

DISCOURSE ON THE LONELINESS OF NORTHEASTERN BLACK WOMEN

DISCURSOS SOBRE A SOLIDÃO DA MULHER NEGRA NORDESTINA¹

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Abstract: The purpose of the present research is to analyze and try to understand the many discourses generated on Twitter regarding the loneliness of black women from the Northeast of Brazil. These discourses found uptake when Flayslane, a black woman from the Northeast who was taking part in the 2020 edition of the reality show Big Brother Brasil, chose to address the issue on the air. To this end, we base ourselves on digital ethnography that relies on textual tracking online and draws heavily on the concept of indexicality. With an understanding of language as action as our point of departure, we establish a dialogue with theoretical perspectives related to intersectionality. The data generated allow us to infer that performative speech acts point to discourses that reinforce the loneliness of black women from the Northeast of Brazil.

Keywords: Intersectionality; Loneliness; Northeastern Black Women.

Resumo: O propósito desta pesquisa foi compreender os discursos sobre a solidão da mulher negra no Twitter, quando a participante Flayslane, mulher negra nordestina, participante do Big Brother Brasil 2020, aborda o tema durante o programa. Para tal, embasamo-nos na pesquisa etnográfica de internet que busca rastrear textos e na concepção de indexicalidade. Partindo da concepção de linguagem como ação, promovemos um diálogo com perspectivas teóricas relacionadas à interseccionalidade. Os dados gerados nos permitem inferir que os atos de fala performativos analisados apontam para discursos que reforçam a solidão das mulheres negras nordestinas.

Palavras-chave: Interseccionalidade; Solidão; Mulher Negra Nordestina.



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Introduction

In 2020, we were all taken aback by the news of a Covid-19 pandemic, a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the new coronavirus. Ever since March of that year, when the pandemic reached our country, the attitude of the former President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, had been one of denial. With regard to the pandemic, he made light of the virus calling it the sniffles and, when confronted with the thousands of lives lost every day around the country and all over the world, Bolsonaro ironically replied: “so what?”

Conceição (2021) has shown us that, contrary to what the president claimed, the pandemic was far from democratic. The researcher highlighted the many facets of oppression and racism that were brought to the fore by the Covid-19 pandemic. The author also focused on the impacts of socio-racial inequalities that strip away the right to sustain life.

In the context of the pandemic, one of the most widely watched programs of any television network was being aired: *Big Brother Brasil*⁴ 2020, in that edition marked by the pandemic. Throughout the show’s mandatory isolation (from the outside world) of contestants, conversations took place among them dealing with various subjects, including issues of race intersected by gender, class, etc. In one such conversation, two black women discuss the loneliness many black women face. Flayslane, a singer from the Northeastern state of Paraíba, discusses the subject with Thelma, an anesthesiologist from São Paulo. The conversation found uptake on the platform formerly known as Twitter, where the data for this investigation were generated. In the specific conversation under analysis, we tried to understand the discourses generated on Twitter regarding the loneliness of black women from the Northeast of Brazil, when participant Flayslane addresses the issue on the show.

According to data from the event “Black Women Towards a 50-50 Planet: what we want in 2023”, organized by Black Women from the Northeast Network with the support of UN Women Brazil and the Black Women’s Committee, around 75% of the population of the Northeast of Brazil is black (Un Women Brazil, 2017). Therefore, in order to discuss the loneliness of black women from the Northeast, we will look at the intersectional oppressions of sexism, racism and xenophobia. In the case in

4 *Big Brother Brasil (BBB)* is a reality show consisting in the confinement and isolation (from the outside world) of a group of contestants in a specially constructed ‘house’, where contestants are continuously monitored by TV cameras 24/7, competing for a cash prize of millions of reais at the end of each edition. The show is edited prior to being aired so producers can be sure that what is aired is in line with their interests, as well as with the audience’s and the sponsors’ interest(s).

point, Flaylsane suffers a triple oppression as she is a woman, she is black, and she is from the Northeast of the country.

It is our understanding that xenophobia, sexism and racism are constructed in performative speech acts and, as such, produce effects in people's lives. As we will see in greater detail below, the theoretical framework of this research draws on the constructs of performance/performativity. The term *performative*, according to Butler (2018), refers to the way in which we enact acts of identity, in a continuous series of social and cultural enactments, rather than being understood as the expression of a previously given identity. We have come to understand language as an instrument through which power is exercised, as a performance; in this sense, words are actions and produce effects.

Performances allow us to narrate and resignify social life; through them, social subjects can be reinvented and modified, and social practices and norms can be transformed, since we are dealing with a discursive *performance*, in other words, a way of doing through language (Melo; Moita Lopes, 2014).

Muniz (2016, 2009) rounds off this debate by underscoring the fact that performativity displaces the concept of truth and promotes the possibility of conceiving a relationship between language and identities in terms of a dynamic and relational process politically motivated by action. Above all, a relationship between language and identities that is not based on bounded, rigid notions, since both linguistic self-identification and hetero-identification as a black person in our country will take place in a manner that is both political and contingent.

Alongside this construct of performativity, we also need to understand the notion of discourse employed here. For Butler (2021), the production of discourses is not only an action which performs actions, but also a production that consists of a practice with effects and consequences in our social relations. Discourses are not to be reduced to something that is self-contained and personal, but rather, thought of as something historically and socially constituted.

Butler (2021) also goes on to examine how hate speech exists within the framework of the relationship between language, actions and the bodies of those who produce and those who are the object of hate speech. Hence, the author states that hate speech wounds, that is, linguistic injury acts in a way that is similar to physical injury.

It is important to point out that we do not exist outside of power relations; on the other hand, however, we cannot exempt discoursing subjects from

responsibility in choosing their discourses. According to Foucault (1997), discourse does not reproduce exclusively what is external to the speaker, but also the interests of those who speak. In this sense, the subject acts through discourse and vice versa. Therefore, subjects are responsible for their utterances and discourses carry expressions of the time, the context, the place, the culture, but also expressions of who we are and of our subjectivity. Discourse displaces the concept of truth and promotes the possibility of establishing a relationship between language and identities. Thus, for Butler (2021), the naming of the self and of the Other performs essential functions, since we are linguistic beings.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, the methodological strategy we use is that of textual tracking. According to Blommaert (2010), Fabrício (2014) and Fabrício and Melo (2020), texts in the online environment describe multiple and inconstant textual trajectories; these trajectories lead us to changes, re-evaluations and transformations of texts in different contexts. The aim of textual tracking is to follow these textual trajectories so that, for instance, we may learn about the discourses on loneliness produced all along these trajectories, as is the case in the present research.

In the first textual tracking, a search was done for the terms “loneliness of black women from the Northeast.” The search was carried out on Google, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, and led us to a variety of texts, including a tweet (a Twitter post) about the conversation between Flayslane and Thelma at BBB 2020. In the second tracking, the search terms used were “Flayslane and loneliness,” and the search was only carried out on Twitter. The Twitter posts were then selected because they were in line with the research objectives of addressing the loneliness of black women from the Northeast.

Twitter is a particularly relevant social network platform for our study of the loneliness of black women on account of its structural and operational features. As a topic, the loneliness of black women is oftentimes subjected to processes of effacement in spaces for social interaction, such as conventional media platforms. Twitter, however, due to its open-endedness, allows for debates on the topic to be carried out in the public realm. While other platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, rely more heavily on visual content, the platform formerly known as Twitter is markedly dependant on text and discourse, making it a valuable source of qualitative data.

For the sake of the present research, we focus specifically on tweets (textual posts), leaving out comments. This strategy allowed us direct access and a deeper understanding of the different personal discourses on the loneliness of black women, which is the main purpose of our research. The

comments proved irrelevant, as did spam, emojis or interactions which did not add to the study.

To analyze the posts, we drew on the concept of *indexicality* proposed by Silverstein (2009), Blommaert (2010) and Melo (2021). Language in use produces a multiplicity of meanings that point to different repertoires. This phenomenon is known as indexicality. Indexicality can have a denotational or a connotational value (when it points to socio-historical meanings). The latter are ordered according to an “indexical order” and also according to “orders of indexicality” (two different constructs, albeit related). In this sense, indexicality points to discourses, texts, and broad social repertoires of a co-constructed nature within a narrative. To analyze a specific excerpt, we will also rely on the constructs of *footing* and *framing*. According to Melo and Moita Lopes (2020), framing is understood as explaining the activity being carried out and the meanings attributed by the speaker to what they are saying. Footing, on the other hand, represents alignment, the projection of a participant’s self in their relationship with the Other, with themselves and with the discourse that is under construction (Goffman, 1981).

With that in mind, we now turn to the issue at hand. This article is organized into three sections: first, we take a closer look at the concept of intersectionality; then, we make some considerations on the loneliness of black women; and finally, we reflect on the discourses produced on Twitter on this topic of the loneliness of black women, after Flaylsane, a participant in Big Brother Brazil 2020, who is herself a black woman from the Northeast of the country, addressed the issue on the show.

1 A theoretical-methodological framework: intersectionality

Considering the perspective of black intellectuals such as Lélia Gonzalez and bell hooks, whenever we focus on black women’s studies, the perspective of *intersectionality* comes into play. According to Crenshaw (1995), intersectionality considers that the categories of race, class and gender are interrelated and shape each other. The concept can be divided into three types: structural intersectionality, showing, for example, that the forms of oppression undergone by black women differ from those undergone by white women; political intersectionality, addressing the impact of public policies on groups that are discriminated against; and representational intersectionality, assessing how popular culture represents these groups and how this affects their lives.

For Akotirene (2019), on the other hand, intersectionality is a system of oppression combining interconnected factors; it has to do with identity

issues in which racism participates, intercepted by other structures. Building on this perspective, the concept suggests that the idea of race should draw on class-gender subsidies and be on a level of analytical equality with these two other terms, as this theoretical perspective shows black women positioned in 'avenues' far from white heteropatriarchal cisgender identity.

According to Collins and Bilge (2021), intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing how the complexity of the world becomes manifest in people and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life are made up of many different factors that mutually influence each other. When it comes to social inequality, life and the organization of power in a given society, social divisions can be observed, whether of race, gender or class, but there are many axes that operate together. Intersectionality, in this sense, offers us better access to the complexity of the world and of ourselves.

Furthermore, for these researchers, the term rejects false divisions between academia and activism, between thinking and direct action. Intersectionality also appears in the practices of social movements, such as black women's social collectives, so its definition, history and potential are not limited to the understanding and limits imposed by academia. Therefore, for the authors, intersectionality is a powerful analytical tool (in which theory and practice are interconnected) for confronting power relations marked by diversity, and is an important intervention strategy for work seeking social justice. "Intersectionality is not simply a method for doing research, but also a tool for empowering people" (Collins; Bilge, 2021, p. 57).

In addition to being a critical form of research and analysis, intersectionality is also a type of praxis that challenges inequalities and opens up a collective space to recognize common threads in complex experiences of injustice and respond to them politically. Since the 2000s, intersectionality has inaugurated a new stage of internationalization, being included on the agendas of diplomacy and human rights global governance. Intersectionality has contributed to the process of articulation between different groups and transnational movements of resistance to neoliberal practices, which are often implemented with the agreement or protagonism of the state apparatus (Collins; Bilge, 2021).

In this regard, the authors mention three elements that are especially worth highlighting in order to understand and apply intersectionality in the context of the Global South. Namely: the importance of a historically contextualized analysis of the emergence of the term 'intersectionality'; the acknowledgment that intersectionality implies both a critical analysis

and praxis; and finally, a global outlook on intersectionality, in the sense of recognizing its origins not solely among the women of the Global North (as the ideas contained in intersectionality are also present in the social movements of black, indigenous and Latin women), as well as its broad potential in the field of transnational social movements and of human rights advocacy.

As a result, we realize that the effects of sexism, as well as of racism, play out in the lives of black women. Black women are the “Other of the Other”, a double antithesis of *not* being male and *not* being white (Kilomba, 2020). According to hooks (2019), the word “men” refers only to *white* men; “black” refers only to black *men*; and “women” refers only to *white* women. That is why, for the author, black women suffer from a sexist-racist oppression, the result of which being that they are not seen in our society.

Both Davis (2013) and hooks (2019) agree that there is a need to debate race and class within feminism itself. For this reason, the creation of black feminism, which demands the rights of black women, was not only necessary, but it was also essential. Davis (2013) says that white feminists reinforce racism in their own quest for rights. While *white* women fought for the right to work, *black* women have always had to work. Work has always been the only alternative for survival. Even today, we witness a wage and job gap that favors white women. While these fight for sexual freedom, studies show that black women suffer from loneliness, as we’ll delve into next.

2 De(constructing): the loneliness of black women

The loneliness of black women is a complex and multifaceted issue that is part of a historical and social context marked by racism, sexism and inequalities. According to Souza (2008, p. 39), the loneliness of black women goes back a long way, “from the African diasporic divide all the way to contemporary times [...]”. In other words, this loneliness begins with the process of enslavement and is still present today. Since the days of slavery, black women have carried the burden of being neglected, subjugated and used as sexual objects, among other abominations, in order to satisfy the desires of white men.

hooks (1995) adds that in order to justify this sexual exploitation, white culture produced the discourse that defined black women as hypersexualized and endowed with a “primitive eroticism”. Both during and after enslavement, black women were constructed only as bodies, in other words, devoid of intellect. Even today, said hooks commenting on the behavior of young men “[...] as is often the case in this society, they [white men] were confident that

non-white people had more life experience, were more worldly, sensual, and sexual because they were different” (hooks, 2019, p. 60).

Thus, for Pacheco (2013), black and brown women are excluded from the “market of affection” and naturalized in the “sex market”. They are constructed imagerically as hypersexualized and good in bed, while at the same time not being valued for serious relationships.

Pacheco (2013) offers a retrospective of the concept of loneliness that goes back to Foucault (1976), who when studying sexuality points to the isolation prevalent in prisons, and to Sennett (1988), who studies the same subject in the 18th and 19th centuries and proposes three categories of loneliness: the loneliness of exile (that imposed by exile); the loneliness of the dreamer (that of those who rebel against the status quo) and finally, the loneliness of being and feeling alone. In this sense, there is not a single unified concept of this idea of loneliness.

According to Melo (2021), the concept is constructed historically, socially, discursively, performatively and through language, relationships and interactions between people. The author also observes how the loneliness of black women is culturally determined; that they are alone due to social impositions, we could say that it is a compulsory loneliness, which is to say that the loneliness of black women is structured and staged in language, in performativity, in various areas such as work, social circles, etc.

Therefore, since the days of slavery, the loneliness of black women has surpassed relations of love and affection, denying them the right to love even between parents, siblings and children. “The denial of slaves as human beings necessarily implied the denial of their subjectivity, which was violated, denied, ignored, especially in the relationships between them and their next of kin: slave mother-children, slave father-children and slave man-woman” (Giacomini, 1988, p. 37).

According to hooks (2000), the collective difficulties with the art and act of loving began in the context of slavery, as black people experienced their family members being sold away, and/or their lovers, partners and friends suffering physical punishment for no reason. Pacheco (2013) and Souza (2008) state that in Brazilian society, also post-abolition, with public policies encouraging miscegenation, the ideology of racial democracy reinforced the loneliness of black women.

Another factor contributing to the loneliness of black women is the genocide and mass incarceration of black men. According to Mbembe (2018), our present-day society is characterized by a *necropolitics* in which

the State actively instrumentalizes violence, death and the destruction of certain social groups, such as black men, as a means of exerting political control.

Considering that police violence, policies of mass incarceration and the active genocide of young black men (fathers, male partners and sons) keeps this population in check, it is then up to black women to become the head of the household and raise their children on their own. Furthermore, the systematic death of these young men reduces the number of partners available for romantic involvement within the same racial identity group.

On the creative and healing facets of performativity, discourses about the loneliness of black women can be transformed into resistance and/or empowerment. These are constructed through language; there are revolutionary discourses that transform the lives of black women who resist with their black bodies, which are perceived as non-standard by a society strongly built on the paradigm of whiteness. In the following section, we'll see how, through discourse, pain can eventually mutate into empowerment, resistance, struggle and change.

3 Discourses under review: Flayslane's loneliness

The present research sought to understand how and under what circumstances the loneliness of black women became a topic for debate on Twitter. The study focused on the debate generated when Flayslane, a woman of Northeastern background, became a participant in the 2020 edition of reality show *Big Brother Brasil*, and brought the issue up for debate on the show. To analyze the discourses that circulated, we base ourselves on digital ethnography work that relies on textual tracking online, as Flayslane's comments generated considerable uptake on the platform formerly known as Twitter. *Big Brother Brasil* (BBB) is a TV reality show that confines and isolates (from the outside world) a group of contestants in a specially constructed 'house'. The contestants are unable to contact their family and friends, or have any access to outside information for the duration of the competition. They are continuously monitored by TV cameras 24/7, besides competing in a series of tests and going through weekly eliminations, in search of a cash prize of millions of reais at the end of each edition. In Brazil, Globo's reality show is broadcast on various channels and platforms. In addition to daily shows on the network's TV channel, and sporadic flashes on the Multishow subscription channel, also owned by the Globo group, BBB is available for subscription on Pay-Per-View (PPV) on various pay-tv operators. It's worth noting, however, that the show is edited prior to being aired, so producers can

broadcast what best suits their interests and the interests of the audience and/or sponsor(s).

The dataset we have selected consists of tweets (posts) that circulated on Twitter. Our searches began on April 11, 2020 and ended on August 2, 2020. We chose to analyze all the excerpts found on the topic of loneliness observed in Twitter posts regarding “Flayslane, black woman from the Northeast”. This procedure was carried out with our emails logged in and also logged out (a methodological procedure aimed at overcoming algorithmic barriers). It should be noted that these searches were carried out throughout the period mentioned.

During the textual tracking work we came across an article published on the *Mundo Negro*⁵ website entitled “The loneliness of black women: Thelma and Flay talk about the humiliation of being traded for white women”, written by Maria Clara Silva and published on April 11, 2020. The conversation took place during Big Brother Brasil 2020 on April 10, 2020. On that day, the public saw a black woman from the Northeast of Brazil, singer Flayslane, from the state of Paraíba, address the topic of loneliness with another black woman, Thelma, an anesthesiologist from São Paulo.



Figure 1 – Flayslane and Thelma on Big Brother Brasil, 2020

Source: Mundo Negro website (2020).

5 Available at: <<https://mundonegro.inf.br/a-solidao-da-mulher-negra-thelma-e-flay-fama-sobre-humilhacao-ao-serem-trocadas-por-mulheres-brancas/>>.

In figure 1, we see two black women in a warm embrace, indexing, through their bodies, the caring, affection and fondness between them at that moment, when they were dealing with a subject that was so difficult and painful for both of them. The scene also indexes the support and complicity that takes place between many black women when dealing with their pain. Although the concept of alignment was not originally thought of to deal with images, the alignment of affection, care and complicity between them seems clearly noticeable. The conversation begins with the two women recounting racist acts they have suffered.

Thelma: Once I slapped a racist who said that blacks and people from the Northeast are the scum of the country. Flayslane: What about me? A black Northeastern woman who had to deal with racism all my life!? Flayslane: My boyfriend cheated on me, he ditched me for a 'big blonde'. When he posted a photo with his new girlfriend, his friends' comments were like: that's more like it, this girlfriend suits you, the other one looked like a monkey. Flayslane: That was me Thelma. I went through that with my boyfriend. I get what you're going through, I get Babu (Mundo Negro Website, 2020).

We no longer have access to this video segment, it is not available in the recorded version of the program; only those who had access to the pay-per-view⁶ live streaming witnessed the scene. However, this does not invalidate the research, as at the time the video excerpt circulated on various websites and on Twitter, becoming a topic for debate.

In the conversation above, we see that the participants are aligned in their shared experiences as victims of racism. The speech act *"blacks and people from the Northeast are the scum of the country"* points to a racist and xenophobic ideology; the linguistic indexes point to blacks and Northeasterners as supposedly inferior, stating that these are the most despicable people in Brazil.

Flayslane's response to Thelma's account, *"What about me? A black Northeastern woman who had to deal with racism all my life!?"* points to intersectionality (Collins; Bilge, 2021), because the participant indicates that she suffers from a double prejudice, as the victim of both racism and xenophobia.

Flayslane then points out that a former boyfriend "ditched her for a 'big blonde'". The indexicality present here points to the fact that black women

⁶ The term 'pay-per-view' (PPV) designates a pay-tv system that allows subscribers to purchase access to specific content, such as watching Big Brother Brasil 24 hours a day.

are often shunned as prospective partners and that this has implications for their lives. When the former boyfriend took up with his new girlfriend, a blonde, the comments his friends posted on his photos on social media were: *“that’s more like it, this girlfriend suits you, the other one looked like a monkey.”* The speech act *“this girlfriend suits you”* points to prejudice against interracial relationships, spreading the belief that white men shouldn’t engage in relationships with black women. Next, the linguistic index *“macaca”* [monkey] is a racist slur, a text that generates the animalization and dehumanization of the Other, pointing to the eugenics ideology, as “the first step in moral exclusion is the devaluation of the Other as a person and, ultimately, as a human being” (Bento, 2002, p. 29).

The animalization of black women has been analyzed in the work of Melo and Moita Lopes (2014), Borges and Melo (2019), and also in Melo (2012). In line with these authors, we observe the issue of the dehumanization of black women playing a part here and, in addition, we see a hierarchy being established that places black women from the Northeast in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis blonde women.

According to Butler (2021, p. 13) “one is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned.” These friends of the former boyfriend use language as an instrument of power, to maintain a position of superiority in relation to black people. Language in this sense is used to wound, to injure and to maintain the domination of one group over another. “The use of a term such as ‘wound’ suggests that language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury” (Butler, 2021, p. 16).

This specific dialogue exhibited on the reality show Big Brother Brasil 2020, travels through social networks, being also shared on Twitter. The first and second semesters of the year 2023 were dedicated to gathering data online, since the research was developed based on the posts shared on social media.

Studying the discourse of black women, especially the conversation between Flayslane, a black woman from the Northeast of Brazil, and Thelma, a black woman from São Paulo, becomes important as black women highlight the issues that are close to their hearts.

The first post we found in the Twitter search, on April 13, 2020, highlights the importance of this conversation, of bringing the discussion of

the loneliness of black women to the debate. The post is by Bruna⁷, a black woman, who mentions the conversation between the two women on her network:



Figure 2 – Post by Bruna on August 13, 2020.

Bruna: Thelma and Flay chatted before Flay left the house and they both talked about the loneliness of black women.

Source: Twitter (2020).

Already in this first post, we can see that Bruna projects an alignment of interest in the topic. On the web, there are several black women legitimizing their voices on social media; the relevance of this dialogue for this group of black women refers us back to hooks (2020) when she mentions the need for the black population to heal itself from all the oppression and self-hate in which this population has been constructed and inserted. Thus, viewers of online media are, at the same time, writers and content creators, as we can see from another post, another profile that also highlights the conversation between the participants. This is a post by Betina, a black woman, on April 12, 2020:



Figure 3 – Post by Betina on April 12, 2020.

Betina: Cool to see Thelma and Flay talking about the loneliness of black women. Though I don't consider Flay to be black, I understand the shadeism that affects her.

Source: Twitter (2020).

⁷ The usernames have been altered for ethical reasons, in order to protect the identity of the users. The names assigned were chosen by the researcher herself.

In this frame established in figures 1 and 2, we can notice that this discussion about loneliness is relevant to black women, and so they align themselves not only in solidarity with the BBB participants, but also with a sense of identifying with them, so much so that they reaffirm the relevance of the conversation on their social networks.

Even though our focus is on hate speech, the internet is also a place of hope (Melo, 2017), because it offers a space where black women can be open about themselves without having to fear the aggression that scars or somehow affects their bodies, being a safe space for the physical body, as well as being a space open to self-reinvention. “We have made use of these digital tools to negotiate acknowledgment, as well as to recognize ourselves as the subject of rights and desires” (Miskolci; Pelúcio, 2017, p. 264).

Thus, the internet is integrated into our lives; the actions we see taking place in the online environment are connected to our lives offline. In this sense, we can hardly consider our virtual activities as phenomena that are separate from our bodies, as the internet “[...] becomes part of our experience as embodied and socially positioned subjects” (Ciborga, 2022, p. 47). In addition to Bruna and Betina, also black women, there was also a post by Carla, another black woman, on April 12, 2020:



Figure 4 – Post by Betina on April 12, 2020.

Carla: What is there to say? Just feel... The loneliness of black women: Thelma and Flay talk about the humiliation of being ditched for white women.

Source: Twitter (2020).

The passage: “*Just feel... the loneliness of black women*” allows us to interpret that Carla also shares this feeling. She ratifies an alignment of agreement, interest and identification. The post deals with a loneliness in contexts of love and affection. Flayslane and Carla project alignments about the humiliation of being exchanged for white women, how aggressive this is and how much suffering this racist act causes in black women’s lives. Thus, we return to the idea that desire is a cultural and political construction, and that men’s preference for white women is permeated by ideological considerations, and is not merely a matter of personal taste, as is often believed.

Despite the relevance of the topic for a critical assessment of racism and male chauvinism in Brazilian society, we gather from Jorge's post, a black man, on April 11, 2020, that the program left out this dialogue during editing, so the conversation between Thelma and Flayslane was not aired on prime-time television.

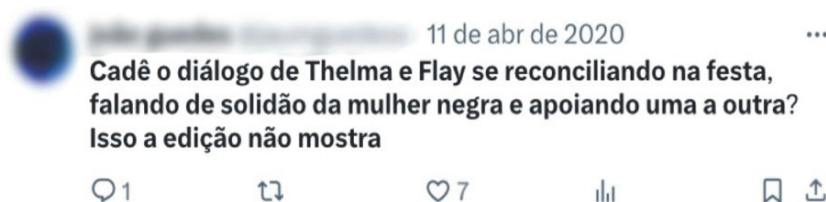


Figure 5 – Post by Jorge on April 11, 2020.

Jorge: Hey, where's the conversation between Thelma and Flay making up at the party, talking about the loneliness of black women and supporting each other? That the edit won't show.

Source: Twitter (2020).

Jorge, on the other hand, projects an alignment of questioning and indignation when addressing the issue, as we can observe from the linguistic indexes: *"Hey, where's the conversation?"* and *"That the edit won't show"*. The final edit of the program doesn't show the two women in an embrace, as we see in figure 1, but it did show scenes of the two women quarreling, reinforcing stereotypes that black women are adversaries and don't get along. According to hooks (2019), white men and women exert control over media images, and therefore whiteness is overvalued, and blackness is devalued. This leads to themes involving black people being mostly absent from mainstream media.

In the following posts the issue of the edit leaving out a conversation between Flayslane and the other participants on the topic of isolation is also questioned. Regina, a white woman, posted twice on August 2, 2020:

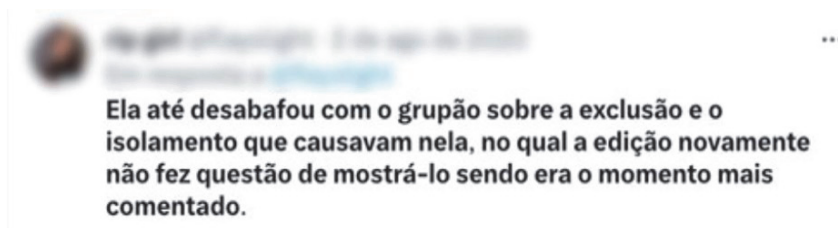


Figure 6 – Post by Regina on August 2, 2020.

Regina: She even vented to the group about feeling left out and isolated that [...] caused her, which the edit again made no point in showing although [it] was the most talked about moment.

Source: Twitter (2020).

It also brings up an important point, that loneliness permeates not only loving-affective relationships, but also, as we see on the show, issues of friendship, partnerships, and the very way in which the producers of the program dealt with the subject (Melo, 2021).



Figure 7 – Post by Regina on August 2, 2020.

Regina: She had fun by herself at parties, although she didn't fall in with the crowd (because most of them already had their own group of friends), she never failed to entertain folks.

Source: Twitter (2020).

In addition to these posts, we've separated an event that is relevant to the topic of loneliness, and which took place after the 2020 Big Brother Brasil season was over, but which came up during our field research on Twitter. Ivana, a white woman, on May 3, 2020, shares:



Figure 8 – Post by Ivana on May, 2020.

Ivana: "laughing so you don't cry" hey Neymar? you bet that flay is out of your little league alright, it's not like you were going to admit having a fling with a black Northeastern woman, a former bbb [contestant].

Source: Twitter (2020).

In May of 2020, Flayslane confided to blogger Maya Mazzafera that she and footballer Neymar had had a "fling," in other words, a short-term, non-committed sexual relationship. The player responded to the blogger's post with the phrase: "*Laughing so I don't cry*", followed by several emojis of faces crying with laughter. The phrase "laugh so you don't cry" [in Portuguese, "*rir para não chorar*"] is a figure of speech in Portuguese, an antithesis, i.e. the use of two words of opposite meaning, "laugh" and "cry". This expression indexes

irony, such as *I'm going to laugh so as not to cry at this awful situation*, or, specifically in Neymar's case, *I'm going to laugh so as not to cry at this blatant "lie"*, using the metaphor to deny the relationship.



Figure 9 – Post by Neymar on May 2, 2020.

Neymar: Laughing so I don't cry...

Source: Twitter (2020).

So the discourse, besides denying the relationship, points to a mockery that diminishes black women. Men only regard black women as bodies, they only want them for sexual pleasure. These last posts point not only to the objectification of black women, but also to the fact that these men don't acknowledge black women, don't value them for serious relationships (hooks, 2019; Pacheco, 2013).

Over the years, Neymar has had several romantic involvements, which were all played out in the public eye, and were the object of public scrutiny on different media outlets. However, there is no record of him ever having dated a black woman. In 2020, so while still a young man, when asked whether he had ever been the victim of any form of racist act, Neymar's answer was: "Never. Neither on nor off the pitch. After all, I'm not black, so..." The statement, at the time, was taken by many as a form of denial of his own black ethnicity.

Ivana aligns herself in solidarity with Flayslane, placing the football player in an inferior position to the participant, despite all his fame and money. We can perceive this in the speech act "*you bet that flay is out of your little league alright*". In addition, the comment points out that Neymar would not admit that he had been in a relationship with a "black woman from the Northeast", showing that the oppression in this case is intersectional (Collins; Bilge, 2021), since it affects Flayslane not only because she is a black woman, but also on the basis of being from the Northeast. This post indexes the ways in which this loneliness is linked to male chauvinism, racism and xenophobia. The terms are not cumulative – racism plus sexism plus xenophobia – these oppressive mechanisms merge and interfere with each other.

In addition to Ivana, who points out that the player wouldn't admit to the relationship because Flayslane is a black woman from the Northeast, Lara, a white woman, shares this same understanding, as we can see from her post on May 4, 2020:

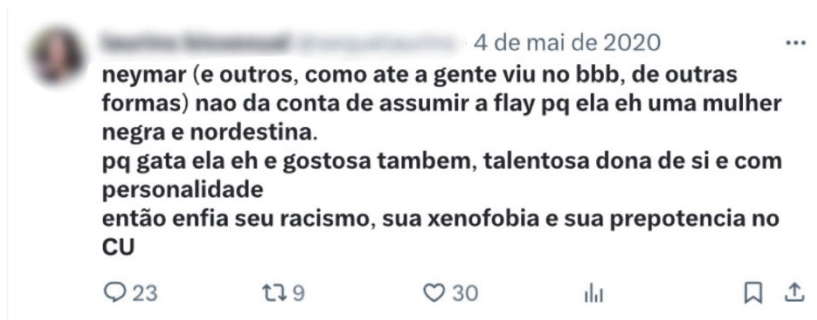


Figure 10 – Post by Lara on May 4, 2020.

Lara: neymar (and others, as we saw on bbb, in different ways) has a hard time admitting the relationship with flay 'cause she's a black woman from the Northeast. 'cause she sure is gorgeous, and hot, and talented sure of herself and loaded with personality so you can just shove your racism, your xenophobia and your arrogance up your ASS.

Source: Twitter (2020).

It's interesting to notice how intersectionality appears in figures 8 and 10, signaling how xenophobia and racism form a system of oppression in which various elements come into play. We can therefore say that the structural basis of black women's loneliness is racism and sexism, but this loneliness is exacerbated by the issue of xenophobia. The indexicality mobilized points to different types of loneliness: affective-sexual loneliness, loneliness in friendship, loneliness in partnerships, loneliness in representation and in this woman's daily struggles.

Final considerations

The discourses about Flayslane are constructed in and through language. When we analyze both the participant's conversation with Thelma, and Neymar's post, we notice that the discourses are dealing with an affective-sexual form of loneliness. However, all along the Twitter posts in our dataset, we see that this woman's loneliness is not restricted to romantic relationships. Where it is most harshly felt is in the lack of friendships/partnerships throughout the Big Brother Brasil 2020 reality show season; in the very invisibility of the topic, which the broadcaster leaves out of its selected "highlights" of the day.

The data generated allow us to infer that the discourses point to sets of beliefs and ideologies that still construct black women from the Northeast as "inferior," resulting in these women suffering from a form of compulsory solitude. We live in a society marked by the dictates of whiteness, where white people are still equated with notions of "beauty" and of "racial superiority". In the conversation that took place on the show, during Big Brother Brazil 2020

and then, in the denial of a romantic involvement by footballer Neymar, we see how Flayslane, a black woman from the Northeast, is shunned in favor of white women, due to racism and xenophobia.

The discourses evoke a negative perception of black women, which brings with them an invisible form of violence imposed by white dominance. Faced with these issues, we can observe a representational intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995) at play, if we take into consideration how popular culture represents black women from the Northeast and how this affects their lives. Flayslane is exposed to different levels of suffering, which imply different types of loneliness, not just limited to the affective-sexual loneliness (Melo, 2021).

The program, as we saw, is edited so that producers can broadcast what best suits their interests and the interests of the audience and/or sponsor(s). Furthermore, we see a media that reinforces the tenets of whiteness (hooks, 2019), since BBB 2020 left out this conversation between the two women from its final edit, so it was not broadcast on prime-time television, which supposedly features the “highlights” of the day.

The discourses, in addition to denouncing racism and xenophobia, also show language as action, and more specifically, as transformation (Butler, 2018; 1997; 2002), since all the tweets analyzed include words of resistance, showing indignation and revolt in the face of hate speech against Flayslane, and strengthening a group of black women who post about the conversation, helping to strengthen themselves collectively.

This article hopes to contribute to future discussions and/or interventions in the field of intersectionality in Brazil, enabling the construction of new knowledge that critically engages with the present. Thinking not only about online contexts, the research also provides support for the creation of social representations that reject stereotypes and prejudices, breaking with this negative imagery against black women from the Northeast.

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