on strategies for survival (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 7). Centering our feelings as valid as our productivity is an exercise we need to do constantly to dismantle the pain and the violence that racism inflicts upon us. Racialized and gendered stereotypes affect Black women physically and mentally (Jerald et al., 2017); there is an effort necessary to cope with discrimination, but such action depletes the self-regulatory resources needed to engage in healthy habits and avoid unhealthy ones. The self-regulatory theory comes from behavioral and cognitive psychology. It explains how individuals optimize their adaptation in order to increase their chances of getting what they want from their environments (Mithaug, D. E. 1993). Multiple studies (Lewis et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2022; Jerald et al., 2017) prove that Black women experience gendered racial discrimination based on others' perceptions of their behavior, reinforcing coping mechanisms that degrade their health, like drinking and self-harm. Black women in the United States are more likely to suffer from chronic physical and mental health conditions due to racism and patriarchy. This likelihood of physical and mental deterioration for Black women in the US is exclusive to them, and not replicated in other women

in the country. Thus, in Brazil, scholars point to racism and discrimination as determinants associated with illness and death precocity of Black Brazilian women and men. The main element of this fact is the recognition of racism as one of the central factors in the production of inequities in health experienced by Afro-Brazilians, from all regions of the country, affecting their educational and income levels, at all stages of their lives (Werneck, 2016, p.540)

1.1.5 Necropolitics in the U.S.A. and Brazil

Achille Mbembe (2003) defines necropolitics as the material destruction of human bodies and populations and instrumentalization of human existence (p.14); thus, the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die (p.14). For this concept, refugee camps, prisons, and *favelas* have become a way the capitalist society created to govern unwanted populations. In the *favelas*, people can be controlled, harassed, and killed without any protection or possibility of great resistance. In Brazil, home is one of the places of police intervention, which kills Black people indiscriminately (Loureiro, 2020, p.55). There are many cases of police brutality in Brazil and some that include the murder of Black women are emblematic. Such as the case of Cláudia da Silva Ferreira, a resident of a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, who was shot while going to the bakery in a police operation in 2016. She died after being dragged, in an inhumane act, by a Military Police vehicle, which refused to help the wounded victim. Very similar cases are repeated annually in the country. For instance, in the case of Ágatha Félix, an 8-year-old girl, who was returning from a walk with her mother, and was killed in the car on the way home, she was also a resident of a *favela*, her murderer happened in Complexo do Alemão, a *favela* in the north of Rio de Janeiro. Agátha was not the only child to suffer from police violence, cases similar to hers are not uncommon. Other Black girls such as eight-year-old Anna Carolina de

Souza Neves and four-year-old Alice Rocha were killed in Rio de Janeiro by the police and their cases were not solved.

The same police brutality persistent in Brazilian culture exists in other Black communities, like those of the US. The African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS), created a report to bring awareness to the often invisible names and stories of Black women and girls in the United States who have been victimized by police violence. The discourse of necropolitics is present when the report points out the lack of meaningful accountability for the deaths of unarmed Black men that is extended to the deaths of unarmed Black women and girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p.2). The #SayHerName campaign was a project created in 2014 by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) to bring awareness of the invisible stories of Black women and girls who have been victimized by police violence. The data present in this project shows that Black women and girls as young as seven and as old as nine three have been killed by the police. The purpose of this campaign is to increase awareness surrounding police violence against Black women. Talking about who these women were, how they lived, and why they suffered at the hands of the police (AAPF, 2014). Cases such as Breonna Taylor, Gabriella Nevarez, Aura Rosser, Michelle Cusseaux, and Tanisha Anderson among many others are common and repetitive in American society. The systemic police brutality against Black people has a list of police officers who were not held accountable for their violent actions the same as in Brazil.

Black feminist activists actively speak out against the overreaching authority of police officials. Marielle Franco used her voice as a city council member, scholar, and activist to speak against police interventions in the *favelas*. Assata Shakur, a member of the Black Panther Party,

was incarcerated for her political beliefs and activism. Her stories exemplify concepts such as *state terror*, where the State persecutes, imprisons, and eliminates specific populations so that political and social contestations can be neutralized. She also discusses the concept of nanoracism which points out societies of separation based on identity and exclusion based on the difference (Mbembe, 2016). It distinguishes between its own citizens and the rest, kept at a firm distance since they are not seen to belong (Mbembe, 2016, p.23). Nanoracism is defined by a profound desire to stigmatize and, in particular, to inflict violence, to wound, to humiliate, and to degrade those not considered to be "one of us" (p.31). State terror and nanoracism are key issues that progress police violence against Black women in Brazil and the U.S. - as a result, these issues are integrated into feminist texts, and writings, and inspire multiple protest movements to further deconstruct the culture of African diasporic societies that criminalize and kill Black women.

The article "At The Head Of The State Lies The Skull Of A Dead Relative: The Figure Of The Sovereign In A Necropolitical Territory" analyzes necropolitics as a background of military action in peripheral regions of Brazil. The expectation of pacifying the *favelas*, something proposed by the police arising from a social demand of a racist society, creates a series of discourses that support the image of the enemy and justify the production of territories of death (Dantas, 2021, p.2). Where death is legal and has no social, judicial, or political consequences because they are poor Black bodies who, by reason of their nature, are invisible to Brazilian society.

Police discourses are centered on legitimizing the death of the enemy that threatens the formative values of the ideal citizen. The 2018 election speeches in Brazil focused precisely on eliminating threats, or rather, on the speech of "intolerance to crime" (Dantas, 2021, p. 4). For

example, candidates for the government of the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo emphasized the use of snipers inside the *favelas*, a policy of terrorism and war produced in that territory. The master's thesis written by Marielle Franco also brings attention to this problem "UPP - The Reduction of the *Favela* to three letters: An Analysis of the Public Security Policy of the State of Rio de Janeiro", talks about the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) implemented in Brazilian *favelas* for the purpose of fighting internally the crime of drug trafficking. These units, in Franco's view, reinforce the Penal State model. In this work, she comments on and investigates the meaning of the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) from the perspective of Public Security and based on the elements of Public Administration. Franco points out which relationships are contained in these Units and how they represent a change in security policies. The economic impact of installing UPPs is positive for real estate speculators, however, for *favela* residents means an almost unsustainable alteration in their budget (Franco, 2014, p.84). In addition to increasing the number of deaths within the *favelas*, the UPPs create an oppressive surveillance state for residents who are obligated to live under the watchful eye of the police on a daily basis. Thus, not knowing when the conflict between police and drug traffickers can suddenly start and affect their safety.

This separation between the *favelas* and the city creates an idea of an enemy, of subjects who need to keep themselves separate from "real" citizens who have more value within society. Mbembe explains the society of enmity, he traces the origins of contemporary hate, separation, and extermination through the colonial context. Security for Mbembe is enforced to maintain freedom, although freedom is merely a myth to reinforce the need for security. Thus, liberal democracies rely on religious reasoning to justify the security state, normalizing separation through camps. For the author nanoracism and hydraulic racism contribute to the construction of

the enemy, subjecting them to “daily racist injuries” that target the body, dignity, and self-esteem (Mbembe, p.58). Same for Fanon, Mbembe also argues that racism is both a form of entertainment and is linked to fantasies of annihilation which trap people into a narrative of subordination.

1.1.6 Activism and Resistance: Shakur and Franco

Marielle Francisco da Silva (1979-2018), known publicly as Marielle Franco, was a Brazilian politician Marielle graduated from PUC-Rio, and has a master's degree in Public Administration from the Federal Fluminense University (UFF). The theme of her dissertation was: “UPP: The Reduction of the *Favela* to three letters: An Analysis of the Public Security Policy of the State of Rio de Janeiro,” where she discussed the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) implemented in Brazilian *favelas* for the purpose of fighting internally the crime of drug trafficking. She started her activism in human rights after joining the community pre-university entrance exam and losing a friend, who was a victim of a stray bullet, in a shootout between police and drug dealers in the *favela* of Complexo da Maré. She also has worked in civil society organizations such as the Brazil Foundation and the Centro de Ações Solidárias da Maré (Ceasm). She coordinated the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights and Citizenship of the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro (Alerj) and built several collectives surrounding the topics of Feminism, Black pride, and the security of *favelas* residents. Franco was a Brazilian LGBTQ+ Black activist raised in Complexo da Maré, a group of sixteen *favelas* in Rio she was a member of the left-wing political party *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* [Socialism and Liberty Party] and had the potential to achieve national visibility due to her strong oratorical style and radical politics (Loureiro, 2020, p.51). She was determined in speaking against Black genocide in the *favelas* and criticizing police violence, which made her a target for the *milícia*.

Organizations formed primarily by military police and firefighters, in addition to prison guards – active or retired – who guarantee the safety of residents of *favelas* in exchange for a monthly fee. Milícias, in addition to imposing their service on the residents of *favelas*, add other requirements, such as the purchase of more expensive goods, payment of fees by alternative transport cooperatives that circulate in their territory, and the payment of high percentages for the purchase, sale, and rent of real estate (Zaluar & Conceição, 2008)

Marielle Franco was elected City Councilor in 2016. During her term she was an outspoken critic of police violence and played a key role on a council committee overseeing the military intervention in Rio, confronting elite discourses that legitimize violence against Black people (Loureiro, 2020, p.51). Franco was brutally executed on March 14, 2018, and in the days preceding her assassination, she publicly criticized the violent actions of the military police operating in Rio's *favelas*, including the murder of two young men. As a Black woman, feminist from an underprivileged background, raised in a *favela*, and a lesbian, she represented several minorities throughout her life and through her political work. Franco was 38 years old on the day of her death. The cause of her death remains unsolved by the judicial institutions in Brazil. Her interviews, story, and statements will be collected from the documentary "Marielle: The Crime That Shook Brazil," released in 2020 by Globoplay, a streaming television in Brazil. The documentary gathers testimonies from family members, political companions, and friends of Franco.

Assata Olugbala Shakur was born JoAnne Deborah Byron on July 16, 1947. When Shakur started studying more about her ancestors and the history of her people, she decided to change her name. More particularly on the first time she attended an event hosted by the Republic of New Afrika, a provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika a community

that advocated the establishment of a separate Black nation within the US, and made up of what is now South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana (Shakur, p.183), even though thinking that the idea of this group was wild and far out, Shakur enjoyed the feeling of being around them. Shakur states: "I wanted a name that had something to do with struggle, something to do with the liberation of our people." Thus, she decided on Assata Olugbala Shakur. Assata means "she who struggles," Olugbala means "Love for the people," and Shakur was chosen out of respect for Zayd's death and his family, it means "thankful". (Shakur, p.186). Shakur grew up in Jamaica, New York, and Wilmington, North Carolina (Perkins, 2000, p.3). As her political consciousness expanded, she became more committed to radical leftist politics and building a society free of race and class oppression in the United States. She was known nationally on May 2, 1973, when she and two other Black Panther Party activists: Zayd Shakur and Sundiata Acoli, were apprehended by state troopers while traveling. Zayd Shakur and one state trooper were injured and died in the conflict. Assata Shakur was severely injured and incarcerated after being charged with armed robbery, murder, and kidnapping, among other things. Besides her poems and moments from her childhood, her autobiography narrates her arrest, the days she spent in solitary confinement, her interactions with her cellmates, and the inhumane treatment she received from police officers. On March 25, 1977, she was convicted of the trooper's death and served six years in prison before her escape in 1979 from the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey. Shakur resides in Cuba, where she was granted political asylum. She wrote her memoir as a testimony on how to face racism; she is emphatic in affirming the importance of connection to community and uses her autobiography to educate, expose, correct, and to document and acknowledge a community of support (Perkins, 2000, p.10).

1.2 Research Methods

Even though they inhabit completely different continents, Assata Shakur and Marielle Franco have a very similar history as militants. Both suffered extreme consequences for having a political opinion and responding to the oppression caused by their positionality as Black women. This fact also placed their struggle against racism and sexism at the center of their political life. Marielle Franco was murdered at the age of 38. Thus, unfortunately, there is no autobiography written by her. However, her documentary shows her political path, her resilience, and how she could build her writings and fight against hegemonic discourses shaping the history of her country. This is the same for what we can see in the autobiography of Assata Shakur. The choice of these two revolutionaries for this thesis is aligned with the fact that they showed, through their life stories, how Black women struggle to build themselves as subjects within the diaspora and how the outcome of this search can be fatal. However, they demonstrated in their narratives strategies to escape racial and sexist stereotypes and how to protect their unique identities. Therefore, with much resilience and resistance, their life stories left huge legacies, even though they were constantly threatened and silenced by the necropolitics of their countries.

The methodology used for this research is Narrative Analysis. Narrative Analysis or Narrative Inquiry uses stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, and life experiences as the units of analysis to research and understand how people express themselves, interact with language, and create meaning in their lives. Moreover, narratives are part of sociology; the concept of narrative sociology states that understanding people and their patterns is more accessible through their stories. We may not be able to understand all specific patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty

understanding a story coming from another culture. Through narratives, we can understand how subjects build meaning about themselves (White, 1980, p.6).

Narratives are transcultural messages about the nature of reality shared between individuals in our efforts to describe our experience with language and discourses. This methodology also opens new possibilities for interpretative investigations that focus on social discursive and cultural diversity, more than just searching for patterns that explain human behaviors. It is understood that oral and written stories constitute a base for a framework that attempts to produce knowledge about the nature and conditions of our existence (White, 1980, p.3). This methodology will be applied to the study of the autobiography of Assata Shakur and the documentary on Marielle Franco.

Autobiographies and memoirs can be a form of monologue where the writer tells their story from their perspective while correlating with the events that occurred in their life. It is a story collected from someone's memory to translate knowledge into telling; a narrator, in this case, is a person showing their specific versions of reality determined by the situation in which the narrative takes place. Thus, stories are told from "positions" that happen in orders that are relational to different aspects of a person's life influenced by their location in the social discourse.

Since positions are political, Narrative Analysis is aligned with *escrevivências* to discuss strategies of survival and resistance in the experiences of Black women who had their lives committed to political and social change. This concept of *escrevivências* was created by the Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo and is a method of investigation and production of knowledge in the Human and Social Sciences. The word *escrevivências* crosses two words in Portuguese *escrever* and *vivência*, which means writing and living, as we live to write our stories

in a perspective that tries to escape racial and sexist stereotypes. I will call politics of *escrevivências* the way these two Black women, as transmitted through interviews and their memoirs, show their political engagement and forms of strengthening Black identity, throughout *escrevivências*, they show their understanding of what it is to be them in their unique view of it through their experiences and connections with others and culture.

The purpose of writing this paper is to analyze their narratives and, through them, be a storyteller, thus a conscious witness of records that cannot be erased and need to reverberate through time as a strategy for others. Franco and Shakur occupied a *Lugar de fala* (standpoint), a concept translated by Brazilian Black feminist philosopher Djamila Ribeiro (2017) in dialogue with feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, Sojourner Truth, Lélia Gonzalez, bell hooks, and others (Loureiro, 2020, p.51). *Lugar de fala* does not relate to an individual position; however, to an understanding of structural oppressions that deny the right to speech and the humanity of certain groups of individuals. This concept aligns with radical critical theory and decolonial thought and was developed from the discussion of the feminist standpoint, which points out that our placement and what we produce as Black women are directly related to our societal position (Collins, 2000).

In this analysis, I explore the stories presented by Franco and Shakur, pointing out similarities in their narratives and their standpoints regarding history, territory, political engagement, conflicts with the police, and states of power. The purpose is to analyze the core thesis of the story following the direction of (1) orientation: time, place, situation, and characters who were present in their narratives and influenced their story; (2) complicating action: sequence of events, where they are and how this affects the narrative; (3) evaluation: how the storyteller comments on meaning; thus, what I see as the purpose of their story and what meaning is

produced to Black feminist thought; and (4) resolution: outcome of the story, how their narratives came to an end.

To build an analysis of the documentary on Marielle Franco, the methodology chosen was Discourse Analysis to identify the discursive formation present in the documentary's narrative. Thus, the goal is to observe through the interviews and opinions of politicians, friends, family and suspects in the crime that led to Franco's death. The ideological implications evoked through the discourses are an essential part of the discourse analysis since the objects of study apprehended by that moment in time are partly extracted from the socio-historical context in which the discursive subjects act. Therefore, as a social practice, the discourse is presented with rules and norms which perform analysis and interpretation of the discourses present in the contents of the material studied in the six episodes of the mini-documentary series. The episodes succeeded in this order: Episode 1: "Maré July 27, 1979 - Lapa March 14, 2018," Episode 2: "Crowd," Episode 3: "Lines," Episode 4: "The Suspect," Episode 5: "The Prison," and Episode 6: "Questions." The methodology was developed in three moments: first, a collection of information about this series and its contexts, such as the city where it was filmed, the *favelas*, mainly Black and poor communities on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, and the political and personal life of Marielle Franco. I watched the documentary 4 times and chose moments that I thought were important to the theme of this thesis and chose other moments that I judged could be related to Shakur's autobiography. Along with that, I clipped some images from the documentary to talk about the territory where Franco was born and lived most of her life and images of the possible suspects in her murder. This approach aims to construct a familiarization with the object of study.

Afterward, there was a mapping and transcription of relevant statements by family members, politicians, friends, and suspects in the execution of Marielle Franco, thus, also mapping randomly selected scenes for the analysis of two categories: interviews and scenarios. Such categories made it possible to read this audiovisual product as a discourse. In this way, observing the language presented is a way to infer the functioning of an ideology (Mussalim, p. 104, 2001). Another essential aspect of this analysis concerns that what we define as knowledge refers to the particular construction or version of a phenomenon that has been given the label of truth within our society. Therefore, knowledge is directly associated with power. The power to act in a certain way, claim resources, control, or be controlled depends on the prevailing knowledge in society (Foucault, 1979).

Franco's documentary was produced by a significant Brazilian broadcaster called Globo, a major network in Brazil that was for a long time, founded racist, sexist, and harmful discourses against the Black community. Globo is the face of popular cases of racism and some of the programs broadcasted by the network starred, over the years, in several instances, racist discourses, which most of the time do not have greater repercussions (Freitas & Rei, 2012). The network produced a documentary about Franco because the politician received worldwide visibility after her murder. Thus, the consequences of Franco's unsolved crime brought a speculative and entertaining tone to the narrative, also engaging Globo to produce the first large-scale documentary made about the history of a Black woman.

The media has a significant role in the construction or deconstruction of "truths" that are organized by society. The media is also an institution that, since its formation, serves to maintain an ideological position of power of an elite group, organized to build situations where the hegemonic power of the wealthier social classes remained (Freitas & Rei, 2012). Therefore,

power is not only a possession of some but rather an effect of discourses (Nogueira, 2001). Black women's narratives do not fit the logic behind the discourses produced by the network Globo because they are not part of an elite group, however, Franco's death impacted Brazil so deeply that made the population demand persistently for answers and visibility to the case. A documentary of the size of Franco, a Black queer woman, draws attention to the political discussion that gained a different place after her death, but also to the population who was mobilized by her and what she stood for. Before Franco, Black women were never recognized in the major mediatic discourses as an open target of the necropolitics of the country. Franco's death led to an investigation of the justice system, police, and even the president in power at that time, Jair Bolsonaro. Questions such as "Why was Franco killed?" and "Who killed Franco?" were explored in her documentary among the implications of her history, where she was from, and what she said. This thesis will rely on those questions to analyze the possible encounters and cultural mismatches between Assata Shakur's autobiography and Marielle Franco's documentary.

2 WAR: DEATH

I believe in living.
 I believe in birth.
 I believe in the sweat of love
 and in the fire of truth
 (Shakur, p.I, 1987)

2.1 Enemy

The article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" by Kimberlé Crenshaw shows that intersectionality is a way to

articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy. Thus, intersectionality is also about location. Inside the capitalist racist system, Black bodies are constantly resisting subordination and with the addition of sexism and classism, Black women are, most of the time, forced to be located in the position of objectification. Therefore, when we locate and analyze women's narratives about themselves, we observe and locate socially the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Blackness (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1244). These dimensions circulate with institutional violence, patterns of racism, and also the uniqueness of an existence that can not be captured and unified by anything or anyone. Black identity has been constructed beyond the present time and brings an ancestral history anchored in practices of old racial policies. Old practices inherited from slavery are still perpetuated and naturalized within the penal and judicial systems in both the United States and Brazil. In this chapter, I will address how state necropolitics affected the lives of Marielle Franco and Assata Shakur, historical figures who lived at different times and in different countries but fought against a very similar patriarchal and racist system. These systems offered them exile and death when they asked for freedom and equality. They were individuals who in their search for justice found a fate of cruel and violent erasure from society, a society that was supposed to protect and view them as equal.

Politics took on a destructive aspect in the lives of Shakur and Franco. When they wanted to fight for the right to freedom and life, they were exiled, imprisoned, and killed. Mbembe defines the ultimate expression of sovereignty as the production of general norms by a body (nation) composed of free and equal men and women. In this nation men and women are considered capable of self-knowledge, self-awareness, and self-representation. Thus, politics is defined in two ways: a project of autonomy and the realization of agreement in a collective through communication and recognition. The author refers to politics as something that differs

from war. For him, reason is the truth of the individual, and politics is the exercise of reason in the public sphere. Therefore, the exercise of reason is equivalent to the exercise of freedom, a key element for individual autonomy (Mbembe, 2003, p.124).

The exercise of freedom is different for every group and community, as Audre Lorde said “in a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior.” For the author the inferior group is composed of Black and non-white people, working-class people, older people, and women. Shakur and Franco, were part of this systematic oppression, for occupying the place of Black women. For this reason, they found themselves victims of a necropolitical system that is responsible for silencing and pushing them into destruction.

The logic of colonization is still perpetuated in both the United States and Brazil. While emancipation from slavery illegalized the enslavement of Blacks, other policies were enacted to maintain Black suppression. Black individuals were still given the status of slaves due to the way they are targeted by police and society. This divestment results in a triple loss: loss of a “home”, loss of rights over one's body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is equivalent to absolute domination, alienation at birth, and social death, that is, the expulsion of humanity in general (Mbembe, p.131). For Shakur and Franco, the judiciary system and the police acted like a grinding machine that answered directly to the wills of a system that chooses which bodies must die or disappear and which bodies are entitled to live.

Franco's political activism was a sign of progression and justice for *favela* residents and women of Brazil. Her death at the hands of Brazilian *milícias* highlights the way in which

opposing political views, actions, and outcry are opposed by the racialized and oppressive system in Brazilian politics.

2.2 Maré 27 de julho de 1979-Lapa 14 de Março de 2018

The name of the first episode of the documentary about Marielle Franco describes her date of birth and death. Maré is the name of the *favela* where she was born in Rio de Janeiro. Her assassination took place in Lapa, a central avenue of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Complexo da Maré is an agglomeration of 16 *favelas* in the North Zone of Rio, the largest *favela* complex in the city. This *favela* is home to approximately 130,000 people, according to the 2010 census. Maré was officially recognized as a neighborhood in 1994. The opening scene of the documentary, before introducing the details of Franco's execution, shows Marielle celebrating New Year's Eve from 2017 to 2018. After that is the scene of Franco at Casa das Pretas, the last place she was seen alive. Casa das Pretas is a space created by a group of feminists who work to influence political actions to bring social and political changes to gender, race, and poverty issues in Brazilian society. Franco was there for a Women's Day lecture, as a self-proclaimed feminist this event was commonplace in her career as a councilwoman. Franco ends her lecture with a phrase from Audre Lorde, "I will not be free while another woman is a prisoner, even if her chains are different from mine." In this solitary space of understanding and affection among Black women, Franco smiles and appears calm, the women surrounding her pay undivided attention to her words and seem inebriated with her powerful presence. It is terrifying and strange to realize that no one there had any idea that this was the last moment Marielle Franco would be alive and that her last act was to speak to Black women about their right to freedom, their right to lose their chains.

After this scene, the documentary shows the messages that Franco and her driver exchanged with their companions who were waiting for them to get home. There is also Franco's advisor talking about the fear that entered her life after the counselor's death. Also, the countless voice memos they exchanged on their cell phones 15 days before the attack. Shortly after leaving that event Franco, her driver, and her assistant were accosted by two men who were following them for about four kilometers. The counselor was hit with three shots in the head and one in the neck and the driver was shot at least three times in the back, causing the death of both. Her assistant was hit by shrapnel, taken to a hospital, and released. She was the only one who survived.

The murder of Marielle Franco by Rio de Janeiro *milícias* is one of the ways the State has taken to carry out its racial and gender biases in committing crimes against human rights in Brazil's poor and Black communities. The police force in Rio de Janeiro is recognized for its power to annihilate the Other – that Other, who is usually Black and poor. Biopower, in this case, works as a social selection, an instrument of the State that chooses people who can live and those who can die. The *milícias* within the *favelas* play this role of social control that the State does not guarantee; in some *favelas*, they offer protection to residents to the same extent that they torture those who do not follow their laws. It is a two-way violence that gained greater visibility when Marielle Franco was executed for opposing *milícias* policies within those communities. Franco was drawing attention to the fact that residents were being executed for disobeying the laws of the *milícias* and their bodies hidden by this same extension of the police force. In a Facebook post, Franco denounced the deaths that were happening in a *favela* in Rio, days before his murder. She wrote:

We need to shout to let everyone know what is happening in Acari right now. The 41st Battalion of the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro is terrorizing and attacking residents of Acari. That week two young men were killed and thrown into a ditch. Today the police walked the streets threatening residents. It has always happened and with the intervention, it got even worse. (Franco, 2018)

The *milícias* are known as armed criminal groups which illegally control and extort the essential services markets in poor neighborhoods in Brazil. They extort services such as the supply of water, electric energy, cooking gas, cable TV, public transport, security, and housing. The *milícias* exercise their control over *favelas* through coercive practices like threats, beatings, torture, and murder (Hirata et al.,2022). It is also known that *milícias* violently dispute territories among themselves and against drug factions as they profit from drug sales. The crimes committed by those groups mostly are naturally accepted as part of the process of living in a *favela* thus, the victims' families fear asking for help or fighting for justice.

For me, as a Brazilian, having been born and raised in a *favela* I understand how deep and complex this problem is; the fear of asking for help and especially the knowledge of the fact that those who you will ask for help are the real perpetrators of the crimes you are denouncing. A perverse and sickening dichotomy for people who live within these spaces.

Days before being executed, Marielle Franco also publicly denounced the murder of three young men that were executed by the *milícias*. Franco defied the status quo; she was killed because she gave a name to an already naturalized and ancient violence. However, her voice, complaints, and investigations took a different form as a city councilor. Franco had a state and social visibility that could lead these crimes to a possible solution, with the public made aware of

the practices of the real culprits. A possible look at the real culprits. She was killed because she had a voice that could be heard.

In the United States 70 percent of Black people who have experienced police violence against them feel that the force was excessive (Morris, p.65, 2014). This phenomenon is equally cruel in Brazil, where 80 Black youths die every day, due to State negligence, lack of public policies, and police violence. Ethnic persecution policies are within the judicial system of these countries as a legacy of slavery, they are silent and giant ways of dehumanizing and destroying these individuals who do not find any possible way out of existence other than fleeing or sacrificing their own life in exchange for freedom.

2.3 A gente faz debate pelo direito à vida

Anielle Franco, Marielle Franco's sister, wrote an article remembering the importance of community engagement for Afro-Brazilians. Her work reinforces Marielle Franco's quote that names this chapter: "*A gente faz debate pelo direito à vida*" which means: "We make political debates for the right to be alive. "Also using the work of Conceição Evaristo, Anielle Franco proposes and reinforces the construction of policies that break the necropolitics of the Brazilian state. To break this logic, it is necessary to forge insurgent technologies that start from the collective struggle. Franco's sister draws attention to the lack of answers about the murder and also how Marielle Franco's voice and power are present as a symbol and as a reference in the fight for human rights. Franco's sister states the following:

By killing my sister, a Black woman from a *favela* who was democratically elected with more than forty-six thousand votes, they also killed our family. A well-engineered political crime, probably very well-paid, that influenced and changed our lives in a

sudden way. They took away our leader, our firstborn, our voice, our strength, and our most reliable policy. We went to the streets to campaign for her, we used our salaries to help, we shouted, we made an effort, and we even started believing in politics again with her position as a councilwoman. But all this was stopped in just 1 year and 3 months. Who had Marielle killed? Who killed Marielle? These questions are part of our thoughts and have haunted us for months without answers. (Franco, 2019)

Marielle Franco's proposed discussions and actions concerning human rights. Her work focused especially on a community that was usually neglected by Brazilian politicians. This positionality was dangerous for the status quo of the system for multiple reasons, some of which led to her murder. Foucault, in *History of Sexuality* (1976), argues that there is a history of moral systems that produces a truth about our bodies. Still, this truth can be cut by interdictions made by us in our understanding of ourselves, which he calls practices of the self. For the author, there is no power without resistance since power is the interaction of different forces.

Power is created from historical formations constituted by formal practices and discourses that are socially accepted and have political visibility. For instance, white supremacy is a discourse that the State legitimized in many parts of the world, which perpetuated racist practices that decimated and destroyed the body and psyches of Black individuals. White supremacy started with a discourse that became ingrained in economic, social, and even scientific institutions. However, we constantly juggle power structures using strategies that assist us in creating our particular views of the world and ourselves. Racism is a technology destined to allow the exercise of biopower, in the economy of biopower the function of racism is to regulate

the distribution of death and make possible the murderous tasks of the State (Mbembe, 2003, p.128).

In Franco's documentary, the economy of biopower and the function of racism regulating the distribution of death is exemplified in episodes: 4 "The Suspect," 5 "Prison," and 6 "Questions." Those episodes investigate and seek a reason and a culprit for the crime of Franco's execution. The leading suspects who have pieces of evidence attached to the car that was used to follow Franco are connected with people of high political power in the country. Their connections include former president Jair Bolsonaro alongside other councilors who felt threatened by Franco's political positions as they clashed with the councilor for disagreeing with her political views. In the figure of Marielle Franco, the idea of a political enemy was glued. She was marketed as someone who should be destroyed, whose ideas of equality and justice for *favela* residents were seen as an affront to the ideology of many.

Months after Franco's death, deputies linked to former president Bolsonaro's party the Partido Social Liberal (PSL) broke a sign placed on a street in Rio in honor of Franco. This sign was honoring Franco's political activism and work; however, in the following weeks, the sign was destroyed by deputies linked to the political party PSL. The PSL is a far-right political party most notably backed by the former president of Brazil Bolsonaro. Rodrigo Amorim, state deputy at Rio de Janeiro, and Daniel Silveira took a photo together holding the broken sign (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). In the background of this picture, it is possible to identify a photo of Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, president Bolsonaro's son, next to a rifle.

The perception of non-white people as the "other" is frequent in Brazilian society. The "other" is perceived as an attack against life, a mortal threat and an absolute danger that needs an end is present in the discourses of the so-called *Bolsonaristas*, people who follow former

president Bolsonaro and committed crimes of hatred against minorities such as women, the Black community and queers. Sara Ahmed explains this phenomenon when she writes about the organization of hate. The author explains that emotions such as hate secure collectives through how they read the hate of others (Ahmed, 2004, p.42). The defensive aspect in the use of hate can be seen in the fascist discourse, a discourse that is also implemented in the ideology of *Bolsonarismo*. These narratives work by "generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject, such as security but to take the place of the subject in society" (Ahmed, 2004, p.43).



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2

Franco's political activism was suppressed and shot down by the Brazilian government in power, her discourse and calls for justice being the driving force for her enemies to commit murder. Similar to Franco, Assata Shakur was both targeted and hated by the government of the U.S.A. The political enemy's speech was also placed on Shakur to justify her arrest and exile and on Franco to justify her death.

3 WAR: EXILE

I'm not quite sure what freedom is, but I know damn well what it ain't.

(Shakur, p.155, 1987)

3.1 Persecution

Black women are complex individuals; their experience is unique and cannot be easily shaped or defined. We transit through much more than two dimensions of knowledge and power. *Escrevivências* is a constructive protest against the norms of society. For Evaristo (1994), *escrevivências* come from a practice of literary work whose authorship is Black, female, and poor. In this process, the agent, the person who creates and takes action on thinking and reflecting upon their existence, is in the center. This person is taking a position of control over their narratives while understanding that their actions may affect their community in what they will produce and think about themselves. Crenshaw points out that even feminism reinforces the subordination of Black people when it fails to consider race as a factor (p.1252). The same can happen with anti-racism movements when they do not take gender as an essential part of their strategies of resistance. Nonintersectional environments frequently reproduce the subordination of women, and intersectionality is the only way to articulate the interactions of racism and patriarchy while creating different strategies for survival. In this way, *escrevivências* allow the existence of intersectionality when inserting Black women's narratives into the center of social change and political thinking. Narratives, like the memoir of Assata Shakur, aim to capture the ways in which racism, intersectionality, and the concept of *escrevivências* define the Black woman's experience in the U.S.

Assata Shakur was a Black Liberation activist of the mid to late 20th century. She is known best for her involvement in the Black Panther Party of the U.S. - an organization that led various anti-racist and Black protectionist movements. Through her activism, she was accused of robbing a bank and killing a police officer in 1977. In her memoir, she narrates the treatment she received from police while incarcerated and also writes about episodes from her childhood and teenage years. Shakur is known for escaping prison and becoming a political refugee in Cuba. In

her writings, Shakur speaks about her persecution until her incarceration and how her political views influenced how she was treated in jail. Like Franco, she centered her political work on ending racism and sexism and protecting the Black population from police brutality. Besides their stories having in common intersectionality and strategies of resistance in different territories, police violence was in the middle of their narratives affecting their outcome as militants. Thus, police forces represent how the discourses of white supremacy and patriarchy destroy, incarcerate, and minimize Black women's existence. The intentional and unintentional conduct of police officers can dehumanize people of color and perpetuate psychological violence through intimidation, neglect, verbal abuse, and physical and sexual violence (Alang S. et al., 2022). For Foucault, the State and the police are exercises of power. This power relation focuses above all on bodies and what they do, controlling their actions and violating them when they go outside the norm. The police force, in the case of these two women, is one of the instruments of the State that aims to maintain the power of white supremacy.

The persecution of Shakur by the police was linked to the fact that she was a former member of the Black Panther Party, a group that had in its ideology self-defense and the study of socialist practices within the Black community. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was an organization that existed between 1967 and 1982 gathering Black militants interested in dismantling racism and oppression in the United States. Through laborious groundwork such as Free Food Programs, Free Breakfast for Children Programs, Free Housing Cooperative Programs, The Black Panther Newspaper, Youth Training, and so many other socialist-inclined initiatives, the Black Panther Party aimed to restructure the treatment of Blacks in the nation. The purpose of the party was to end racism and put the capitalist system into question. In their ideology, capitalism prospered not in spite of the marginalization of Black people but “because

of the brutal exploitation of Black people and workers and consumers” (Judson, 2018, p.8). Shakur joined the party because she felt a need to analyze the history of Black people, for her it was the duty of Black revolutionaries to define themselves and their struggle.

When Shakur started learning about communism, urban guerrillas, and important historical revolutionaries such as Che Guevara, Mariguella, and the Tupamaros, her perception of the world changed. In the Black Panther Party, she worked with the Free Breakfast for Children Programs and The Black Panther Newspaper. Being part of the party was a process of educating herself on what it meant to work to reach an economic and social revolution. In her memoir, she states: “We were all alive and we were excited and we believed that we were going to be free someday. For us, it wasn’t a matter of whether or not. It was a question of how” (Shakur, p. 183). During her process of gaining consciousness about American history and the system of oppression of racism and capitalism, Shakur realized that “the history of oppressed people was impossible to find in history books” (Shakur, p.199). In her memoir, she points out that the history taught in American schools had numerous misconceptions and distortions, especially about Black history. One of the examples was the lie about former President Lincoln freeing the slaves and that the civil war was fought to free Black people. “Abraham Lincoln was in no way whatsoever a friend of Black people. He had little concern for our plight” (Shakur, 1976). She further brings proof through statements made by the former president relating to his desire to save the Union without concern about freeing enslaved Black Americans in the process. Thus, the belief in this misconception of history, what she calls myths, is one of the main causes of mistakes in analyzing the situation of oppression of African Americans and disturbs the planning of future action (Shakur, p.176). For fighting against this alienation she was persecuted. Even though disagreements within the party caused her to leave her militancy, her persecution by

the police was not prevented. “They kill our leaders, then they kill us for protesting. Protest. Protest. Revolution. If it exists, I want to find it. Bulletins. I’m tired of bulletins. I want bullets.” (Shakur, p.196).

Many members of Black revolutionary groups were forced into hiding as a result of the extreme police repression and persecution that took place during the late sixties and early seventies (Shakur, p.241). A state of terror was placed in Shakur’s life when she realized people who were committed to the militancy and who she used to run rallies with were hiding underground. She also did not realize that she would be next. “I stared down at my picture on the front page of the *Daily News*. The paper said I was wanted for questioning in relation to the machine gunning. I walked aimlessly around in circles. I couldn’t believe it, but I was looking at it” (Shakur, p. 236). Even though Shakur was not part of any armed attack against the police, her photo was exposed in a newspaper branding her as a dangerous and violent fugitive, an accusation that lives until today (Figure 3.1). After this photo, her life changed completely, tension and fear became an intrinsic part of her routine.

During the days Shakur was incarcerated, she was challenged by intense acts of violence from the police, the tactics her grandparents taught her helped her to remain herself, and aligned with her beliefs no matter how dense the atmosphere was. The reports of violence she suffered from the police were directly related to the hatred the institution had for seeing a Black woman who was a political activist and also accused of killing a white police officer.



Figure 3.1

3.2 Strategies of resistance

“They call us murderers, but we did not murder over two hundred fifty unarmed Black men, women, and children, or wound thousands of others in the riots they provoked during the sixties. The rulers of this country have always considered their property more important than our lives (...) They call us murderers, but we did not murder Martin Luther King Jr., Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, George Jackson, Nat Turner, James Chaney, and countless others. (Shakur, p. 50)

Assata Shakur, since she was little, learned from her grandmother to have respect for herself and her body. Her grandmother taught her to face racism in the eye and don't let anyone

say that she was less because of the color of her skin. Whenever her grandmother heard about somebody being mistreated, especially if it were a man mistreating a woman, she would reaffirm to Shakur that she was not raising her to be mistreated by anyone, “the tactics that my grandparents used were crude and i hated it when they would repeat everything so often, but the lessons that they thought me, more than anything else i learned in life, helped me to deal with the things i would face growing up in amerika” (p.20). Thus, what Shakur calls "tactics" are the strategies that her grandparents taught her to survive in a racist and sexist America. The spelling of America as “*amerika*” in her memoir can be a reference to Nazi Germany since it is the German spelling of America, however, it is not clear if her intentions are to link her country with Germany or the Ku Klux Klan. The memoir has references to police as “pigs” and to whites as “krakas,” her spelling for the derogatory “crackers.” “amerika,” “kourts” and other words connected with U.S. institutions that contain the letter “c” is spelled with a “k”, she also uses a lower-case “i” for the first-person pronoun “to take the emphasis off the egotistical implications of the capital ‘i,’” (Wakin, 1987).

Shakur narrates encounters with Black figures of authority - police officers and politicians - who, even within the system, saw themselves as part of the anti-racism movement and identified their struggle as similar to Shakur’s, proving that institutions are also affected by other racial identity and activism discourses. While Shakur was in the hospital before her incarceration, a Black man in uniform came closer to her; who she thought was a cop turned out to be the hospital security guard. He comes near her, smiles, and gives her the power sign “his face reeks into a kind of reserved smile and, very discreetly, he clenches his fist and gives me the power sign, that man will never know how much he made me feel at that moment” (Shakur, p.6). Jails and prisons are designed to break human beings and to convert the population into animals

in a zoo, obedient to the structures of discipline and no longer dangerous to each other (Davis, 1972, p.52). The man that gave Shakur the power sign did not align with the norm; he understood in a way that Shakur's politics were also his politics as a Black man. Shakur's identity, political views, and activism produced positive gaps within the system, the same system that oppressed her. This sympathetic action of this worker inside the prison shows that Black women's activism constantly creates new forms of interacting and affecting power relations.

The search for freedom is a common subject that is constantly present in the narratives of Black people, especially diasporic Black people. The search for freedom and its implications comes from a discomfort imposed by the racist and unequal system we are part of and, equally, from the history of slavery and violence present in our past and present. Freedom is guided by finding ways of being in the world, ways in which the imposition of silence and inequality is not tolerated by the societal structures that surround us. However, when those structures do not support Black people's beliefs of freedom and equality, the answer is to fight. Fighting means creating strategies of resistance that allow these individuals to exist within society. Then, somehow manage to have a dignified life with basic human rights which are necessary for anyone's existence. The choice to resist in most cases is harmful. Being a political person is in every way dangerous if you are marked by race and gender. In a racist and capitalist society even if a violent or bloody punishment is not openly permitted by laws, there is the use of “gentle” methods of locking up or correcting an individual. With those methods it is always the body that is at stake — the body and its strengths, the body's usefulness and docility, the desire of its submission (Foucault, p. 28, 1975).

In the case of Black women, there is this intrinsic, violent, and structural imposition of silence. The silence of their voices and acts, in the case of Shakur the silence was implicated

through persecution, prison, and exile. For Frantz Fanon, the act of speaking implies being in a position to employ a specific syntax, to assume a culture, and to support the weight of a civilization (Fanon, p. 33, 1952). Shakur carried that weight, and for this reason, she lost the right to speak, protest, and exist in the country she was born.

There is common logic behind the mass incarceration of Black people in the U.S. It is possible to state that incarceration and its punitive roots seek to control a population forced to subvert social laws to find better ways of living. In 1901, W.E.B. Du Bois in the article “The Spawn of Slavery,” asserted that the American criminal justice system was in many ways an extension of the social control mechanisms of slavery. For the author, the appearance of crime among Black people is a symptom of wrong social conditions (Morris, p.58, 2014). Thus, when the majority of the population facing incarceration is Black, something behind this system is wrongly stimulating a repetition of a social symptom. Multiple reasons, such as lack of a fair trial, racial profiling, and poverty can justify the exaggerated imprisonment numbers. However, subverting the laws of the State can also be a way to reach for humanity, a humanity that was stolen through slavery by a racist and punitive society.

The 13th Amendment is a formal abolition of slavery in America. The document states that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, shall exist within the United States (1865). The “loophole” in the 13th Amendment was exploited to continue enslaving Black people inside US prisons. The “13th Amendment,” a documentary directed by the filmmaker Ava DuVernay, and produced by Netflix, brings to light shocking data on prison statistics: despite having only 5% of the world's population, the United States has 2.3 million people in prison, that is, more than 25% of the planet's prisoners. Of this prison population, 40% is made up of Black people, a very large percentage, considering that Black

individuals represent only 12% of the total population of the country. Thus, the gratuity of punishment and violence against Black people continues inside prisons and the mass incarceration of the same population was a form to guarantee the status quo of race disparity and race exclusion. While in prison, Shakur got the right to a job working on the general mechanic's crew, recreation, attending classes, and was able to eat and visit other women in the general population of the prison. While there, she saw the people that were selected to serve sentences stating "many of the sisters were Black and poor and from D.C., where every crime is a violation of a federal statute. They were beautiful sisters, serving outrageous sentences for minor offenses. Similar to the situation that existed at the federal prison in New York." (p.255).

The fact that justice kills or wounds is an act intrinsic to its power, but justice does not publicly assume violence as part of its exercise since its final purpose is theoretically to correct, re-educate, and cure (Foucault, p.6, 1987). The fact that Black people are the most incarcerated individuals in the United States is directly linked to slavery and how punishment for Black bodies took the role of the State in response to its absence of producing public policies to secure the well-being of a traumatized and violated population.

Finally, since these individuals no longer served the State with their free labor, they would be pushed and led to the outskirts (*favelas*, ghettos), forgotten, or imprisoned. Shakur states in her memoir how the position of Black people in society is normalized and still marked by slavery, as a legal economic system inside capitalism "After a while, people just think oppression is the normal state of things. But to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave" (Shakur, 1987, p.262). For these reasons, the visibility of the history of Black women who were political activists and who denounced the capitalist system is essential. Shakur positioned herself as a militant against racial and gender inequalities, pointing out in her memoir

how necessary it is to debate for the construction of a more equal society. Shakur's political position mirrors Franco's path as a politician. The act of encouraging debates regarding structural and social problems that affect Black people in the diaspora has to be part of an international agenda. This agenda has to be composed of Black individuals from different continents affected by the Atlantic slave trade, such as Brazil and the United States. This paper is part of a discussion that needs to be reinforced and continued so it can gain more political strength in order to build social change. Shakur and Franco are part of this revolutionary desire for equality and community engagement. Thus, it is clear that Black women's *escrevivências* have the power to change narratives and inspire political and social discourses.

4 RESISTANCE

After slavery, many Black people refused to use the last name of their masters. They called themselves "Freeman" instead. The name was also used by Africans who were freed before slavery was "officially" abolished, but it was mainly after the abolition of chattel slavery that many Black people changed their names to Freeman. (Shakur, 1983, p.23)

4.1 Renaming

How we reclaim our identity from decades of oppression is one of the obstacles Black diasporic people face. The choice of surname for Black Americans has been one of the ways to reclaim an identity that can be linked to the memory of a land that was stolen and erased through the process of colonization. For instance, Malcolm X took on the surname X because Black

Americans had no way of knowing their family's history. "With the name X, Malcolm could be sure he didn't have a last name that a slave owner might have used" (Waugaman, 2015). African Americans often use names that mean positive connotations in order to reclaim and discover their African heritage.

Thus, for Shakur, Africa becomes a mystical and fantastic place that may contain the answers about the identity of individuals that feel lost and abandoned in a continent that consistently states that they are not welcome. In Shakur's autobiography, she engages with a community of people that advocated for the establishment of a separated Black nation within the United States (Shakur, 1987, p.183), this nation would be made of what is now South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Even though the first thought Shakur had in regard to Black separatism was thinking that the idea of a Black nation was inconceivable, she felt drawn to the idea. Afterward, Shakur attended the so-called Republic of New Afrika event, which she described as a vibrant place with carnival-like surroundings, African garments, posters of Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey, children playing around, and Black people wearing natural hair and connecting with each other. There she spoke with some individuals about the idea of a new version of Africa outside the continent and understood through them how the group expressed their ideologies:

"Peace, sister", a voice said. "Do you want to be a citizen?"

"What?" I asked without the slightest notion of what she was talking about.

"A citizen" she repeated. "Do you want to be a citizen of the Republic of New Afrika?"

"How do I become a citizen?"

"Eazy. Just sign your name in the citizens' book."

"That's all?"

“Yeah. You want a name?”

“A name?”

“Yeah, sista, a name. If you want an African name, just ask that brother over there to give you one.” (Shakur, p. 184)

The search for a name was one of the claims used, not just to find an identity, but for a connection to what was stolen. To the memory of a past that can not be restored. In this part of the autobiography Shakur describes this community called New Afrika that was created to give Black Americans a sense of belonging and a chance to connect with elements of the African continent. New Afrika gave the possibility for them to show openly their demands and also to celebrate what they considered part of their lost identity, part of their history that was stolen.

Grada Kilomba defines the idea of a subject as a person that can relate to the political, social, and individual branches of society (Kilomba, 2019, p.74). For the author, a person achieves the status of a subject when, in their social context, they are recognized in the three levels: social, political, and individual. In this sense, the search for the New Afrika was a claim for the lack of recognition of the African American identity by the American white society, therefore, erasing and marginalizing the individuality, and political importance of Black people:

I wanted a name that had something to do with struggle, something to do with the liberation of our people. I decided on Assata Olugbala Shakur. Assata means “She who struggles,” Olugbala means “Love for the people,” and I took the name Shakur out of respect for Zayd and Zayd’s family. Shakur means the thankful. (Shakur, p.186)

After the first ceremony with the New Afrika community Shakur changed her legal name to a new one. From JoAnne Deborah Byron she changed her name to Assata Shakur which

to her represented a refined and new identity. In doing this, Shakur reclaims a new identity that in her perception was least linked to the past of slavery and subjugation. Renaming, using narratives, language, and communication as a powerful tool to fight inequality and stereotypes is one of the ways Black people create a space of positive identity and their personal ideal of a more equal society.

To rename oneself is necessary to communicate a new language, a new way to interact with the discourses of society. Kilomba uses the mouth to describe the relationship which the colonized has with colonialism. Considering memory and trauma as part of the racist structure the mouth is the representation of oppression (Kilomba, 2019, p.33). The mouth is a part of the Black body that whiteness wants to control, therefore it is an organ that had been since the beginning of colonialism controlled and censored by the oppressor. The mouth is a signifier that can be used as a tool for change or can be a thing to be silenced. The mouth in her work is also a metaphor, a signifier, in the Lacanian view, of owning and possessing the other. The mouth is something that the colonized want to have control over.

The unconscious, for Lacan, is structured as a language, that is, as a particular language that each person inhabits, which is sometimes subjected to misunderstanding. A signifier is when that word gains its own meaning according to the experiences and stories of the subject. One language among others is nothing more than the totality of the mistakes that its history has allowed to persist in it (LACAN, 1972/2003, p. 492). For colonialism, the colonized have no humanity, thus they have no history, which is why the colonized have no right to their narrative or to the possibility of talking about themselves. Defined as “the other,” the colonizer has no identity, no country, or ownership of their land, no voice, or valid existence. The status of being the other implies being “other than” or different than the norm that is assumed to be white male

behavior (Collins, 1989, p.18). Thus racist and sexist ideologies use this common aspect of treating and placing dominated groups as “the others”, subjects who lack subjectivity.

Shakur and Franco through their *escrevivências* break this structure of otherness, thus they inspired the title of this thesis “Becoming Somebody.” Both reclaimed their existence and the power to control their own narratives, they used their positionality and voices as a way to create themselves and become someone beyond the chains of a racist and segregated system. For Collins, defining one’s consciousness of one’s standpoint in the face of social images that foster objectification is an essential way of resisting the dehumanization produced by racism and sexism (Collins, 1989, p.18). Marielle Franco was executed for her political views and for what she represented to society; she was a threat to the structures of racism and patriarchy, same as Shakur. They did so by using their voices, language, and mouth to claim freedom and equality for themselves and their communities. Through their work and activism, they also aimed to shape new identities for themselves beyond the stereotypes created by racism and sexism. Becoming somebody also guides an analysis of a body and its location.

The Black Brazilian psychoanalyst Neusa Santos Souza in her book “Tornar-se Negro” states that Black people due to racism create a persecutory relationship with their bodies. For the author, the persecutory relationship with the body exposes the subject to a mental tension whose outcome is the desire to eliminate the center of the conflict. The body and the body image that the subject has of himself is one of the fundamental components in the construction of the individual's identity, thus the image and statement that this subject makes of himself is based on the form that he experiences the pain, pleasure, and displeasure that the body forces him to feel and think (Souza,1973, p.6).

Calling back to Freud's concepts of the Ego, Superego, and Id - we see how the Ego or ideal ego makes Blacks feel inferior within white-dominated societies. For the author, the Ideal Ego is white. Thus, Black people are born and survive immersed in an ideology that is imposed by white supremacy notions of being, therefore whiteness is symbolically introjected into Black people's psyche as an ideal to be achieved and it is a struggle to live inside this structure. The relationship between the Ego and the Ideal Ego is lived under the sign of tension. Thus, the Superego bombards the Ego with incessant demands to reach an unattainable Ideal. Black people are certainly not the only ones to live this experience. Indeed, there is always, in every non-psychotic person, a relationship of tension between these instances, however, for Black people, this relationship is characterized by a higher and more intense gap translated by constant dissatisfaction that cannot find a possibility of an end (SOUZA, 1983 p. 38). Neusa Santos was a pioneer in speaking about this matter in Latin America, for that reason, she was negated and crucified by the white psychoanalysis community in Brazil. A violent act of silencing which was possibly the reason for her suicide in 2008, 25 years after her book was released. The psychoanalyst died without receiving any recognition for her groundbreaking work in the psychology field.

Even though Black people search for a better understanding of their struggle they are still affected by the racist discourse. Kilomba associates the control of Black bodies by racism and colonialism with the past of the plantations in South America. The continent of South America was colonized by Spain and Portugal, which had the continent goods such as cacao, sugar cane, and sugar as their product, where the end sentence at "product" and remove "where." As a result, slavery was the base of all the production. The slave owners forced the use of an iron mask placed in the mouth of enslaved people as an instrument to prevent them from eating the

plantation and harming the property. The plantation and its fruits belong solely to the colonizer and the fact that the enslaved person had a possibility of eating it was a robbery, a perverse crime in the mind of the colonizer. However, the land and its fruits belong to the colonized. The land is seen as a metaphor for possession, it is a place that belongs to some and not to others, even though the real owners were oppressed into the creation of the land with their forced labor. For the author, this is also a moment when whiteness affirms something about the other that whiteness does not want to see in its own existence, the theft of land, life, and history established by colonization. This mechanism is a negation, which is a sort of defense the ego uses to negate its own faults (Kilomba, 2019, p.34).

Thus, language is an instrument of change and also destruction that can be used to reinforce hegemonic discourses and also produce political change. Fanon exemplifies how language is constituted on colonized people, mainly about the colonial “bewitchment” that removes from the colonized the local references in favor of a supposed civilization. For Fanon, language is not restricted to a means of communication but is an access to the identity of a culture. With this access, the colonized seeks to reproduce the language of the colonizer and, even if it is most often delegitimized, it creates expectations of overcoming the desire for recognition and distancing itself from objectification. Colonization and racism create zones where certain narratives predominate and others are silenced. Santos (1983) wrote about the “myth of the negro,” a discourse (verbal or visual) resulted from the convergence of economic, political, ideological, and psychic determinations. This myth is constructed with a set of representations that expresses and hides an order of production of goods of domination and indoctrination (Santos, 1983, p.25). Black people when alienated in the racial discourse search for the dematerialization of this myth through cultural elements that place them closer to

whiteness, such as reaching a higher social-economic power and changing their physical traits, for instance altering their skin, hair, etc. However, when Black people do not accept this subjugation of culture, they position themselves as a counter-culture and are recognized by white supremacy as the enemy. A position that Shakur and Franco occupied in different ways inside their cultures. If they speak or challenge their environments reclaiming for change or for a name, they become troubled subjects that put the status quo into question due to the fact they put themselves in a position of humanity, a body in which positionality denounces and states freedom.

The mouth is where the speeches, and denunciations of a corrupt, colonial, sexist, and racist system came from. The mouth of Franco and Assata was an instrument of power and even though constantly threatened with silence showed a truth that whiteness did not want to see, face, or acknowledge. The imperialist and colonial discourses that are still perpetuated in Brazil and the United States harm and erase Black lives daily and constantly. Renaming and reclaiming are one of the powerful tools of resistance those two revolutionaries demonstrated through their *escrevivências*.

4.2 Territory

Territory was an instrument of positionality and resistance for Franco, thus claiming where she was from was indispensable for the construction of her identity. She called herself "cria da Maré", a slang term that, in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, refers to someone who was born and raised (*criado*) in a certain territory (WikiFavelas, 2018). Maré is the popular name of the Maré Complex, located in the north zone of Rio de Janeiro. By presenting herself as "Cria da Maré", Marielle claimed her identity as part of a community that was constantly targeted by negative stereotypes. Maré is shown in the documentary as an important part of her history, as

well as her trajectory and also education. The territory that Franco grew up in has many historical social markers that delimit this space as mostly Black, the social conditions of this space make it a place with many particularities.



Figure 4.1

The peculiarities of the *favelas* include a specific architecture, a social organization distinct from other common Brazilian neighborhoods, and an aesthetic that can be considered peculiar. Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 portray images from Franco's documentary showing the *favela* of Maré. To understand the context of the origin of the *favelas* it is necessary to see the history of slavery in the country. Slavery was abolished on May 13, 1888, when the Brazilian monarchy signed the Golden Law, abolishing slavery after more than 300 years. Brazil was the last country to end slavery in the Americas. The abolition left thousands of former slaves wandering around with neither occupations nor resources (Perlman, p.25, 2009). Due to this fact, former slaves wandered to the peripheries of their cities and relocated themselves to unoccupied lands, and

created their own communities from scratch with no help from the government. Those territories exist all over the country until today and the majority of the population living there are Black and are still feeling the effects of the misdeeds inherited from slavery.



Figure 4.2

One of the effects is that the houses in the *favelas* are extremely close to each other as if they had been built one on top of the other. This fact shows how the urgency of access to housing was the main cause of the creation and permanence of the *favelas* until today. The houses called *barracos* (shaks), by the early 1920s, had increased more than eightfold (to about 839), and by 1933 the number had grown to 1,500—housing a population close to 10,000 (Perlman, p.27, 2008). Today more than 17 million people live in *favelas* in Brazil. The largest one is Rocinha, in Rio de Janeiro. *Favelas* are spaces constantly surrounded by the police since it represents for the Brazilian government a place where poverty and crime collide.

Franco was always concerned with the problems *favelas* were facing; for instance, the theme of her master's dissertation was: "UPP: The Reduction of the *Favela* to three letters: An Analysis of the Public Security Policy of the State of Rio de Janeiro", where she discussed the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) implemented in Brazilian *favelas* for the purpose of fighting internally the crime of drug trafficking. She started her activism in human rights after joining the community pre-university entrance exam and losing a friend, who was a victim of a stray bullet, in a shootout between police and drug dealers in Maré. She also has worked in civil society organizations such as the Brazil Foundation and the Centro de Ações Solidárias da Maré (Ceasm), coordinated the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights and Citizenship of the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro (Alerj), and also built several collectives surrounding the topics of Feminism, Black pride, and the security of *favelas* residents.

Throughout the documentary, Franco's history emphasized that she studied in public schools, attended the youth group of the Catholic Church, played in the street, and as a typical teenager raised in the *favelas*, snuck out from her parents to go to the *baile funk* (a space of music and dancing that could be considered one of the only safe spaces for Black people in the country).

Like most parts of Rio's *favelas*, Maré is made up of a majority that is Black, from the Northeast, or descended from Northeasterners. Franco's family is from the Northeast and migrated to Maré before she was born. The Northeast of Brazil is known as the poorest part of Brazil; residents from this area usually migrate to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo searching for a better life and better work opportunities. It was inconceivable for the state that people began building their own homes and communities outside the control of the State. For this reason,

favela residents are seen as a menace to the government and have been continually threatened with destruction (Perlman, p.26, 2009).

McKittrick in the book *Demonic Grounds* (2006) uses geography to understand the importance of the ways in which material spaces and places underpin shifting and uneven (racial, sexual, economic) social relations (McKittrick, 2006, p.xiii). It is relevant to associate this with the status of women that live on the margins or in the slums of cities. Even though those spaces give little or even no possibilities of social ascension, they find a way to break through those structures and achieve a way of freedom. Collins (1983) when referring to the status of the outsider within mentions a particular standpoint that Black women can access when living on the margins. She uses the example of bell hooks who spent her childhood in a small town in Kentucky. In her writings, hooks describe her life there as challenging but also that her way of living produced a new way of seeing reality, "Living as we did-on the edge-we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside and in from the inside out...we understood both" (Collins, 1989, p.14). Franco because of her positionality as a *favela* resident knew how to address specific problems that *favela* residents faced, for instance, police harassment. However, she was elected as a councilwoman with 46,502 votes and was the fifth most-voted parliamentary member in the city of Rio de Janeiro. She was constantly challenged by councilors who questioned her *lugar de fala* and undermined her intellectual knowledge. The outsider has the ability to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see (Collins, 1989, p.15), Franco for being part of the *favelas* knew more about their struggles than the sociologists and politicians who studied the *favelas* from the outside. Collins speaks about the label of outsiders as marginal intellectuals which is interesting to the point of Franco since *favela* residents are called *marginais* (marginal) by people who live outside the

favelas. The word *marginais* in Portuguese has a meaning related to stereotypes of criminality and violence. Thus, being at the margin is also a positive qualifier of social difference and produces a more accurate and powerful standpoint.

Marielle arrived at the city council with her “foot at the door”, an expression she recurrently used (WikiFavelas, 2018). On the first day of her legislature, she presented new bills, made remarkable pronouncements, and used social networks to publicize her collective work and summon the population to political participation. Franco understood the importance of social media and used the media in her favor to organize meetings with activists and report crimes in the *favela*. That fact gave her visibility but also put her in the spot for persecution.



Figure 4.3

Note: In this image, Franco’s mother, still living in the same community of Maré, gives an interview about her daughter. In the process, she shows pictures of her childhood and engages with the memories

she has of the past. When asked if she comes from a family of strong women she replies yes with a painful tone in her voice.



Figure 4.4

In the work, *Becos da Memória* (2017), the author, Conceição Evaristo, reflects that, in writing, "stories are invented, even the real ones." This happens in a process in which the author places herself in the open space between the invention and the act of creating new narratives, using this depth to build a singular possibility of existence, one that points to the collective not just to one individual. In *Becos da Memória* Evaristo shares short unique stories about *favela* residents. She uses *escrevivência* to represent the memory of *the favelas* and how the small huddled houses and narrow alleys convey a dense narrative of Black Brazilian existence. The stories are part fantasy and part reality and build a unique writing experience of a population that had its history forgotten and erased from the history books. Writing, for *escrevivência*, means telling particular stories that refer to collectivized Black experiences, since it is understood that there is a common constituent between author and protagonist, whether by shared characteristics

through social markers, whether by the lived experience, albeit from different positions (Sandrine & Soares, 2017). Black women, when they write about themselves, speak of others too, and when speaking of others, they speak of themselves. For instance, when Shakur writes about her experience in the underground when she was hiding from the police, brought attention to the fact that dozens of others were doing the same. That in a way showed the collective experience of Black activists in the 80s. Thus, it was so collectively that Franco, in another continent and more than 30 years later faced the same persecution for bringing attention to similar issues faced by Black people. In Franco's experience, she was persecuted by the *milícias* because of her positionality and the controversial affect her speeches had inside Rio's city council. Family and friends in the documentary stated that she was speaking about being followed and observed by someone. Thus, this is also a stated feeling that most Black Brazilians that live in *favelas* around the country feel unsafe while being targeted and persecuted. Franco's speeches worked as *escrevivências* narrating a unique perspective of a collective problem.

One of the ways to have autonomy is to have a discourse about yourself, a discourse that becomes more meaningful the more grounded it is in reality. Black women have been using their voices and *escrevivências* to state their position as human subjects. The existence of a Black discourse about themselves is essential to incite the construction of an identity that escapes through the margins from the centuries of subjected demands and expectations alienated in the racist discourse. Franco's presence and fearless speeches are still echoing today, affecting Brazilian society, and inspiring Black people to strengthen themselves and resist racist, homophobic, and sexist discourses of the State. However, a Black body who denounces, speaks, and fights for human rights is a menace to society; it is also a gateway for social change.

Using the history of transatlantic slavery to illustrate that Black women are both shaped by, and also challenge through traditional geographic arrangements, McKittrick argues that geography is not secure and firm; Black women produce space, produce its meanings, and work very hard to make geography what it is (McKittrick, 2006, p.xvi). She uses an analogy of the slave ship to talk about the body/mind, memory, and positionality of Black individuals. For McKittrick the physicality of the slave ship, therefore its memory and existence, contributes to the process of social concealment and dehumanization of Black people; however, Black subjectivity is not swallowed up by the ship itself. She states that “the ship, its crew, Black subjects, the ocean, and ports, make geography what it is, a location through which a moving technology can create differential and contextual histories” (McKittrick, 2006, p.xii). Black women have been negotiating a geographic landscape that is upheld by a legacy of exploitation, exploration, and conquest (McKittrick, 2006, p.xiii), if their place is not reclaimed constantly, they may fall into invisibility.

To mark her existence as valid and fight against this place of invisibility, Maria Carolina de Jesus, the first Black woman from a *favela* to write a book in Brazil, wrote the book *Quarto de Despejo: Diário de uma Favelada* in 1960. Carolina's writing is a classic example of *escrevivência*, and her intellectual construction is entirely marked by the sharing of the difficulties faced by those who lived in the *favelas* and survived on their own, oblivious to the country's socioeconomic progress and without any assistance from the government. The author lived in one of the most populous Brazilian capitals in the 1950s, where she perceived social exclusion and the effects of systematic violence on Black bodies (Cassiano, 2021). Black feminist thought is defined as a group of ideas that are produced by Black women that clarify and stand for the position of Black women (Collins, 1989, p.16), this happens because Black

women possess a unique positionality, a perspective of experiences of Black womanhood that can only be shared among them. That does not erase authenticity and differentiation; however, they are affected and can relate to the same universal themes Black women's standpoint may be experienced differently. Through this chapter the history of Franco, Jesus, Evaristo, Shakur, and others relate while reinforcing each other's narratives, it is a unique standpoint that is also collective. Thus Black feminist thought is a place where marginality is an excitement for creativity, American Black women and Black Brazilian women have been occupying this position for a while. As outsiders within, they need to be inserted into the center of sociological analysis; only through this process academics and society can use their knowledge to help reveal aspects of reality that most of the time are obscured by hegemonic discourses (Collins, 1989, p.15).

Shakur was running away from the police in the underground among other Black revolutionaries escaping from the censorship of her political views. Franco lived and protected her equals, the population of *favelas*, a place enslaved people were pushed to after abolition. They both, in different contexts, imagined new ways of facing reality. Using traditional geographies, borders and belongings, and inclusions and exclusions, they exposed domination and how it organizes, they named and located social differences and how it determines social orders (McKittrick, 2006, p.xiii). Thus, as McKittrick states, "black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick, 2006, p.xiv). The territory is an extremely important aspect in the history of Black Brazilian women. Being a woman from the *favela* defined Franco's political and intellectual work and influenced her position as a subject within the diaspora. Reinforcing how much people from the slums, or peripheries of the city are needed in spaces of power to finally

produce their place as outsiders within, and show their own vision for a more egalitarian and safe society.

5 CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I focused on the differences and similarities produced by the positionality of Marielle Franco and Assata Shakur in the United States and Brazil. Thus, how that positionality affected, not just history, but debates about strategies of resistance used to navigate their homeland's necropolitics. Going through this process of immersion in their narratives and geographies I could point out how social structures, for instance, the justice and political system, carry out until today multiple logics inherited from slavery and colonialism, logics which align with patriarchy and homophobia. Therefore, at the same time, this intersection of oppression works as an obstacle; it also gives those subjects a different view of society and its outcomes.

In this study I looked into psychology and the process of recognizing the self, using the concept of *escrevivências* of Conceição Evaristo (1980) to understand the subjective process of identity formation for Franco and Shakur, recognizing their territory as part of their social, psychological, and political history. Through the writings of Grada Kilomba (2019) and Fanon (1952), it is seen that Black people are born and survive immersed in an ideology that is imposed by white supremacy notions of being, which puts whiteness symbolically introjected into Black people's psychic as an ideal to be achieved. How we reclaim our identity from decades of oppression is one of the obstacles Black diasporic people face. Thus, revolutionaries, such as Franco and Shakur, through their activism subverted the social logic of whiteness and masculinity. Their activism served as an instrument for questioning the judicial system in Brazil and the United States.

Revolutionaries, in the case of this thesis, Black women revolutionaries fight the racial-sexual location of Black cultures marked historically concealed in the lack of freedom. Thus, in the face of this concealment, they produce space and geographic meanings. (McKittrick, 2006, p. xii)

Black Feminist Thought was used to analyze the strategies Franco and Shakur built to find authenticity and new ways of surviving in an unsettling environment. Thus, an exercise to point out different narratives surrounding bodies and minds who lived their lives fighting against racism and patriarchy. The survival strategies created by Black women, feminist or not, remain in this world reinforcing resistance and authenticity. With those, Black women find gaps within a system that constantly suffocates them and aims to erase their existence. For Lélia Gonzales (1985), racism is constituted as a symptom that characterizes a Brazilian cultural neurosis. It reinforces an idea of the invisibility of race and Black identity, however, race issues constitute the history of the country they are constantly erased by governmental politics relaying in the false premise of a racial democracy; denying Black people the right to connect with their history. Black feminists and Black revolutionaries through their political engagement and voices reclaim the right to their history by naming their place in society and inspiring others to do the same. All these aspects are present in the works of Afro-American Feminist such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Tamara, Winfrey Harris, Moya Bailey, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and others, who argue that Black women undergo a process of constructing consciousness distinct from other women, thus having a particular way of existing which is traced by body, mind, and territory. Brazilian intellectuals such as Lélia Gonzalez, Conceição Evaristo, Maria Carolina de Jesus, and others reclaim through their *escrevivências* that Black women's process of understanding their place in the world, the process of becoming someone, can be transnational and not necessarily linked

through the territory. Thus, Black women's experience of misogyny and racism aligns two diasporic countries in similar analogies of self.

It is extremely important to conclude this work by pointing out the effects that these revolutionary women brought to society in a field of political and social changes. The case of Anielle Franco, sister of Marielle Franco is essential to this conclusion. By the end of the process of writing this thesis, I have found out that Anielle Franco, Marielle Franco's younger sister, was nominated by the President of Brazil, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, to be a Minister of Racial Equality. The Ministry of Racial Equality is a direct federal public administration body responsible for drawing up policies and guidelines aimed at promoting racial and ethnic equality; affirmative action policies and combating racism in the country. Anielle Franco is responsible for the creation of policies that aim to protect *quilombolas*¹ and Afro Brazilians. The Ministry was founded in January 2023, 20 years after the beginning of policies to promote racial equality in Brazil (Gov, 2023). Since Anielle Franco took office, her work has been continuous to preserve her sister's legacy, but also to create policies to help Black people in the country. Anielle Franco is also a journalist, writer, educator, activist for women's and Afro-Brazilian rights, and the executive director of the Marielle Franco Institute, an institute created after the councilor's assassination.

The legacy of Marielle Franco and Assata Shakur persists, not just because they left their *escrevivências* in autobiographies and speeches, but because their voices echoed to change and denounce an unfair racist system. When their social role is transformed into academic production this act can be extremely important for diasporic and non-diasporic Black people to be inspired

¹ Quilombos were considered places with large concentrations of Black people who rebelled against the colonial regime. With the Federal Constitution of 1988, the term quilombo had its concept expanded so that today it is considered all areas occupied by remaining communities of the former quilombos.

into producing political and social change. Even though Shakur and Franco inhabit completely different continents, they had a very similar history as militants. Both suffered extreme consequences for having a political opinion and responding to the oppression caused by their positionality as Black women. A fact that placed their struggle against racism and sexism at the center of their political life. This issue is not isolated to revolutionaries and happens to many women, men, and non-binary Black individuals across the diaspora who have to live in segregated and violent spaces. Thus, this work shows the stories, history, and legacies of these two revolutionaries in order for them to remain present in our academic, social, and political productions.

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