Between the maid's room and other spaces: the Black body, heterotopias, and utopias in the pandemic /

Entre o quarto da empregada doméstica e outros espaços: o corpo negro, as heterotopias e utopias na pandemia

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ABSTRACT

Supported by decolonial studies from authors such as Carneiro (2020), Davis (2016, 1983), Moore (2017), Almeida (2018), Vergès (2020, 2021) and Vida (2021), as well as by the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia (Foucault 2013b[1967], 1984), the present work aims to analyze how the discourse-body of the Black woman domestic worker is demarcated by utopias juxtaposed to heterotopias during the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for Covid-19. In order to do this, we propose an analysis of the webcomics strip Senzala, part of the series Confinada (2020), which has been circulating on the social media platform Instagram since 2020, during the pandemic. The webstrip leads us to a discursive reading about how the social imaginary manifests itself in the construction of these spaces (utopian and heterotopic) and in the constitution of the subject Black woman domestic worker. Specifically, we investigated how the body-discourse of the Black woman domestic worker is demarcated by utopias and heterotopias from the space of the maid's room, especially between 2020 and 2021, a period in which we experienced lockdown due to the aforementioned pandemic. We understand that the maid's room constitutes a modern heterotopia that, by evoking the slave quarters from the time of slavery, reveals a lot about modern society. The reproduction of this time-space persists in our current society, exemplified by the maid's room, which would function as a modern slave quarters. The maid's room represents a heterotopia that reflects and perpetuates power relationships and inequality between employers and employees, especially considering the racial and class context.

KEYWORDS: Black Maid; Slave quarters; Maid's Room; Utopia; Heterotopia.

RESUMO

Suportado pelos estudos decoloniais a partir de autoras e autores como Carneiro (2020), Davis (2016), Moore (2017), Almeida (2018), Vergès (2020) e Vida (2021), assim como pelo conceito foucaultiano de heterotopia (Foucault 2013b[1967]), o presente trabalho tem por objetivo analisar como o discurso-corpo da mulher negra empregada doméstica é demarcado por utopias justapostas a heterotopias durante a pandemia ocasionada pelo SARS-CoV-2, vírus responsável pela Covid-19. Para isso, propomos a análise da webtirinha Senzala, parte da série Confinada (2020), que circula na rede social Instagram desde 2020, período da pandemia. A webtirinha nos conduz a uma leitura discursiva sobre como o imaginário social se manifesta na construção desses espaços (utópicos e heterotópicos) e na constituição do sujeito mulher negra empregada doméstica. Especificamente, investigamos como o discurso-corpo da mulher negra empregada doméstica é demarcado por utopias e heterotopias a partir do espaço do quartinho da empregada doméstica, especialmente entre 2020 e 2021, período que vivemos o lockdown em virtude da pandemia sobredita. Compreendemos que o quarto da empregada doméstica constitui uma heterotopia moderna que, ao evocar

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a senzala da época da escravidão, revela muito sobre a sociedade contemporânea. A reprodução desse tempo-espaço persiste em nossa sociedade atual, exemplificada pelo quartinho da empregada, que funcionaria como uma senzala moderna. O quartinho da empregada doméstica representa uma heterotopia que reflete e perpetua relações de poder e desigualdade entre empregadores e empregados, especialmente considerando o contexto racial e de classe.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Empregada Doméstica Negra; Senzala; Quartinho da Empregada Doméstica; Utopia; Heterotopia.*

1 Introduction

From the notion of heterotopia, term introduced by Michel Foucault (2013b[1967]), we can reflect on the reality of the social space. The space has been highlighted in studies for allowing the visualization of not only the places in a geographical sense, but also of subjects and culture. This reality is represented by places present in our society, places we visit, where we stop, where we pass through, open places, closed places, through which we need to navigate due to social demands: like schools, universities, libraries, hospitals, prisons, cemeteries, among other places. In the text *Of Other Spaces,* Michel Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) leads us to reflect on the different spaces that shape human existence and the proximity among them, through the concept of heterotopia. In this study, the concept of space is crucial for investigating the limitations of circulation and permanence in certain places imposed on the Black body, as we analyze this body being displaced from its space and projected to another space determined by the racistocracy (Vida, 2021) we live in.

According to Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984), in contrast to real places, there are others that provoke differences and can lead the subject to an unreal place: utopias. Utopia, in Foucault's perspective, can be considered a non-place, an idealized space, an unreal space. Although it is a place outside of all places, it presents the body in a visible state. In this regard, the present study, based on Foucauldian theoretical assumptions about space, focuses on the space occupied by Black women domestic workers, both inside the workplace and outside of it. To this end, we propose an analysis of the webstrip *Senzala* ("Slave quarters", in English), part of the webcomic series *Confinada* (2020), that circulates on the social media platform *Instagram*, a virtual space. The webstrip directs us to a discursive reading of how the social imaginary is manifested in the construction of this space and in the constitution of the Black woman domestic worker subject.

To think about this space, we articulated the concepts of discourse and memory, seeking to understand how space and subjects are materialized in the webstrip. These reflections led us to the following question: how is the discourse-body of the Black woman domestic worker demarcated by utopias and heterotopias from the space of the domestic worker's room, especially during the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for Covid-19? With this question in mind, we sought to understand how the Black woman domestic worker is represented, through the spaces that these subjects occupy or vacate[1], through the discourses that run in the webcomic series *Confinada* and are materialized in it through verbal and non-verbal language. We chose to use the webcomic series as a tool to explore and illustrate the configuration of the space, both in terms of its verbal representation and its visual manifestation. This approach allows us to examine how space is constructed when it is situated in utopian and heterotopic contexts. We therefore begin by presenting the key concepts that will help us in our analysis procedures. First, however, it is necessary to point out that, although researchers such as Ranajit Guha (1988), Gayatri Spivak (2010), Orazio Irrera (2022), Marcelo Raffin (2024), argue that relying on Foucauldian studies to discuss colonialism can perpetuate Eurocentric categories – since Foucault dealt with the complexities and impacts of colonialism in a restricted and unsatisfactory way –, we decided to base our discussions on the contribution of the French philosopher as well. We believe that his concept of heterotopias is an effective tool for analyzing colonial practices and their legacies. Furthermore, our analysis is not restricted to Foucauldian thinking, as we also incorporate the knowledge and theories of decolonial thinkers such as Sueli Carneiro (2020), Ângela Davis (2016, 1983), Carlos Moore (2007) and Françoise Vergès. Therefore, the restricted and unsatisfactory vision of the philosopher of the crowds regarding issues of colonialism will not impose limiting impacts on the discussion proposed here.

2 Foucault and the Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopia

As stated above, the utopian and heterotopic spaces, demarcated by the racist society in which we live, for the body-discourse of the Black woman domestic worker are our central point of

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[1] In Brazilian Portuguese, the term "(des)ocupar" was employed here to play with the dual meaning of "ocupar" (to occupy) and "desocupar" (to vacate). As we do not have an exact equivalent term in English, the words "vacate" and "occupy" were chosen here as two terms reflecting the one in Brazilian Portuguese.

analysis. Based on this, we begin with the reflection presented by philosopher and activist Michel Foucault on space as a significant factor to be considered in contemporary times. For him,

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault, 2013b[1967], p. 113; 1984, p. 1).

As seen above, Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) argues that the current era can be more appropriately characterized as the epoch of space rather than an epoch centered on time. The author reflects on the change in perception and experience of the world, contrasting it with previous eras that prioritized the temporal dimension. To understand this transition is to realize that spaces are sites of diversity and that although subjects can live side by side, the spaces they occupy are determined hierarchically. In the occupation of spaces in a society governed by the racist regime of truth, we have the prevalence of a dispersion, an exclusion, caused by the distinction of color and class, as we will see in the analyses. The attention and importance given to space is most evident in the ways we experience and understand the world.

For Foucault (2013b[1967],1984), the concept of space is characterized as a hierarchical set of different types of places, each with its own functions and meanings. He distinguishes between: sacred and profane; protected and vulnerable; urban and rural places, reflecting the various ways in which subjects live and organize themselves in the world. This understanding underscores the importance of spatial dynamics in the constitution of social and cultural practices, highlighting how spaces are intrinsically linked by the intersection of race, class and gender. Utopian and heterotopic spaces are not occupied indistinctly by all bodies. Depending on the class, gender and race of the given bodies, certain places are exclusive to them.

In this perspective, thinking about space means reflecting on the "outside", where we live, understanding different positions. Reflecting on spaces, Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) highlights an essential concern: the positioning relationships. How, from space, which is a non-empty place, are individuals demarcated? Thus, the author adds:

> In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with

diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (Foucault, 2013b[1967], p. 115; 1984, p. 3)

According to the philosopher of the crowds, our existence does not take place in a neutral vacuum, but in a dense context of complex relationships and interactions "that define irreducible positions", specific and distinct positions for subjects and objects, positions that are not interchangeable or easily comparable. As we live under the aegis of racism, a historical and universal phenomenon (Moore, 2017), instead of occupying an empty space that could be filled arbitrarily, the places occupied by white bodies and non-white bodies - Black and Indigenous - are determined by relations that prescribe our locations and roles in a unique and non-replicable way. Foucault (2013b,1984) emphasizes that it is the set of these relationships that shapes our spatial and social reality, shaping the way we position ourselves and interact in the world.

For Foucault (2013b, 1984), space is a marker of position relations, introducing the concept of heterotopia, or "other spaces". This discussion is relevant to our study, as it allows us to situate the bedroom of the Black woman domestic worker as a heterotopic space, an "other space". It is a real place, but one that is "outside all places", revealing socio-political events and evoking a memory that goes back to the time of slavery. This space places Black women domestic workers in situations analogous to those of that time, reflecting the architectural and power structures that existed in the slave quarters. Thus, there is an accumulation of another time, another era, within a space that is outside this time. The positional relationships emerging from the maid's room are manifested in the way this space reinforces social hierarchies and power relationships within the house. The maid's room, often small and isolated, symbolizes the marginalization and subordination of the worker in relation to the employing family. The positional relationships emerging from the maid's room show the persistence of social and racial inequalities, manifested through the architecture and organization of the domestic space, which symbolize and reinforce the hierarchy and subordination of Black women in the context of domestic work. Just by way of illustration, let's take a look below at a statement from an architecture student in Preta Rara's book, *Eu, empregada doméstica: a senzala moderna é o quartinho da empregada* ("I, domestic worker: the modern slave quarters is the maid's room", adapted to English), which presents the social representation of this heterotopic space called the maid's room:

When I was studying at university, I took a course in which I had to design the floor plan of a house. The teacher specified all the rooms that should be in the plan, and we assembled them as we wished. Among these rooms was a maid's room. When I finished the project, I showed it to the teacher, who said:
- This maid's room is too big. You can make it smaller.
I didn't think the statement was fair, as the room wasn't big at all, but I accepted the recommendation without complaining. I came back with the corrected work. He added:
- Now change the door, the maid can't enter the room from inside the house.
- What do you mean, Professor?
- The door to the maid's room has to lead to the backyard.
I couldn't understand why. I insisted:
- I don't understand, professor. It doesn't seem comfortable to have to go around the whole house so that the employee can enter her own room. What's wrong with the door being in the corridor like the other rooms?
- That's the way it is. Put the door out." (Rara, 2019, p. 36)[2]

From this brief story, we can assume that this space could be read as a heterotopia of deviation (Foucault, 2013b[1967], 1984), that is, a place of confinement in which undesirable individuals are placed, whose behavior does not conform to the norms imposed by society. We consider this to be the case, given the marginalization and inferiority of these professionals reflected in the architecture of these spaces - most of which are very small, segregated and uncomfortable. In her secluded small room, during her rest hours, the domestic worker is in the house, to serve the family, but not being part of it, nor of the house, nor of the family, which makes her necessary, but invisible. According to Vergès *(2020, p.17),*

> (...) Cleaning and caregiving work is indispensable and essential for the functioning of patriarchy and racial and neoliberal capitalism; however, despite being indispensable and essential, it remains invisible, gendered, racialized, underpaid, and undervalued.[3]

This invisibilization can be reflected in a particular form of relationship between spaces. Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) proposes a distinction that categorizes space into two forms: utopia and heterotopia. The first - utopia - refers to an idealized, non-real space. According to Foucault (2013b [1967], p.115; 1984, p. 3):

> Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society

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[2] As the book was originally and only published in Brazilian Portuguese, this is an unofficial translation to English.

[3] This excerpt is part of the preface to the Brazilian edition of the book, thus, we translated it to English.

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itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. (Foucault, 2013b[1967], p.115; 1984, p.3)

As such, utopias are spaces with no real location. They represent perfect, ideal places that don't actually exist in the physical world. Utopias are imaginary constructions that mirror society in an idealized way, offering a vision of perfection, but remaining unattainable and non-existent in concrete reality. Therefore, utopias evoke the idea of something fantastical and idealized. Through utopia, we can contemplate bodies. According to Foucault (2013a, p.11), utopias "were born from the body itself, and perhaps afterwards they turned against it." The Afrofuturism movement, for example, can be seen as an expression of utopia born of the Black body, seeking to reimagine and transform society. This movement in Brazil is a form of resistance against racism and marginalization, offering an alternative vision of the future in which the Black population occupies a central and powerful place. It is a celebration of Black identity and an affirmation of its importance and value. Among the Brazilian authors who stand out in this movement are Ale Santos, twice a finalist for the Jabuti Prize, known for his work "O Último Ancestral". Also noteworthy are Lu Ain-Zaila, author of "(In)Verdades" e "(R)Evolução"; Sandra Menezes, finalist for the Jabuti Prize and author of "O Céu Entre Mundos"; and Fábio Kabral, author of the trilogy "O Caçador Cibernético da Rua 13", "A Cientista Guerreira do Facão Furioso" and "O Blogueiro Bruxo das Redes Sobrenaturais"[4].

The utopia of a society without racism is an idealistic, fanciful, and chimerical idea that contrasts with the lived reality of discrimination and inequality. Utopias offer a vision of what society could be, while reality is marked by spaces of exclusion and marginalization. However, the Black body, although marginalized by our racist society, continues to resist, also through utopian, fantastical spaces such as Afrofuturism.

Associating utopias with the Black body in a racist society involves a critical analysis of promises and ideals that don't come true, while at the same time recognizing the creation and resistance of alternative spaces that challenge the oppressive reality. Wecomics, for example, are

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[4] Further information about the Afrofuturist movement can be found on the website, in Brazilian Portuguese: https://cultura.uol.com.br/entretenimento/noticias.

a space of resistance. Utopias provide a vision of what could be, but they also denounce the disparities between this vision and the daily reality faced by Black bodies.

In contrast to utopias, Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) recognizes heterotopias as "other spaces", real and concrete, but which function differently from conventional spaces, revealing hidden or marginalized aspects of society. The maid's room is very real, but it works differently from the other rooms in the house which, for example, can be entered from inside the house. The French philosopher, bringing up the concept of heterotopia, states that:

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places— places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. (Foucault, 2013b[1967], p.115; 1984, p. 3).

Heterotopias that are distinctive real places, defined as "other places". These spaces stand out for their exclusionary and disruptive nature, functioning like counter-spaces that are situated "out of place". Due to their dissonance with conventional spaces, heterotopias break with prevailing norms, making it possible to challenge established values and regulations.

Among the heterotopias produced by societies, those of crisis and those of deviation stand out. Heterotopias of crisis are designated for individuals in states considered critical, such as women during menstruation, teenagers and the elderly, among others. These spaces are categorized by Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) as sacred and forbidden, representing what he describes as heterotopias of crisis.

In Brazil, during the pandemic, several field hospitals were set up in cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in which soccer stadiums were transformed into temporary medical facilities. These spaces exemplify heterotopias of crisis, since they were activated in response to the em./ergency to isolate and separate those with a potential risk of contagion. They constitute an emergency adaptation of space, designed to prevent the spread of the virus, and reveal the flexibility and responsiveness of the built environment in the face of a health crisis.

Heterotopias of deviance refer to spaces for individuals whose behavior deviates from established social or cultural norms. These places play a role in maintaining social order by isolating those who are seen as a threat or as deviant from cultural and social norms. Thus, heterotopias of deviance constitute a relevant analytical tool for understanding how spaces are used to manage difference and preserve social order through the exclusion and containment of behaviors considered deviant. The concept leads us to a critical reflection on exclusionary practices and the criteria that define what is considered deviant. In primitive societies, heterotopias of deviance were associated with behaviors that challenged the established order. In the present times, these deviations are manifested through marginalization, resulting in the exclusion and isolation of those who do not conform to the behavioural standards considered normative by society.

Thus, institutions such as prisons, psychiatric clinics, retirement homes and other spaces are structured to isolate those who are considered to be deviant from established standards. Heterotopias of deviance generate conflicts stemming from power relationships, since they aim to keep individuals within the norms determined by a society marked by inequalities promoted by racism, sexism and homophobia. Black individuals have historically been the target of control and exclusion in heterotopias of deviation, where they are segregated or isolated because of their race or social class, which deviates from the white standard established as the norm by society, from maids' rooms to shacks in the *favelas* (slums), many are the heterotopic spaces destined for poor non-whites.

By examining above the representation of the domestic worker's room in the context of isolation, exclusion, prejudice and racism – an "other" space within the house itself – we classify this space as a heterotopia of deviation. This classification will be explored in greater depth in our analysis, exploring the representation of the Black woman domestic worker and the space allocated to her. In this context, the discursive genre of the webcomic strip emerges as a vehicle for the representation and exposure of spaces and the bodies that inhabit them. Additionally, the webstrip concretizes the social relations and culturally constructed "truths" that determine the configuration of these spaces and subjects, through the specific discourses that characterize it.

Given the conceptual basis underlying our discussion, let's now move on to the analysis, with a view to understanding how these concepts are manifested in the configuration of the maid's room and other spaces represented in the webstrip *Senzala*.

3 The Black Body between Utopia and Heterotopia: Realities in the Pandemic

In our reflections, we propose to consider an integral space in our society that raises debates about the representation of Black women as domestic workers: the domestic worker's room, explored in the light of the concept of heterotopia, as outlined by Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984). We understand that the inclusion of the Black body in this environment emphasizes its invisibility, placing it on the margins and excluding it from other social spaces.

The *corpus* that prompted us to examine these issues in detail is set in the context of digital media. This environment plays a central role in the visibility and configuration of discourses, assuming a fundamental importance in the construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of social imaginaries, identities, desires for truth and knowledge. By exposing and debating a wide range of issues, such as the identity of the Black woman domestic worker in modern times, digital media transmits information quickly and comprehensively. Events become visible in real time, reaching diverse audiences, functioning as a dynamic record of society. Social media, in particular, have stood out as spaces of social representation, where the texts transmitted reflect, refract and shape our reality through the discourses present in various discursive genres.

We've selected the webstrip from the webcomic series *Confinada*, which was published on the internet between 2020 and 2021, a period immersed in the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes Covid-19. The series was conceived by Leandro Assis, who has a degree in Social Communication with a specialization in *storytelling* from the *New York Film Academy*,as well as being a comic artist and screenwriter; and Triscila Oliveira, a human rights activist and *cyberactivist*. The series' narratives explore the daily lives of a digital influencer of white descent and a Black domestic worker, tackling complex issues related to gender, class, race, and social and racial inequalities.

The digital media, through the dissemination of these discourses, has portrayed the Black subject based on the dynamics of power, knowledge and truth that permeate our society, as evidenced in the webstrip. The conditions that sustain these discourses, manifested as events, are shaped by social, economic and political factors that have been established and perpetuated in society. In our research, we investigate how the intersection between women, domestic work and

the space they occupy revives economic structures left over from the colonial period, which highlight and perpetuate racism through discursive practices.

For Almeida (2018, p.27):

> Racism is not just a discriminatory act or even a set of acts, but a process in which conditions of subalternity and privilege that are distributed among racial groups and are reproduced in the spheres of politics, economics and human relations.[5]

For the author, racism should not be seen simply as a single act of discrimination or as a sequence of disconnected events. Instead, it should be understood as a continuous and systematic process. This process perpetuates conditions of subordination for certain racial groups while maintaining privileges for others, and these dynamics are reproduced in the discursive, political and economic spheres and in human relations in general. In this way, racism is understood as a structural system that perpetuates inequalities and hierarchies based on race over time. Furthermore, according to Moore (2007, p. 38), "racism is an eminently historical phenomenon linked to real conflicts that have occurred in the history of peoples".

Considering this structural, historical and phenotypical system that delimits the position of the Black body, we reflect on this body in light of the conditions of subalternity and privileges involved in the relationship between the employer - a white woman - and the domestic worker - a Black woman[6]. We analyzed the space that the latter is destined to occupy in the workplace - the maid's room. This space, situated on the fringes of the home, small and out of place, is configured as a heterotopia that manifests power relationships, as we discussed above. Spaces can symbolize and reinforce social hierarchies. For example, the maid's room represents a heterotopia that reflects and perpetuates relations of power and inequality between employers and employees, especially when considering the racial and class context.

The structure and organization of Brazilian society, especially during pandemic times, emphasize inequalities related to gender, class, and race. Without ideal conditions for isolation, the

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[5] As the book was published in Brazilian Portuguese, we freely translated this excerpt to English.

[6] It is well known that this is also a profession occupied by white women, but considering that the subjects who occupy this space are mainly non-white, we turn our attention in this work specifically to Black women domestic workers. According to the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies (DIEESE), "women make up more than 92% of employed domestic workers, and more than 65% of them are Black".

poorest – among these, the vast majority are Black[7] – forbidden from following the 'stay at home' warning due to the need to continue working, became the most vulnerable groups to situations of exposure to the virus. Among these groups, domestic workers stand out in particular, mostly composed of Black women.

In addition to characterizing domestic work in Brazil as a predominantly female and Black activity, during pandemic, it is important to point out that the Black woman domestic worker faced greater vulnerability to contamination by this deadly virus that killed approximately 500,000 people only in Brazil, of which 58,9% of the excess deaths occurred among Black population – mixed-race and Black individuals. This information highlights how structural racism is manifested in an exaggerated manner in the lives of Black women who work as domestic workers.

During pandemic, these women not only continued to play an essential role in society, na sociedade, mostly without the appropriate conditions of safety and protection, but also faced higher risk of getting infected by the virus due to their working and living conditions. This emphasizes how racism and racial discrimination not only marginalize these women within the labor market, but also place them in situations of greater vulnerability and exposure to dangers such as serious illnesses, with devastating consequences for them and their communities.

According to Sueli Carneiro (2020), the social structure still perpetuates racism by directing certain labor occupations towards Black individuals, as it's evident in the case of domestic work. Carneiro (2020) argues that "The predominance of Black women in this service sector reaffirms that, as in the post-abolition period, this continues to be the main form of economic activity accessible to Black women"[8] (Carneiro, 2020, p. 36).

The association of Black women with domestic work is closely linked to the historical legacy in which former slaves, often lacking professional qualifications beyond domestic work, were forced to perform this type of activity. In the southern United States, specifically, slavery was often referred to as the "domestic institution." As Davis states (2016, p. 98; 1983, p. 54):

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[7] At least 40% of the Black population live with an income that places them below the poverty line (less than 5.5 dollars a day, 2011 calculations). While approximately 18% of the white population live in the same situation. The average percentage of people living below the poverty line for the Brazilian population as a whole is 30%. Source (in Brazilian Portuguese): https://informasus.ufscar.br/por-que-as-pessoas-negras-sao-as-que-morrem-mais-de-covid-19-no-brasil/.

[8] This excerpt was also freely translated to English, as it was officially published in Brazilian Portuguese.

> Indeed, slavery itself had been euphemistically called the "domestic institution" and slaves had been designated as innocuous "domestic servants." In the eyes of the former slaveholders, "domestic service" must have been a courteous term for a contemptible occupation not a half-step away from slavery. While Black women worked as cooks, nursemaids, chambermaids, and all-purpose domestics, white women in the South unanimously rejected this line of work.

As the author suggests, slavery in the United States was disguised under the euphemistic term of "domestic institution," while Black women were often neutrally referred to as "domestic servants." For former slave owners, the term "domestic service" served as a polite way to describe a job considered degrading, not far removed from slavery itself.

While Black women performed roles as cooks, nannies, maids, and various other domestic roles, white women from the South generally unanimously rejected these types of work. A framework was formed that equated domestic service with slavery, assigning Black women the performance of domestic labor.

As stated by Davis (2016, p.102; 1983, p. 57):

> If white women never resorted to domestic work unless they were certain of finding nothing better, Black women were trapped in these occupations until the advent of World War II (Davis, 2016, p.102; 1983, p. 57).

A scenario that, even amid the existence of new knowledge, is still visible today, since domestic work is performed in a greater percentage by Black women, as demonstrated by a study carried out by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (2019):

> The Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) released a sociodemographic overview of domestic work in Brazil this Monday, the 23rd. The report highlights a reduction in the proportion of employed women engaged in this type of work: from 17% in 1995 to 14.6% in 2018, on average. The rate rises to 18.6% among Black women, compared to 10% for white women.
> .

The analysis of domestic work in Brazil shows that the proportion of women performing this activity has declined in past decades. Although women's participation in domestic tasks has declined globally, this decline has not been uniform across racial groups. Black women continue to perform significantly more domestic tasks than white women. This difference illustrates not only the persistence of racial inequalities within the sector, but also highlights how Black women are disproportionately represented in activities that require more time and effort, reflecting structural and historical inequalities that affect these women in the labor market.

Thus, bringing to light this persistent reality of the presence of Black women in domestic work proves to be essential, as que interpret it from a discursive perspective and emphasizing space as a crucial element to understand the representation of Black women as domestic workers through the discourses present in the webcomics that address the space of the "maid's room".

The webcomics series *Confinada* depict the life of a digital influencer, Fran Clemente, a wealthy white woman who lives in São Conrado, an upscale neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro. Among her domestic workers is Ju, a poor Black woman from Rocinha, who out of necessity continue to work and reside in her employer's house during the pandemic. To begin the analysis, let us examine Fig. 1, webstrip number 59, entitled *Senzala* (slave quarters, in English).

Figura 1: Webcomics *Confinada* N.59 *Senzala*[9]

Source: Webcomics - illustrations on Instagram @leandro_assis_ilustra, 2020

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[9] **Panel 1**: "I already see some people saying: 'This is jealousy!', 'Does Fran have any fault for being born rich?!', 'So much hate against white people!' Umph! The hate comes from Fran and her kind. Hate for me and my people!"

Panel 2: "Only hate explains having a thousand-square-meter apartment and putting the maid in a two-square-meter room. No air conditioning. In the service area!"

Panel 3: "And having a bunch of bathrooms like this in the house but forbidding us from using them? And separating our plates, silverware, and cups? Is that disgust?"

Panel 4: "Why do I walk into a store and a security guard sticks to me? Why do I have to carry receipts for everything?! Why does the police kill us more?! Is it fear?"

Panel 5: "Hate, disgust, fear! You'd love for us to disappear! You don't want us in college with you. Not in airplanes, stores, or Disneyland. But you need us."

Panel 6: "You can't live without your housekeepers, nannies, and cooks. You keep them always close. So close. But so far..."

Panel 7: "Today's slave quarters. / Person 1: 'This place makes me uncomfortable.' Person 2: 'I like the peace here. It helps me think. I've made many decisions here.'"

Panel 8: "Person 2: 'I dropped out of the architecture program. Became an influencer. My life owes a lot to this place.' Person 1: 'So? Will you accept dad's proposal?' Person 2: 'I don't know yet. But I'm sure of one thing...'"

Panel 9: "Person 2 continues: 'Whatever decision I make, I'll be fine!' / And that's how life goes. White people living. Black people serving. To be continued."

The webstrip in question is a direct sequel to N.58 - Unicorn, in which the possibility of Fran's being canceled on social media arises. In this context, Ju temporarily takes control of Fran's phone in order to disclose details about the house and the realities they both experience, and also emphasize that even if Fran is digitally cancelled, social disparities will persist. In the next episode, N.59 - Senzala, Ju continues to be the protagonist of the narrative by managing her boss's social media posts, using her phone to do so, as shown in the second panel.

Firstly, we would like to highlight the representation of two distinct realities in the webstrips. Firstly, there is Fran's view of the world, which reflects her position as a subject belonging to a privileged social class, white and possessing assets and capital. On the other hand, there are Ju's posts, which reveal her interpretation of the world from her position as a marginalized, Black, low-income subject who doesn't belong to Fran's world of privilege. Knowing that truth, according to Foucault (1979), is always a construction influenced by the subject who formulates it and the social context in which they are inserted, each of them presents truths from their social perspectives and positions.

The presence of utopia in the realities of a wealthy white woman who is a digital influencer, like Fran, and a Black woman domestic worker, like Ju, can be highlighted through the representations of their respective social universes and aspirations. For Fran, utopia is present in the construction of an idealized and privileged world, reflected in her luxurious life, her role as a digital influencer and her influence on social networks. She, a white woman, represents an ideal of success and visibility, where her concerns revolve around social status. On the other hand, for Ju, utopia is manifested in contrasting ways. She aspires to a reality in which she is not marginalized, and her working and living conditions are respected. By taking temporary control of Fran's social media on the webstrip, *Senzala*, Ju uses this platform not only to expose the inequalities and injustices she faces, but also to demand visibility and recognition for her own reality, breaking with the invisibility imposed by her role as a domestic worker. Thus, both Fran and Ju operate within different utopian contexts: Fran within a context of privilege and idealization of digital and social life, and Ju within a context of seeking recognition and social justice within the unequal structures of contemporary society.

In the scene depicted in the second panel, there is a discursive materialization of a utopian body of the poor, Black domestic worker, represented by Ju, as she temporarily takes control of

her rich, white boss's (Fran) phone to publish her own reality on social media. This act represents an inversion of roles and power, where Ju uses the digital platform, normally controlled by Fran, to expose the social inequalities and living conditions she faces as a domestic worker.

Through the second panel, we have a scene that depicts a body that can be utopian (by taking control of the boss's private space, the phone), breaking certain rules, even laws, and thus demonstrating a disruption (when the expectation is obedience) to its position within the discourse-body of a domestic worker, and, equally, there is a heterotopia, marked, we could say, by a deviation, to the extent that it makes its real space visible to the virtual world.

At the same time, the situation presented reveals a heterotopia of deviation, as Ju transforms her boss's digital space into a place of contestation and exposure of social disparities. Fran's social media, initially designed to idealize and promote her privileged life, are subverted by Ju to reveal a marginalized and invisible reality, as a form of resistance. This inversion of Fran's use of digital space represents a heterotopia, where the space usually dominated by a hegemonic discourse is used to present a critical perspective of social reality.

By taking her boss's phone, Ju is exercising an act of direct resistance. She appropriates a communication tool that would normally perpetuate her employer's image and status. Ju uses the digital platform to reveal the harsh realities of her life and work, which are often made invisible by mainstream society. She describes the oppressive working conditions and segregation she faces in the domestic environment. Through this appropriation, Ju introduces her own voice and narrative into her employer's digital space, inverting the usual hierarchy and amplifying the domestic worker's perspective, which is usually silenced.

Resistance creates heterotopias through narratives that challenge the dominant order. By exposing the details of Fran's house, Ju subverts the private and controlled nature of this space, transforming it into a scene of public contestation. Ju constructs an alternative narrative that challenges the hegemonic construction of the social order, exposing inequalities and questioning the power structures that maintain their subordination. This alternative narrative functions as a form of symbolic empowerment. By sharing her experiences, Ju denounces injustice and demands social equality.

Ju's appropriation of her boss's phone, a private space, and her exposure of the realities of her life and work are ways to create a narrative heterotopia. These representations introduce

new truths and challenge dominant constructions, transforming the symbolic space of digital media into a field of resistance. Digital media, especially social networks, become a symbolic space of resistance, where marginalized voices can express themselves, share their stories and mobilize support. This space allows new truths to emerge, challenging dominant constructions of race, class and gender. The digital platform, which often serves to reinforce social norms, is transformed into a field of contestation.

We therefore reaffirm that resistance creates heterotopias through narratives and representations that challenge the dominant order by introducing new truths and challenging hegemonic constructions. In the case of the webstrips, the domestic worker's appropriation of the cell phone and the exposure of her realities transform the symbolic space of digital media into a field of resistance. These representations not only challenge the invisibility and subordination of domestic workers, but also create alternative spaces of empowerment and contestation, with the potential to catalyze significant social change.

Various spaces are highlighted by the illustrations of the webstrip and the characters' speeches, such as: the house, the maid's room, the slave quarters, the store, college, Disneyland, and finally, the *favela* in contrast to the noble neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro (realities separated by a few meters). These spaces allow the body to become the body – in other words, they situate the body as a place that is constituted by heterotopias and utopias.

We live in a time of spaces, as Foucault (2013b[1967], 1984) said, and these spaces cross discourse-bodies and constitute them. From this perspective, the webstrip points to a body-discourse that is materialized by racism, exclusion and separation, through the spaces that the Black woman domestic worker is made to occupy or vacate[10]. Thus, racism, prejudice and exclusion, based on race and class, are analysed through a body; without a body, there is no racism, which is therefore materialized in the body-discourse of the Black woman domestic worker.

Still in the second panel, there is a line and an illustration that present the space destined for the maid: "small two-square-meter room", "no air conditioning", "in the service area". This space contrasts sharply with the other rooms in the apartment, as can be seen in the image and in Ju's speech: "Only hate explains having a thousand-square-meter apartment and putting the maid in a

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[10] In Brazilian Portuguese, the term "(des)ocupar" was employed here to play with the dual meaning of "ocupar" (to occupy) and "desocupar" (to vacate). As we do not have an exact equivalent term in English, the words "vacate" and "occupy" were chosen here as two terms reflecting the one in Brazilian Portuguese.

two-square-meter room. No air conditioning. In the service area". In the webstrip, not far from reality, the maid's room is a space located in a separate environment from the others, in the service area, distant and marginalized. It is a closed space, without proper ventilation, without access to the other rooms, which is both close and distant. The apartment and the maid's room represent two antagonistic spaces within the same environment. The latter is intended for people who are considered to be deviant from the white, wealthy standard established by society, thus configuring itself as a heterotopia of deviance.

It is important to emphasize that the Black woman domestic worker subject does not deviate from the norms imposed by society, but is deviated by it, through a culture governed by the pact of whiteness (Bento, 2022), and is marginalized in the spaces intended for them. According to one of the principles highlighted by Foucault (2013b[1967], p.117; 1984, p. 5) for the description of heterotopias, "is that a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion". This allows us to situate the maid's room today as a modern-day slave quarters, as Preta-Rara (2019) stated when she titled her book as "I, domestic worker: the modern slave quarters is the maid's room". The title of the webcomic, *Senzala*, exposes this similarity between the slave quarters and the small room of the domestic worker, mostly Black. We can observe the updating of colonial spaces and relationships in which domestic workers were placed in situations of confinement and servitude. Even during the pandemic, this working class was not exposed to the social isolation from which everyone had to protect themselves. This class continued to clean, cook, wash and work outside their homes, while the bosses and mistresses remained in their homes, following the quarantine. Protected from the virus and being served.

Relating the webstrip to the socio-historical context, we highlight the statement by the then Minister of the Economy, Paulo Guedes, about the possibility of domestic workers going to Disneyland, thereby inferring a balance in the Brazilian economy. This statement was widely reported in the media. According to Ventura (2020), on the website *O Globo*[11]:

> The Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes said on Wednesday that the higher dollar is 'good for everyone'. He stated that, with the lower dollar, 'everyone' was going to Disneyland, in the United States, including the 'maids'.

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[11] Full report in Brazilian Portuguese on the following website: https://oglobo.globo.com/economia/guedes-diz-que-dolar-alto-bom-empregada-domestica-estava-indo-para-disney-uma-festa-danada-24245365

The webstrip's mention of the possibility of domestic workers going to Disneyland takes up and criticizes the minister's speech, highlighting social inequalities and questioning the superficial view of Brazil's economic balance. By specifically mentioning domestic workers, the former minister reinforces class and gender stereotypes, perpetuating a view that places these professionals in a position of socio-economic inferiority and limits their prospects for social and economic advancement.

The distinction based on race and class becomes a determining criterion for access to certain organizational spaces. According to Foucault (2013a, p.21), each society has its own heterotopias, and it is possible to classify societies according to the heterotopias they prefer or constitute. In this context, the existence of the maid's room, especially during the pandemic, and the restriction of Black people's freedom to enter certain places reveal the deep marks of racism in our racistocracy (Vida, 2022). The spaces designated for the circulation or residence of Black individuals highlight a racism that not only excludes but also perpetuates social inequality and, in many cases, violence, as illustrated by the frequency of questions in the webstrip: "Why does the police kill us more?!". Thus, social inequality, racism, lack of access to education and other elements of a racist system have forced the domestic worker to remain confined to her own little room. These same factors have also contributed to the exclusion of these individuals from other spaces which, although apparently accessible, remain unreachable, such as theme parks like Disneyland.

We are struck by the interaction between the verbal and the visual, especially in frame six. The image depicts a Black domestic worker recording her workplace in an upscale area, while in the background there is a glimpse of a favela, her place of residence. Accompanying the illustration is the statement: "So close. But so far...". There is a geographical proximity, but a considerable socio-economic distance, as well as a clear racial separation.

When we consider the virtual space and the use of cell phones to capture both work and living spaces, we realize that the body-discourse is permeated by a complex space-time, where the Black woman domestic worker subject is and is not in that place at the same time. According to Foucault (2013a, p.37), space-times share the characteristic of being places where "I am and I am not", like the mirror or the cemetery; or where "I am other". In this way, the images portray a virtual space that not only represents, but also reveals the real space of the Black domestic worker.

She finds herself in a place where she is present and absent at the same time, a space that does not belong to her everyday reality.

In the last scenes narrated, while the sisters talk in the old senzala, a space belonging to the family, we notice that the bodies-discourses experience the present permeated by the historical past times of slavery. This past is evoked by the very structure of the slave quarters, by the instruments of torture used at the time and by the architecture that illustrates it. Here, a concrete heterotopic space is configured, an "other" space, where a utopia coexists, manifested in the statement "I like the peace here". This place, which evokes painful memories for Black people in general, generating feelings such as sadness, suffering, restlessness, anguish and pain, paradoxically becomes a place of peace. It is a space that, according to the seventh panel, facilitates reflection and decision-making.

The space of horror for the Black subject becomes a space of peace for the white subject, exemplifying the principle that "Heterotopia has the power to bring together in a single real space several spaces, several positions which are in themselves incompatible". (Foucault, 2013a, p.24). By bringing together contradictions and multiple realities in a single place, these heterotopias offer a new perspective on social norms and cultural meanings.

Final considerations

Our analysis, whose *corpus* are webcomic strips, reveals economic issues and fundamental politics regarding domestic work and the condition of the Black woman domestic worker, providing perspectives on how our society has been and continues to be structured by segregated spaces still occupied by these subjects.

During the analysis of the webstrip, we observed how the Black woman domestic worker is represented, based on the utopian and heterotopic spaces that permeate her existence within the narrative approached by the genre. The pandemic, in turn, exacerbated the detour of Black and poor bodies into other spaces, such as the risk of contagion by a virus that was deadly at the time. During the pandemic, domestic workers were forced to continue working in order to ensure economic survival for them and their families. Opposite to the general advice to stay at home during social isolation, in most cases they were confined to their employers' houses, not being allowed to visit their own families. They were segregated to their designated rooms, without access to other

spaces, due to the employers' families' fear of contamination by Covid-19. The right to social isolation thus turned out to be a privilege based on race, class and gender.

The analyses carried out here lead to the conclusion that the discursive spaces visible in webcomics are valuable sources for understanding bodies, especially the Black body and its place in society. The body of the Black woman domestic worker asserts itself as a discursive body when her image is published, gaining voice and visibility in the virtual world as a utopia. However, it is also a discursive body that occupies heterotopic spaces, which evokes painful memories of slavery, such as the slave quarters, housing for Black slaves, spaces without natural light, with inadequate and uncomfortable sanitary conditions, creating a comparison with what is known today as "the maid's room". In both situations, the body is marked by exclusion, marginalization and deprivation of freedom, as during the pandemic, when it was forced to continue working without freedom of movement or visiting family members. It is the spaces, through language, that allow us to read these "truths".

Thus, the conditions imposed during the pandemic have highlighted and amplified racial and gender inequalities, revealing how power operates in multiple layers to perpetuate subordination through the intersection of race and class. Analyzing these conditions in the light of Foucault's theories (2013b[1967], 1984) reveals a complex network of power, control and resistance that shapes the lives and work of domestic workers.

The "maid's room" space is a concrete example of heterotopia, as it encapsulates and reflects the socio-political tensions and dynamics of society. Domestic workers, often Black women, are confined to a physically separate but functionally indispensable space for the family. This physical isolation not only reflects but also reinforces racial and social segregation, relegating domestic workers to a position of invisibility and servitude.

Moreover, this space carries a historical memory that goes back to slavery, where the spaces of the enslaved were deliberately separated and kept in inferior conditions. This historical continuity of spatial separation perpetuates the idea of inferiority and subordination, inserting this worker into a power dynamic that dehumanizes and undervalues her.

On the other hand, by criticizing the oppression and historical inequalities associated with slavery and colonization, offering an alternative vision that suggests new ways of being and living and highlighting past and present injustices, the webstrip aligns itself with the social and political

critique of Afrofuturism, a movement that seeks to affirm and celebrate Black identities, providing new forms of empowerment and self-affirmation, because, as Spivak (2010, p. 72; Morris & Spivak, 2010, p. 59) states, "one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous".

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