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"*O meu gene não é solúvel*": decolonial narratives from women of the Brazilian Okinawan diaspora

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For my ancestors

I ask permission

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on collecting narratives from young women of the Brazilian Okinawan diaspora, intertwining it with a narrative that has the *hacer decolonial* as a praxis. Like a piece of patchwork, diasporic narratives are (de)constructed looking at historical developments given as facts distorted by epistemicide. What remains are questionings that seek to open paths to *othered* knowledges that have as a starting point the recognition of the traumas left by colonialism in diasporic bodies.

Keywords: Brazilian Okinawa diaspora, uchinaanchus, colonial trauma, internalized racism, transgenerational haunting, decolonial practices

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GLOSSARY

“Butsudan”: traditional Okinawan prayer altar for ancestor worship

“Gaijin”: Japanese word to refer to Western people. It can be a pejorative term.

“Gashou”: “pray” in Japanese

“Hajichi”: ancestral tattoos reserved for women only in the ancient Ryukyu Kingdom

“Kaikan”: Japanese word for “associations”

“Kamintyu”: high priestess within the Okinawan beliefs system

“Mabui”: soul in Uchinaaguchi

“Naichi”: people from mainland Japan, but could be interpreted as a pejorative term

“Nihonjin”: people from Nihon (Japan)

“Oba” and “Odi”: grandma and grandpa in Uchinaaguchi

“Osonai”: offering rituals made at the Butsudan, usually homemade food, fruits, flowers and tea

“Sanshin”: Okinawan and Amami Islands traditional musical instrument and precursor of the mainland Japanese shamisen. Often likened to a banjo, it consists of a snakeskin-covered body, neck and three strings.

“Shimanchu”: people that come from Utiná, adding a sense of “coming from the same region/district/island”

“Uchina” or “Utiná”: refers to the Ryukyu Kingdom, a place before the colonization of Japan, written in a Brazilian-Portuguese form of pronunciation.

“Uchinaaguchi”: the language spoken in the main land (Okinawa) of the Ryukyu Kingdom

“Uchinaanchu”: people that come from Utiná

“Uyafaafuji”: ancestors in Uchinaaguchi

“Yamato” or “Yamatochu”: people from mainland Japan, or descendents of the Yamato clan

“Yellow people”: people of Asian ancestry in Brazil, widely focused on East Asians

“Yutá”: priestess within the Okinawan beliefs system

PROLOGUE

"Yuu ya shititin mii ya shitinna"
Okinawan proverb
["Even if you hide yourself from the world, don't lose sight of your real nature"]

Back in Berlin after several months of fieldwork in Brazil, I felt the overwhelming need to share back ideas and impressions with some of the people interviewed. One of them was Hiromi, one of the *hajichaa* (ancestral Okinawan tattoo artist) in Latin America, and one of the key connectors that facilitated my approach to the Okinawan community in Brazil. At some point during our long journey of contextualization, daydreaming, crying, and gratitude sharing, I suggested that the *hajichi* – the ancestral hand tattoo Hiromi gifted me before leaving Brazil and that historically has been used to mark a rite of passage in the ancient kingdom of Ryukyu - marked my own entry into diasporic Okinawan studies. Until now, I had doubts: would I like to direct my academic path to be so intertwined with my personal journey, one spanning different countries, cultures, languages, and norms? Ultimately, this research helped me understand how I could portray narratives with deep personal resonance to me as a visual anthropologist, and navigate questions of emotional and political distancing through ethnography - particularly on topics centered on migration, war, and gendered violence which are already fraught with questions of objectivity and emotional resonance.

Can personal approximation make up for gaps in the historical record and cultural reservations about ethnographic work deployed by 'outsiders'? How can this experience help guide ethnographic work around similar questions in cultures and groups farther away or outside of personal approximation?

Even with (or perhaps because of) my linguistic and cultural closeness to the subject, I was surprised to encounter such a disparate web of non-linear narratives deployed by Okinawans in Brazil, like a patch of clothing with a frayed print and several holes that look suspectfully non-accidental that leaves one with a sense of confusion, and doubt about how to unravel. On one side, stories that seemed hastily adorned with a garish coating of generational cohesion, cultural pride, and personal happiness might be dismissed as niceties that fit the theme of "Okinawa, the land of courtesy" (O'Donnell, 2014). On the other side, stories of pain, war, carnage, and sexual violence seemed so clear, present, and unable to hide under any veneer. The

pull of these two polarities sank me in an ocean of grief, doubts, and silent contemplation about the role of historical memory within a community that seemingly left part of it behind in another land, but continually held on to the notion that there is a clear line marking what makes one part of it Ethnographic approaches that value separation from the subject seemed ill-prepared to help delineate questions of belonging - especially within a culture where both sides of the duality of insider/outsider seemed marked by histories of oppression, colonization, and marginalization.

I regard this work as a faithful record of the evolution of my approach to the field of diasporic Okinawan studies, rooted in an undoubtedly first person gaze upon what I have known my entire life: my family, my community and myself. Nevertheless, this work does not aim to contemplate an in-depth research on the history of Okinawa nor the history or culture of the Okinawan diaspora in Brazil. Instead, it helps to contextualize the actual focus of this research: internalized racism and transgenerational haunting as key outcomes of a historical process of silencing and erasure due to colonization and migration.

In chronicling fieldwork I let myself be carried by the powerful tide of Brazilian Okinawan women, who have already been using academic research and visual performance as methods of their own practice. I let my skills (or lack of skills) be apparent while operating the camera. But I also let my instincts and my soul guide me when I held its full power in my hands, in a kind of artistic trance. Finally, editing has been done in what I believe to be the most respectful way in regards to the use of my interviewees' images intertwined in my own narrative, in a reflexive process of respecting and honoring our ancestors.

INTRODUCTION

During a class on “decolonised images” in the masters of visual anthropology, Solomon Mekonen, one of our professors for this class together with Laura Na Blankholm, invited me to present a couple of references and articles referring to the topic of “Berlin as a site of decolonisation”. At the end of my presentation, I read a text I wrote about my subjective experiences in the city as a non-European diasporic woman. The text itself was written in a moment of much rage and frustration in the city, arousing perhaps some mixed feelings regarding the scientific relevance of my contribution to the class, since I had also relied on "popular" and not strictly academic references. Solomon’s reaction though was of acknowledging and legitimizing my rage, which became for me an utterly important gesture to actually help me transgress my condition as a racialized woman in a predominantly white city. It became clear what bell hooks (1994) states in “Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom” about creating safe spaces for students while nurturing a relationship of trust in which subjective reports and observations can also be welcomed within academic structures. According to hooks (1994), “education is a political act. To not be political in the classroom is taking a stance — that of the system that’s in place. By “remaining neutral” in discussions of the historically oppressed, one is accepting the status quo and helping spread disinformation.” Solomon's attitude is a gesture that I wish all students who constantly find themselves oppressed in post-colonial modernity could one day have the opportunity to receive.

While researching amongst Black feminist theory (Gonzalez, 2020; hooks, 1992; Ribeiro, 2017), intersecctionality (Akotirene, 2018; Collins and Bilge, 2021), postcolonial and decolonial studies (Fanon, 2008; Mignolo, 2009; Segato, 2012) and diasporic studies (Wright, 2004; Cho, 2008), I would often encounter embedded sparks of anger in emotional language functioning as an academic and political discourse. According to Morrison (1992), “Anger, however, is a catalyst for the critique that is necessary due to the fact that we still inhabit worlds in which "ignoring race is perceived as a liberal, gracious, even generous gesture"”. In Tate’s (2008) work, she urges for agency through anger and pain, in order to break with the myths created around races.

This research was done in movements like the waves that make up a tide, in which my visual anthropologist self distanced itself from my interlocutors to reflect and contemplate, while my native anthropologist self allowed itself to be affected by my field to experience it from an active and emotional listening position. Besides, using my own body as a research tool, I was also made a studied subject in this research, acknowledging that all information passed through me had to be elaborated in a narrative that is located in a certain historical perspective, and not attempting to make it "universal" nor a fixed "portray of the Okinawan diaspora in Brazil" as a homogeneous block. Rather, it tries to work respectfully with the subjectivities and positionalities of each interlocutor, while searching for points of intersection as a group that is necessarily located in a certain social-political context. As Higa (2015) said to conclude her own research: "every "house" is situated on a "street" and interacts with it." I see these narratives together as a piece of patchwork, stitched together according to my own development in this research.

In total, I spent the past five years in contact with my interlocutor's work through digital mediums, and had the opportunity to spend three months in fieldwork with them (from March to May 2022 in São Paulo and Campo Grande). The subject of this research – Okinawan diaspora in Brazil – is currently being debated in Brazilian academia as it has been flooded with academic productions on the topic in the past years, mainly acknowledging the ethnic differences between the Japanese and Okinawan diasporas. Within the Okinawan community in Brazil, artistic productions have been flourishing and triggering research about the *othered* narratives that have suffered from epistemic violence, inspiring a somewhat ethnic identitarian movement. Furthermore, the current framework of rising cases of violence against Asians, triggered by the covid-19 pandemic, has made the topic of racism urgent to be debated inside and outside Asian communities.

In regards to the framework of epistemicide (Santos, 2010), this research has focused on practices that can be studied within the field of decolonial studies, acknowledging what Cho (2008) states about "transgenerational haunting" that "what gets subjugated, erased, and generated through these forms of knowledge production are the undocumented, illegible, and irrational." Her research then writes "against sociology's own tendency to create ghosts by looking to sites of exclusion." This study would, therefore, contribute to the field of internalized

racism studies acknowledging emotional language as political discourse (Jimeno, Varela and Castillo, 2015), and challenging the notion of “race” as a colonial mechanism of oppression (Wright, 2004).

In part I the historical context is drawn (both of the country receiving Okinawan immigrants and the country that sent them) to explain the historical processes that would culminate in the "ghosts" described in part II. If parts I and II talk about the symptoms of a disease and try to discover its cause, following part III, it talks about possible ways for a "cure" through a decolonial praxis.

PART I

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. *O meu gene não é solúvel* (“My gene is not soluble”): the historical political context of immigration

The title of this research “My gene is not soluble” is an allegory to the “Políticas de Branqueamento” (“whitewashing policies”) and the myth of “racial democracy” in postcolonial Brazilian studies. The world is often thought of as being postcolonial, forcing upon us the perception of colonialism as a chapter in history that belongs to the past. It is important to reinforce that it was not left behind, but merely transformed. Colonialism remains entrenched in all kinds of structures: in our politics, relationships, minds and even bodies influencing and guiding how we see, sense, and assimilate the world around us. Brazil in particular was a laboratory for colonial practices that made it especially susceptible, as an independent republic, to scientific racism ideas from North America and Europe that tied racial purity to national cohesion and progress.

This section aims to review the “postcolonial” republican chapter of Brazilian history, highlighting the factors that facilitated the conception of a “fourth race” in the country, the so-called “yellow race”, composed by Asian immigrants and their descendents.

1.1 Race Laboratory *a la brasileira*: people like gouache paint (because watercolor is too *chic*).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Brazil went through rapid structural economical and political developments brought by the sudden proclamation of a Republic following a coup-d'Etat in 1889 (Mossé, 2015). Being the last country in Latin America to abolish African and Indigenous slavery in 1888, the new republicans concerned themselves with legislation aimed at dealing with the numerous amount of freed slaves, which they saw incompatible with the idea of a modern nation state. The set of legislation focused on one goal - to whiten the population (Lesser, 2015; Takeuchi, 2016; Góes, 2018) - and collectively became known as the "Políticas de Branqueamento" ("whitewashing policies"). A key focus of the "Políticas de Branqueamento" was to populate the territory with white European immigrants, considered the "superior race", and ultimately annihilate Black and Indigenous population under the excuse of national progress. For the new republicans, Blacks and Indigenous were seen as an obstacle to the country's economic and social development (Lesser, 2015; Gonzalez, 2020).

> "According to the views of the greatest enthusiasts of these new legislations, in about a century blacks would have already disappeared from Brazil, while whites would be the majority of the population. This thesis was presented by a Brazilian commission, led by the then director of the National Museum, João Baptista de Lacerda, at the First International Congress of Races, held in London in 1911. There, it received praise for the peaceful way in which Brazilians would solve their "Negro problem."" (Souza, 2021)

The racial theories of Englishman Francis Galton in 1883 and disseminated in the USA and Europe through the works of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Renato Kehl strongly influenced Brazilian elites consolidating eugenics not just as a pseudoscience but as a "new religion" in Brazil (Góes, 2018). Eugenics would underpin the "Políticas de Branqueamento" in Brazil and become a driving force of political thought in the country.

According to Góes, the framework of eugenics in Brazil as an organizing principle of the state offered the new republic a path towards industrial modernisation different than the classical routes exemplified by England and France, or what the German state did as it reconstituted from the Prussian empire. Instead, Brazil would then follow the colonial way to constitute itself within capitalism, consolidating its position as a former ex-colony and export country with a high degree of dependence on foreign capital, led by an oligarchic elite inherited from centuries of colonialism by the Portuguese crown. Given the capitalist and oligarchic economic model chosen

for the country's future, the elites made use of "science" as an institutionalized weapon in the hand of the landlords against the poor and the workers (Góes, 2018) (my brackets), mostly Black and Indigenous people, which was about 80% of the Brazilian population at the time of the Old Republic.

As a result of the “Políticas de Branqueamento”, more than 5 million immigrants arrived in Brazil from 1872 to 1972: 31.1% Portuguese, 30.3% Italians, 13.4% Spanish, 4.2% Germans, 4.6% Japanese and 16.4% from other nationalities, specially from the Middle East (Levy, 1974 in Lesser, 2015), concentrating in the southeastern part of the country. I will come back to the 4.6% Japanese in the next chapter, as Japanese are not considered white, but “yellow”. Within the concept of the “Políticas de Branqueamento” was the idea of *mestiz*aje (Martinez-Echazábal, 1998) encouraging interracial "*relations*" (here I stress my brackets) between white European immigrants and the former ex-slave population. For Lesser (2015), "terms such as white, black, European, Indian, and Asian (among others) had no fixed meaning in the Brazilian context. People and groups moved in and out of these ever-changing categories, and Brazilian national identity was generally both rigid (whiteness was consistently valued) and flexible (the meaning of whiteness was malleable)." It therefore translated the idea that the "degenerated" Brazilian population could be "fixed" through "strong white blood" that would override that of the "weak non-whites." The law would prevent the entry of "weak" races and tolerate the "light-skinned" races in the absence of white immigrants (Lesser, 2015; Takeuchi, 2016). Becoming "white", therefore, was as important for the newcomers as it was for the existing population and especially for the national elite, while solidifying the notion of "whiteness" in a country that tolerated and somehow promoted *mestizaje*.

By the end of the 1930s, a new interpretative model emerged that sought to represent Brazil as a racial democracy, driven by the idea that races are soluble (Lesser, 2015), and as such, all races could coexist in the same space, as long as they passed through a process of "whitening" that existed in parallel to the notion of becoming "civilized". One of the most prominent works capturing this paradigm shift is Gilberto Freyre's "Casa Grande e Senzala", published in 1933. Freyre describes a hybrid Brazilian society in which social segregation is diluted and Portuguese settler miscegenation is romanticized. In this revision Black and Indigenous communities lived in peace in their "senzalas" ("slave quarters") separate from the "Casa Grande" ("Big house") of the plantation inhabited by the “bosses” - no longer “owners” - that they “worked for” instead of

forcefully serving, creating what Sánchez-Eppler (1992) described as a "history of colonial Brazil as a patriarchal and polygamous social structure within a plantation economy". Simultaneously, several well-known authors like Oliveira Vianna and Monteiro Lobato would start to produce works describing romanticised “interracial relations”, specially stressing the objectification of the black body and the status of agency of the "white", and populate the popular imagination with the myth of "racial democracy". Schwarcz (2012) evokes Lévi-Strauss' structural perspective about "myths": "the cause of a myth is a contradiction". Although racial democracy flirts with the idea of social mobility *despite* one's race (“all races are equal”), it comes alongside an idea of social hierarchies by fixating on the aspirational superiority of whiteness, and often positioning “being equal” as “collective delirium”[1] (Queiroz, 2022), making it easier to “domesticate” the population as a State-made methodology of control and alienation.

The retelling of Brazilian history under the “República Velha” (“Old Republic) of 1889 shows a great degree of epistemic violence by omitting certain facts that culminated in the slavery abolition in 1888. For example, the popular uprisings for independence of the 19th century had slaves and workers as revolutionary social leaders organising *quilombos* and *revoltas* (“quilombos and rebellions”) n all parts of the territory. One such instance, the “Revolta dos Malês”, was led by enslaved African Muslims in the city of Salvador in 1835 inspired bythe Haiti Revolution of 1804, and which, like other revolts happening in national territory, was brutally repressed by the imperial government and followed by a death penalty law (Queiroz, 2017) and several expressions of religious intolerance, culminating in a growing genocide of Black people, both freed and enslaved. Marcos Queiroz (2017) in his work “Constitucionalismo brasileiro e o Atlântico Negro: a experiência constituinte de 1823 diante da Revolução Haitiana" (“Brazilian constitutionalism and the Black Atlantic: the constituent experience of 1823 in the face of the Haitian Revolution”), argues that the ruling Brazilian elites (slavocrats, landowners) were well aware of revolts inHispanic America, Haiti, US and especially concerned about popular uprisings, particularly one led by slaves as in Haiti. Therefore, key historic milestones of the Brazilian government (independence in 1822, first constitution in 1824, abolition of slavery in 1888, proclamation of the republic in 1889) were marked by the continuing institualization of racism as a key feature of Brazil’s paradigm as an independent country *and*

[1] In Queiroz’s (2022) work named “Delírio de liberdade” (“Delirium of freedom”), he analyzes the historical process of Brazilian’s independence from Portugal as a “collective delirium”. An interview made by The Intercept Brazil can be found here: https://theintercept.com/2022/03/29/independencia-brasil-conluio-revolucao-negros-como-haiti/

export colony. In his analysis, Sidney Chalhoub (2011) considered that the Brazilian landlord class continues to learn that one of the most effective ways to exclude the black population in a country with a black majority is to use a strategy of exclusion through law, without acknowledging it as a racial strategy. Silence, therefore, became a powerful control tool for Brazilian elites allied to an efficient and alienating mass media.

Over the course of the 19th century and into the 20th, Brazil started to promote itself as a *mestizo* nation, proclaiming a rich "mixed culture" but keeping "white" as the highest class in terms of human hierarchies. Racial democracy, in this context, became a necessary public concept to decrease popular dissatisfaction and avoid new revolutions, as well as to promote a "peaceful" relation among all races. As European immigrants would gradually decrease (Lesser, 2015), and the population remained mainly Black and Indigenous, the elites found themselves in a situation in which they had to operate in a "democratic" system while envisioning the maintenance of their own privileges as the ruling class. Thus, it was necessary to distribute "dreams of social mobility" to the workers, stressing their own individual ascension rather than allowing an organization of communities with common political interests (Queiroz, 2017).

After more than a century under the "políticas de branqueamento", Brazil did not become white, as expected. Instead, it created a whole color palette that does not necessarily fit in any of the current five official race categories (white, black, pardo, yellow, red). Officially, more than half of the Brazilian population remains black (IBGE, 2019). In the article "Do preto, do branco e do amarelo: sobre o mito nacional de um Brasil (bem) mestiçado" ("Black, white and yellow: on the national myth of a (well) mixed-race Brazil"), in which Lilia Schwarcz (2012) analyses the myth of racial democracy in contemporary Brazilian society, we see how the use of race in a context of "*mestizaje*" operates as a currency of praise or a category of accusation, and how the idea of race flows between the two opposites according to the circumstances and temporality of the speech. According to the survey "Pesquisa nacional por amostra de domicílio (Pnad)" (1976) Brazilians used 136 different colors to define themselves, according to Schwarcz, "revealing a true 'Aquarela do Brasil'" ("Brazilian watercolor"). The idea of race, therefore, is directly attached to "skin tone" ("*colorismo*[2]"), diverging from the eugenist ideas of Galton, showing how the concept of "race" in Brazil has simplified and transformed its own categorization

[2] According to Schwarcz (2018), *Colorismo*, or pigmentrocracy, is a form of discrimination based on skin color, on the phenotype, being recurrent in countries with a colonial past and European domination. In general, it means that the blacker a person is, the more discriminated he/she will be, and the opposite is also true.

attributions over a century of “Branqueamento” and “Racial democracy”. However, it is important to point out that racial democracy does not imply that differences are tolerated in a context of “Políticas de Branqueamento", but that differences are *eliminated*, which contradicts the idea of democracy altogether. To this day, much of the population still clings to a notion that everyone has some degree of racial mix in their heritage, showing that Racial Democracy is but another popular myth in the Brazilian imagination.

1.2 Shades of yellow: Japanese immigration and Okinawa

The previous chapter was necessary to elucidate the national context in which the subject of this work was introduced. Furthermore, the history of the Okinawan diaspora is intertwined with the Japanese immigration, making it necessary to draw another parallel to understand the context in which Okinawans settled in Brazil.

In the midst of the “laboratory of races” that characterized Brazil in the early 20th century, a new component was introduced to fit the emerging racial configuration of the country, one in dire need of migrant farm labor for its growing coffee plantations. The first Asian immigrants were Chinese who arrived in the late 19th century. However, according to Lesser (2019), the “experiment” failed as anti-Chinese sentiment from the US also took hold withinBrazilian elites. Along the same lines, Japanese migrants arrived to Brazil following a ban of Japanese migration to the US in 1907, given government fears that the Japanese, as immigrants from a rapidly industrializing country, could threaten national sovereignty. One year later, the first ship *Kasato Maru* arrived in Santos, southeast Brazil, with 781 Japanese immigrants, 325 of whom came from Okinawa (Higa, 2015). Although official narratives about the Japanese immigration usually attribute a sort of romanticized heroic value to it and tend to homogenize the “Japanese” image, works such as Yamashiro (1993), Higa (2015), Kanashiro (2015), Satomi (2004), Shimabuko (2020), sheds light on counternarratives, so that narratives about diasporic Okinawans can be constructed in its plurality.

Japanese and Okinawan immigrants arrived at a moment in which Brazilian republicans struggled to attract Europeans to work in the farms. Although they were not considered white, republicans believed that the “civilized Japanese” (Lesser, 2015; Takeuchi, 2016) would serve the ideals of racial democracy and national progress. Besides, the agricultural knowledge brought by the Japanese boosted productivity on coffee farms, Brazil’s biggest commodity in the 20th

century, which made them a desirable asset for the agribusiness in Southeast Brazil (Lesser, 2015; Lesser, 2008). Furthermore, the private immigration companies in Japan broadened their interests to Brazil and Hispanic America after the Japanese ban in the US, facilitating the immigration routes. The integration of a new race into the national fabric, though, was not universally desired throughout the Brazilian elites who were obsessed with the idea of whitening the population. While this story counts with an affectionate desire from certain diplomatic figures to bring the "civilized" Japanese component to Brazil, this desire was not unanimous among politicians and diplomats of the time.

Image 1: "4th Race" by Shima (2007). Performance, plastic zebra tape and monument (Monument of the Three Races - White, Black, Indigenous, Civic Square, Goiânia/GO), variable dimension and time, 2007. photographic record: Claudio Cologni.
Source: Shima - Hirokazu Shimabuko, access in: https://shima.art.br/a-quarta-raca

The "Monumento das Três Raças" ("Monument of the Three Races") in Goiânia, Midwest Brazil, created in 1968 by the artist Neusa Moraes, symbolizes "the miscegenation of

three races - black, white and indigenous, that has been and still is in the formation the genetic and cultural characteristics of the Goiás people", according to the prefecture of the city[3]. The artistic intervention performed by Shima (2007), aims to challenge the "mito das três raças" ("myth of the three races") about the genetic composition of modern Brazil. According to Higa (2015), who interviewed Shima (2007) in her research:

> "In Shima's performance, phenotype and race are directly associated. Simultaneously, his body creates a tension in the myth of the three races in Brazil evoked by the name and the figuration of the sculpture, and seeks to position a fourth element. The stereotypes and irony surrounding the Brazilian racial hierarchy, also through the performance, the bodies of the sculpture are half-naked, while the artist is formally and socially dressed. The images from "4th Race" seem to direct a new attempt at "Brazilianness", a figuration of the composition of the Brazilian population that forces, despite their recent presence in our country, the integration of the integration of Asians into our racial picture. The living body of Shima, dressed in suit and tie, as a civilized and modern worker, and thus representing the Brazilian immigrant project, contrasts with the sculpted bodies of the white, black, and indigenous involved in the history of our country, marked by the conflicts and clashes of Portuguese colonization and the slavery system."
>
> (2015, p.189)

Marcia Yumi Takeuchi (2016) in her book "Imigração Japonesa nas Revistas Ilustradas: Preconceito e Imaginário Social (1897-1945)" ("Japanese Immigration in Illustrated Magazines: Prejudice and Social Imaginary (1897-1945)") shows how printed media outlets of the time artificially constructed and manipulated visual depictions of Japanese immigrationbased on stereotypes and political interests so that during the first five decades of Japanese presence in the country, the Japanese subject received several conflicting labels as defined by the Western gaze of mainstream national media. According to Lesser (2001), parallel to the positive association of Japanese migrants to the emergence of Japan as a model of economic development on the international scene, the Brazilian elites feared a social "mongrelization" of the population. These images were strongly informed by the North American idea of "yellow peril", where Asian migrants were commonly represented by a rat or other pests. At the same time that it acknowledged Japan as an industrial power and as "the most westernized people in all of Asia" (Takeuchi, 2016), media vilified Japanese migrations as "a threat of contagion from addictions and diseases, supposedly transmissible by individuals of Asian origin" (Morimoto, 1999) and

[3] The prefecture's website explanation on Moraes (1968) work can be accessed here: https://www.ipatrimonio.org/goiania-monumento-as-tres-racas. Reference from Higa (2015)

“despite its recent "European varnish", was "uniquely Asian", i.e. bellicose, impetuous, and of "morbid susceptibility".” (Takeuchi, 2016) Brazilians in the early 20th century, under a media monopoly, were completely by and large dependent on media to form their opinion about Japanese immigration, given contact with the Japanese was an unprecedented situation in the country. Thus, once immigration started and the state received almost 200.000 from 1908 until 1941, it was not difficult for the government to recalibrate its mediatic interests, using various caricatures that aligned with an elite class always uncertain about the assimilation of the Japanese into Brazil.

> “The institutions, as well as the system of law, a religion or an instituted power, only exist socially as symbolic systems accepted, that is, sanctioned by a given society. [...] Thus, States began to exercise control and use the symbolic with the aim of creating and maintaining the cohesion of society. For the established power to manipulate the collective imaginary, it must be able to dominate the symbolic, because the collective imaginary can only express itself or even exist through the symbolic. The images conveyed, the ghosts - the fears - are deformed representations of a present situation and have, for this very reason, a symbolic function. Symbolism, in turn, presupposes an imaginary capacity, because it allows one to see in something what it is not; it allows one to see it as different from what it really is.”
>
> (Takeuchi, 2016 p.126, 127)

Image 2: Title: "O Japão Moderno" (The modern Japan). "O perigo amarello (não confundir com os bonds da Villa Isabel) ameaçando meio mundo (?)" ("The yellow peril (not to be confused with Villa Isabel bonds) threatening half of the world (?)"). In this cartoon published in one of the most popular Brazilian magazines (Fon-Fon!) of Old Republic times, Japan is represented as a rat-man kind of creature, threatening the other countries (England, Germany, Spain, USA, Norway, France, Portugal, Greece, Russia, Belgium, Italy, Turkey) which appear as smaller "culturally dressed" humans.
Source: Fon-Fon! Magazine, Rio de Janeiro, n.48, 7 March 1908, p.31, AFGN/RJ in Takeuchi (2016, p.128)

Perhaps the only Brazilians that realized at that time that Okinawans were not exactly Japanese were the landowners who watched their distinctive behavior at the farms and demanded several requirements from the immigration companies to select "Japanese" suitable for farm work. Itokazu (1998) points out that Okinawans had the habit of circulating naked in public spaces and speaking an incomprehensible "dialect"; and their women had their hands tattooed and the habit of carrying their children on their backs. Besides, Okinawans were seen as "*fujões*" (runaways) as it was commonly stated in official narratives that they did not fulfill their immigration contracts and often ran away from the farms, creating disagreements between the comrades and the landowners, even if escapees also included Japanese migrants due to the terrible working conditions on the farms (Higa, 2015). According to formal narratives, the

emerging differentiation from Japanese migrants led to an outright ban on Okinawan migration to Brazil between 1913 and 1916. Due to shortage of farm labor, they were accepted again under stricter rules requiring formal education in Japan; ability to speak Japanese; and lack of hand tattoos on women. According to Higa (2015), however, the ban on Okinawans was unrelated to the existence of official documents claiming Okinawan escapes from farms and abandonment of their contracts. The reasons for the banning were also constructed through narratives within both communities without formal documentation that could prove its veracity. She proposes, in contrast, that the widespread image of Okinawans as "*fujões*" operates as a metaphor dressed up as memory for the alterity conflicts between Okinawan and Japanese immigrants, beyond a simple “regionalistic” conflict of differences.

The hostile situation of Japanese immigration in Brazil – precarious, analogous to slavery under the colonial period, in conflict with the other immigrants and landowners, unsupported by elites – led to an intensification of the already existing conflicts between the two ethnic groups of Uchinaanchus (Okinawans) and Yamato (mainland Japanese), and resulted in the Okinawans adopting a "Japanese" identity to the detriment of the characteristics that once subjugated them as "savages" and "uncivilized" Okinawans. The conflict in fact has its origins in the territory that we now call “Japan”, and managed to travel overseas with the diaspora. Today, there are around 2 million Japanese in Brazilian territory, according to the Embassy of Japan in Brazil. From this total number of “Japanese descendants”, around 120.000 are Okinawans, having its larger communities in São Paulo and Campo Grande (Freitas, 2011).

1.3 Okinawan issues

“Okinawa” in fact is a name that expresses its colonized past as it was named after the main island of the once independent Ryukyu Kingdom (1429-1879), composed of the Amami, Okinawa, Miyako and Yaeyama islands in between Southern Japan and Taiwan. Although relatively small, the kingdom was the center of a powerful maritime trade network between East Asia and Southeast Asia, keeping an intense cultural and economical exchange with the Chinese Empire. There exist several denominations for them such as *Shimanchus*, *Uchinaanchus*, *Luchuans*, *Ryukyuans*. Their languages are *Shimayumusa*, *Uchinaaguchi*, *Myakufutsu*, *Yaimamuni*, *Dunangmunui*. Their beliefs revolve around a free and unique spirituality centered

on ancestor worship (Sousei Suuhai) led by solely female shamans (Yutás and Kamintyus). (Yamashiro, 1993; Mori, 1998; Konno, 2014)

In 1883, however, as a result of the imperialJapanese ambitions in Asia, the Ryukyu Kingdom was colonized and incorporated into Japanese territory. This rupture in the history of an ethnic group followed a similar path of those of native peoples inhabiting territories targeted by imperialist powers. With this annexation, *Uchinaanchus* lost their rights to speak their native languages, to practice their religion and to inhabit and farm in their own lands, causing a severe social, economical and political crisis in the islands. Great part of *Uchinaanchu* women were sent to "comfort stations" to become sex slaves for the Japanese army and, later, US army. To the Japanese, Okinawans did not fit the racial ideal of Japanese superiority, as Japan was considered "the whitest of all Asians"[4]. Indeed, historical archives prove that Okinawans are in fact *not* Japanese. Besides governmental violence and poverty as a result of the annexation, immigration policies were also encouraged to empty the islands of this unwanted genetic component, considered "archaic" and "underdeveloped" (Itokazu, 1998), which explains why more than half of the first ship that arrived in Brazil from Japan were Okinawans. The Ryukyuans are currently the largest ethnolinguistic minority in Japan, with 1.3 million individuals living in Okinawa Prefecture and more than 600.000 living abroad, especially in Hawaii and Brazil (Kerr, 2018). Okinawa is also the poorest district in Japanese territory (Higa, 2015).

Although recommended for the fourth time by the UN in 2016 (Ryukyu Shimpo, 2016) the current Japanese government does not recognize Okinawans as an indigenous ethnicity as this recognition could also culminate in recognizing their rights to their native land. While Okinawans in Japanese territory continue to live in their native land - the Ryukyu Islands - Japan's relationship with the US after WW2 culminated in Okinawa being an extremely militarized US colony from 1945 until 1972. Although Okinawa was "returned" to Japan on May 15, 1972 (known as "Okinawa Reversion Day"), about 20% of the territory remains occupied by US military bases, even against the will of the local population who fiercely oppose it.

Okinawa was already a territory annexed to the Japanese empire for 29 years when the first immigrants arrived in Brazil. Therefore, for Brazilian authorities and the general population,

[4] The "Racial Equality Proposal" was an amendment made by Japan to the Treaty of Versailles that was considered at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. According to Russell (2009), Japan would reinforce its view as a "superior race in Asia" equal to the countries of the League of Nations, but largely dismisses non-Yamato Asian ethnicities.

Okinawans were generally perceived as “Japanese”, having their ethnic differences gradually erased over the generations, either by the lack of knowledge of Brazilians and other immigrants about Okinawa's history, or through institutional ways within the community. It is important to point out though that “Okinawa” or “Uchinaanchus” are names that circulate with certain familiarity within the Japanese community in Brazil, meaning that there is an idea of “difference” within the community based on identity discourses fostered by institutions and by the people themselves.

1.4 Silencing and erasure

During my fieldwork in São Paulo, I had the opportunity to talk to Nadya Gushiken Domingues, a communicator, content creator, graduate student in Languages (Japanese/Portuguese) at University of São Paulo, and former ex-scholarship holder from Okinawa Urizun (Okinawan Association in São Paulo). Nadya is a well-known figure within the Okinawan community in Brazil as she has focused her efforts to contribute to a “*educação de base*” (founding education) (Freire, 1996) about Japan, Okinawa and the diaspora. She invited me on Good Friday (15 April) to her house in the Northern part of the city of São Paulo, which coincidentally was also the day of offering *osonais* in *butsudan*. We prayed in the *butsudan* of her family to the sound of the beat of the *quebrada*[5]. She was happy to cooperate with my research and documentary, allowing me to film her while cooking *popo*, a sweet Okinawan fluffy pancake, a recipe from her arsenal of affective Okinawan food. We shared the space with her parents, who joined us to help fry the pancakes and talk about Okinawa and the diaspora while eating a delicious *karê* cooked by Nadya.

Some days previous to that encounter, in a Japanese café in Pinheiros, São Paulo, we had talked about the pattern of silencing within our families and community, and how the difficulty of finding materials that talk about the hardships that happened in the history of the immigration, is a form of epistemic violence (Santos, 2010). She pointed out that the experiences of first generation migrants, including conflicts between Japanese and Okinawans within the same “community”, would only be inscribed in their own memories. In other words, she meant that it is impossible for us to clearly comprehend what happened to the first waves of immigrants as

[5] “Quebrada” is a slang term in São Paulo city for neighborhoods located in urban peripheries. São Paulo’s quebradas are well known for their rap and funk music production.

there are few pieces of written records about them. Most of the narratives about that period were monopolized in Japanese or Okinawan Associations, in which Higa (2015) works on a comprehensive research about.

In a shared conversation with Nadya's parents, they emphasized the cruelty of State repression during the *Era Vargas* (1930-1945) which followed the "old republic" and was headed by democratically elected president and later dictator Getúlio Vargas. During this time, one of the most painful memories recounted by the Japanese diaspora took place: the "Expulsão de Santos" in 8 July 1943, when Japanese immigrants and descendents had to leave the coastal cities within 48 hours, under threat of arrest or deportation back to Japan. The evictions happened not only in Santos, which had one of the biggest Japanese communities at that time, but also in Paraná.

The period of the Vargas era is notorious for an acceleration of the project of "nationalization", which aimed to "Brazilianize" politically, culturally, and economically various aspects of national life. In this historical moment, anti-Japanese sentiment grew stronger and immigration quotas were introduced with the aim of limiting the entry of non-whites, as foreseen in the 1934 Constitution (Kimura, 2006). Around the outbreak of World War II, immigrants and descendants from the Axis countries were persecuted, expelled from their homes, their property and belongings confiscated, and supposedly confined in labor camps. "Supposedly" is often used about confinement because there are currently no official police records about the confinement of Japanese people in labor camps. One of the only records is the compilation of testimonies of victims organized by Claudio Seto (2002) in "Ayumi - Caminhos Percorridos". According to the author, in Paraná, Southern Brazil, the confinement camp of Japanese immigrants and descendants under the custody of Manoel Ribas became a "human zoo" for the entertainment of "prize-winning students" in the Granja do Canguiri, Paraná state.

> "Every week several prize-winning students would arrive to see the sad demonstration of power by the Paraná authorities. They enjoyed themselves making fun of the Japanese and their Brazilian descendants. Invariably the Curitiba students, in a mocking attitude, offered grass to the lodgers with imitations of the mooing, neighing, and bellowing of goats."
>
> (Seto, 2002, p.243)

Even though my family and Nadya's family have not explicitly vocalized their time in labor camps, I couldn't help but recall a conversation I had a few days earlier with a close aunt of my mother and her daughter. During fieldwork for this research, I talked to several family

members from older generations in order to understand their life trajectories as Okinawan immigrants in Brazil. However, what I found on most of the days I visited them, was a deafening silence about their own stories of marginalization, often embedded in optimistic and simplifying narratives, and an avoidance of the recognition of “Okinawa” as an once independent kingdom. For the most part, I could recall from previous years that people in my family would tell about their memories on coffee farms, poverty, the perseverance of their parents, the hard work to get the children to study at least elementary school, cases of family members who became *dekasseguis* in the 1980s. The conclusion of almost every narrative arc was a subtle "I'm glad we're okay now”. In this conversation with my aunt, though, I asked her about the hardships she might have encountered as a farm worker in Paraná during the Era Vargas, mentioning the fact that my grandfather (her brother-in-law) lived first-hand at the “Expulsão de Santos” in 1943. At this moment, she immediately froze and looked at me with terror. Her daughter interfered by evoking a memory of stoning in a public place, justifying that after this incident, her mother’s fear of "*gaijins*" was so intense that she was afraid to leave her house. My aunt nodded and rapidly changed the subject of the conversation, wrapping it with a “it’s better for you to forget those stories, it is now in the past”.

On the occasion of the first meeting with Nadya, when I mentioned that my grandfather went through the “Expulsão de Santos” but that I would find difficulties to hear more details from my family, she invited me to wonder “why don't they speak about it?”. Kimura (2006), in her interview with Claudio Seto about the victims of the labor camps in Paraná, mentions that “he encountered difficulties in this work, because few immigrants were willing to talk about the experience of confinement during the war” as the bitterness of the humiliations still resonated in their memories and bodies. On this occasion, Nadya evoked one of her family memories about her great-grandfather, one of the founders of the now-defunct Okinawan Association in Lucélia, São Paulo state. At a certain stage of the life of the association, her great-grandfather advised her grandfather “to avoid getting closer to the Okinawan community”. As she recalls, he said that instead “it was better to just be Japanese”. What happened could perhaps be explained as the "administration of forgetfulness" or "mechanism of selective silence" that Hobsbawm (1997) describes in the essay "Identity history is not enough". In this work, he evokes delicate issues such as the tacit agreement that entire communities are forced to sign in order to "bury past conflicts", to be able to return to life and a certain normality. At Nadya’s house, debating about

the *Era Vargas*, we all agreed that “we don’t really know what they had gone through at that time to decide to not say anything to their children”, making an allusion to the few historical records we have about that time, which sound difficult enough not perhaps justify why those stories were not told or passed on as memory.

Over the course of fieldwork, talking to my friend Elen about the research, she said: “you have to talk to my mother. I think she would like to tell you her stories”. A few days later, I had the fortunate chance to talk to Masako Yagi Ticianelli, who immigrated to Brazil in 1958 with her parents and siblings at the age of 4. They invited me to their house, offered me a lot of *salgadinhos* and *guaraná*, and kindly showed me her immigration passports and family photographs. According to Masako, among the reasons to immigrate was a widely-spread idea of enrichment in Brazil commercialized by the immigration agencies in Okinawa. In her own words:

> "We came here in '58, which was a difficult time in Okinawa after the war, so it was very difficult. According to my mother, my father never said anything about it, but my mother said something about it. My father traveled a lot because he was a carpenter, but it was very difficult, so there was news about Brazil, I think it was advertising, I don't know, that there was a need for labor at that time, and that people could come here and become rich. And my father believed it, he thought that everyone was coming here and he wanted to come too.”
>
> (personal communication, 2022)

Masako would be the first woman that I encountered – who lived postwar in Okinawa and the immigration to Brazil – who did not hesitate to talk about her memories. She described with impressive details the memories she has of her parents, always highlighting the fact that her mother was opposed to coming to Brazil and ultimately lived a life of great sadness. The stories of their life in the coffee farms in Ourinhos, São Paulo state – “*casa com chão de terra batida”* and *“bicho de pé*” – sounded familiar as I remembered myself as a kid listening to the stories of my parents and grandparents. As I nodded, attempting to offer a gesture of acknowledging the suffering of the diaspora, she added:

> “But I think the most painful thing was the war. You know, it was the war they went through. My mother had a mark on her forehead, a mark on the back of her head, she was shot and ended up in the hands of the Americans. [...] But they lived in a cave. They lived in a cave and at night they had to go out to look for food. And in those circumstances they caught her, then she said that she was in their hands. She said she had to pick up corpses, collect pieces of feet,

pieces of things, put them together, I don't know what they did. She said that she often saw Uchinaanchu mothers begging them not to kill her child, a small child, and the soldier would go there and kill the mother and the child, you know. Sometimes the mother had her child in her arms, kneeling, but they would go and shoot her. She said she saw this a lot. So I think that the person who went through all of this…"

"[...] So my mother told me about it, my father would never talk about it. I know that he had a problem with his leg because I think a bomb fell near him and I think a rock fell on him. According to what they told me, they said that they had to dig with their fingernails to remove the stone. He had a problem with his leg, he always limped like this, you know. My grandfather lost his arm. And many of them died, many relatives died, they couldn't find them anymore. So, with all this, they decided to come to Brazil, "let's go to Brazil, if there's another war there, we can't go through another war". Those Okinawa wars were pretty violent, right? It was very difficult [...] it's a very sad story, the Okinawa war is very sad. I never wanted to know about it in depth."

(personal communication, 2022)

After the conversation with her I came back to my parent's house feeling completely empty, almost as if I could finally understand why my family would never say anything about the war. Rather than attempting it rationally – like I had been doing since I started to *read* about the history of Okinawa and the diaspora – to *listen* to it first-hand from a survival perspective made even more real the biggest disgrace in our history. After listening to Masako's testimonial, I finally understood the reasons for why my family and the community in general would relativize their immigration story with a sort of "it was bad but not as bad as the war". It almost sounded as if they were not allowed to "suffer" for their own experiences in Brazil in view of the violence Okinawans suffered in the battle of Okinawa.

The stories of Nadya and her parents, as well as the ones fromMasako, establish parallels from where it is possible to understand how and why Okinawa was purposely erased from the memory of the diaspora. The battle of Okinawa (1 April 1945 – 22 June 1945) was the deadliest of WWII. Around 200.000 people were killed, in which more than 100.000 were civilians (around ⅓ of the population) murdered by the US army and Japanese Emperial army or were forced to commit suicide (Yamashiro, 1993). Besides the military violence of the war, with the battle of Okinawa, the situation of women trafficking for the forced prostitution system of the Japanese imperial army became even more dramatic for Okinawan women who had been kidnapped since the previous decades of colonization. Even with the impasses and contradictions of Japanese immigration in Brazil, it is possible to understand what Masako says about "being

impossible to survive another war", in view of the continued militarization of Okinawa after the war as a US colony and the imperialistic attacks of Japan in Asia. Although Okinawan immigrants founded their own associations in Brazil as a form of maintaining an ethnic community separated from mainland Japanese immigrants, the case of Nadya's great-grandfather could be interpreted according to her as an attempt to "protect" the following generations from being isolated in a new Western country. As Brazilians would generally not differentiate Okinawans and assume them part of a generals "Japanese immigrants' group, ', it was "safer" to be seen as part of a larger, and stronger, Japanese community. Moreover, Japanese migrants also had access to Japanese institutions in Brazil that provided aid in case of hardship (Yamashiro, 1993; Takeuchi, 2006), as it was the case for my family when they had to move during the "Expulsão de Santos". Masako, when asked about Okinawan associations in Ourinhos, told me that "there is an Okinawan association there [today] but in my time it was all together [with the Japanese] because there weren't many *Uchinaanchus* in town". Her daughter Elen emphasized that "they didn't have much choice, so they went to be part of the Japanese *kaikans* because that's what they had". Her memory alludes to a certain Okinawans' anthropophagic (Andrade, 1962; AOKB, 2010 in Higa (2015)) resiliency to assimilate the surrounding culture and adapt to the new circumstances.

The theme of silence would permeate all my interviews and conversations in fieldwork, sometimes contextualizing a general avoidance of speaking out within the families and the communities, sometimes perceiving this intentional silence in relation to certain topics. What I would come to realize, however, is that these silences exist accompanied by parallel narratives that seem aimed at diverting attention from deeper questions about Okinawan identity and nationhood.. For instance, the current tagline of Okinawa as "the land of courtesy," while echoing an old phrase that defined the independent kingdom of Ryukyu in its days of prosperous maritime trade (Yamashiro, 1993), now works to commodify Okinawa as a welcoming tourist destination as a sort "Hawaii of Japan". This often repeated line serve to hide the fact that Okinawa is currently the poorest district in Japan, as a historical outcome of its colonization. In a documentary[6] with fellow survivors of the Okinawa battle, Tsunehiko Miyagi, survivor of

[6] The documentary was found on the digital broadcaster Youtube, entitled "Civilian Suicides during the Battle of Okinawa 沖縄戦集団自決" by an account named "d1Ngk1Ng". According to the author, it is a personal project in which the survivors were interviewed. Access link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-vibIwEfl4

Okinawa battle and archivist of suicidal testimonies, talks about a mechanism of domination of colonized peoples: the imposition of the colonizer's language. According to him, it is common today to see survivors of the battle of Okinawa unable to express their feelings and their memories about the war because the younger generations no longer speak *Uchinaaguchi*. In his words:

> "All the battle of Okinawa survivors today are grandpas and grandmas, well into their 80s, since this was 65 years ago. Even now, they can't use the standard dialect – Japanese. They can't express themselves in Japanese. "It was terrible", in the Okinawan dialect "Kore dejieta!". "Chaguttoieta!", "it was really harsh!". They can only say that it was awful, but never really describe the events fully [in Japanese]. However, as a fellow survivor, I can empathize with and understand the hidden sides to their stories"."
>
> (2001)

Talking to former ex-students of the Okinawa Urizun scholarship, they also mentioned frustration at not being able to communicate with elderly family members in Okinawa, as the requirement to apply for it is Japanese. They did perceive, however, the traces of traumas left by the war. Nadya pointed out in our conversations that there has been a significant decrease in the interest in learning Japanese or Uchinaaguchi among our generations in Brazil, which leads to a limitation in communication with the elderly. Therefore, acknowledging that there is a real limitation in communicating history and memories through generations, the issues of silencing and erasure would become deep gaps vulnerable to the appropriation of one-sided narratives and epistemic violence through formal institutions dedicated to writing about Okinawa's history. Higa (2015), when analyzing the discourse of formal Okinawan institutions' publications revolving around the theme of *Okinawan culture*, states that "the emphasis is on the Okinawans' *anthropophagic* capacity to adapt, to mix and reinvent themselves when facing other peoples." She continues:

> "The assumption evoked here is that of Okinawa's plasticity; a certain narrative that highlights the dialogued coexistence with other cultures. So much so that it follows in the text analyzed here a historical description that inserts the place of Brazil in the reflection on the "Okinawan identity". The topic about the "History" of Okinawa ends with the approach of this group to Brazil and emphasizing the contact with other peoples."
>
> (2015, p.8)

She provokes the official narratives by concluding “In this sense, they (like us) would once again be the tropics of Japan”. In Higa’s work, she would always invite us to think about “who tells and how stories are told” when it comes to the hegemonic narratives about Okinawa and the diaspora, again pointing to the susceptibility that we, as readers, are subject to when we try to understand the history of Okinawa from archives and written records, given as "official narratives".

PART II

O SILÊNCIO É MUITO ELOQUENTE (SILENCE IS VERY ELOQUENT)

2. Phantoms: internalized racism and transgenerational haunting

On Mabui's premiere – a theater play made by the interdisciplinary artist Lúcia Kakazu and her cousin Ricardo Kakazu – I attended the event at the invitation of Hiromi, who worked on the costume of the play. At the waiting room with my friend Elen, I met Naomi, who a few days before was in a live stream at the digital channel YoBanBoo with Miwa Higa talking about her anthropological documentary. I wasn't quite sure what to expect from what I had read on the small pamphlet about the play when I entered the venue. When it began with Lúcia buried beside a majestic tree, creating life with the sound of the forest, I felt thrilled. The intertwining of our Okinawan history – of an indigenous people – with contemporary Brazilian indigenous issues filled me with emotion and pride. I was very sure that I wanted to know her better. After an intense and politically engaged performance, they ended the play with a *kachashii* (popular Okinawan dance). At that moment, which evoked several memories from my life, I wanted to feel joy but what came to me first was shame. I looked at the people in the audience – many whites and familiar *Uchinaanchu* faces – and I felt like hiding. To listen to

that music felt wrong. To feel familiarity with that sound, those movements, that physiognomy, felt wrong. To enjoy it felt wrong. To celebrate a cultural manifestation that is and is not mine, that lives in a time gap, seemed to create an uncomfortable chasm between me and the Brazilians. And, above all, memories of violence hovered over my body that felt the urge to vibrate with that moment, but restrained and squeezed it in the chair paralyzed by fear.

Suddenly, two giant hands in the front row of the audience stood up and began to dance delicate and mesmerizing movements. It was Miwa's beautiful hands. The drawing of her *hajichis* on her fingers went back and forth to the sound of Ricardo's *sanshin*, joining with Lucia's dancing hands. I noticed the smile on Lucia's face, happy with the solidarity of her friend who stood up to dance with her on stage. I felt as if all my fears were suddenly tiny monsters watching the spectacle, intrigued. In the end, all *Uchinaanchus* in the audience, like a tide, occupied the stage and danced hectically, freely and happily, with wide smiles and loud laughs. I wanted to cry, but all I did was take three psychedelic pictures with my disposable analog camera.

“Kachashii session” with the audience at “Mabui” (2022) by Lucia Kakazu and Ricardo Kakazu. Source: personal archive.

2.1 Internalized racism

In Wei-Chin Hwang's (2021) work "Demystifying and Addressing Internalized Racism and Oppression Among Asian Americans" she denotes the multitude of terms used in academia to talk about internalized racism: "including but not limited to internalized oppression, appropriated racial oppression, colonized mentality, racial self-hatred, internalized Whiteness, and internalized White supremacy." This multiplicity of terms brings us closer to or distances us from the causative agent of this phenomenon. To understand it in this vast array of nomenclatures, helps us to have a clear vision about the historical process that culminates in internalized racism as a direct product of a racial classification system. Still according to Hwang, "whether intentional or unintentional, racism is a disease of moral turpitude, perpetuated by a complex interplay of those sickened by ethnocentric beliefs and feelings of racial superiority, the power dynamics that create structural and institutional disadvantage, and the bystanders who benefit from privilege and are less compelled to take action and consequently reinforce the status quo." Stuart Hall (1990) refers to internalized racism as one of the most common and least studied features of racism. He defines it as the "subjection of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them". While internalized racism remains a substudied field in social sciences, in this chapter I would like to point out to IR as an outcome of a historical accumulation described in the previous chapters, and as an inherent characteristic of diasporic bodies that have undergone processes of colonization.

The philosopher Gayatri Spivak (1988) coined the use of the term "othering," which describes the process by which colonialist discourse produces its others. According to her, on the one hand, we have the Other that dominates, as the focus of desire and power, represented in psychoanalysis, as we have seen, by the mother or the father; and in postcolonial studies, in an analogous way, by the colonizer. On the other hand, we have the subject that desires, the subject at the same time excluded and created by the discourse of power. Othering is, therefore, a dialectical and circular process in which the dominant Other is established at the same time that while other subjects are produced within the context of domination (Spivak, 1988). In 1903, Du Bois wrote about the existence of "double-consciousness," or the "sense of always looking at

one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," to explain racial subortinates' self-perception as heavily influenced by the dominant group's negative gaze. It is within systems of inequalities that the oppressed subjects can potentially start to believe, internalize, and project the shame of who they are. Being at the receiving end of "denigrating" behaviors, the oppressed begin to question their identity, believe that they are inferior, and exude self-doubt and self-hatred (Fanon, 2008, my brackets).

The mixed feelings I felt when I watched "Mabui" for the first time pointed to this subject in the form of bodily sensations that arise even without a violent trigger. In my body experience, the simple seeing-hearing of a dance accompanied by the strumming of the *sanshin*, brought up a wave of emotions and memories. Emotions and memories that were either experienced by me or remembered from other people's accounts. Although this experience cannot be utterly reduced to the phenomenon of internalized racism, it is part of what explains someone feeling ashamed of something that they wish they could openly express. I can't help but remember an occasion at a family party when one of my father's uncles played *sanshin*. The first reaction of people in my family was to make fun of these "old songs". Couple of minutes later, I watched my aunts experience a moment of mixed feelings: while their hands trembled with the desire to dance to *kachashii*, they looked at each other with doubt. I encouraged them to dance, and they replied, "I don't know if we *can*". At that occasion I did not understand why they said that. I would come to better comprehend this situation a couple of years later when I encountered Higa's (2015) chapter talking about the "14 Improvement Points" imposed by the Okinawan *Kyuyou Kyokai*[7] foundation in 1926 about behaviors of Okinawan immigrants that should be "corrected" in order to become "Japanese immigrants in Brazil". According to Koichi Mori (2003), "the document formalizes the Okinawans' desire to correct what was perceived as flaws and defects in their culture and behavior, as well as to become not only Japanese, but also Brazilian." I would come to understand my aunt's reply "I don't know if we *can*" as a "I don't know if it is *allowed*", denouncing remnants of a period of restrictions and oppression in their lives as immigrants.

[7] The Kyuyou Kyokai was the entity considered the embryo of the Okinawa Kenjin Association of Brazil, founded in 1926, being one of the reasons for its foundation the supposed prohibition of Okinawan immigration to Brazil (Higa, 2015).

The process of internalizing manifestations of oppression becomes part of a system of reproduction of structural inequality, considering that the coping mechanisms often used to tackle stigmas associated with race involve denying and distancing from one's past and roots, as well as enacting similar oppression within the group. The research conducted by Monica Trieu and Hana Lee (2018) about internalized racism oppression with fifty-one US Asians-Americans exemplifies multiple coping mechanisms developed by individuals to deal with the experience and trauma of being perceived as "Asian" in the US context. Among the testimonies, strategies like self-mockery, diversion from Asianess, dissociation from other Asians and defensive othering are often adopted by second and third generations in the US to cope with the violence enacted against them, especially during their early socialization years. For many respondents, the desire to become "white" would be seen as one of their first reactions to this system of oppression, as it would allow them to be an "ideal American" and therefore leave their condition of victims of violence. Freire (1996) describes in his work about education among the oppressed that the detrimental psyche behind internalized oppression feels "an irresistible attraction towards the oppressors and their way of life" to the extent that "it becomes an overpowering aspiration," and "in their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them". In both cases described, it seemed that by compactuating with a given "culture", another "identity" must be denied. That is, for Okinawans to be respected as Brazilians, they would have to not only go through a process of "whitening" their appearances and behavior, but also vehemently deny the existence of other identities in the same body or group. The hatred inherent in racism in this case does not only come from an external agent towards a group, but also from within the individuals that compose this same group.

Beyond the corporeality of racism, Sara Ahmed's (2007) work "A phenomenology of whiteness" evokes Fanon's theory about historic-racial schema in which he describes this "background layer" positioned behind racialized bodies, "default" to the colonized world. In her words:

> "As Fanon's work shows, after all, bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world 'white', a world that is inherited, or which is already given before the point of an individual's arrival. This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly. Colonialism makes the world 'white', which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach. Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them. Such histories, we might say, surface on the body, or even

shape how bodies surface (see Ahmed, 2004a). Race then does become a social as well as bodily given, or what we receive from others as an inheritance of this history."
(2007, p.153, 154)

Given the historical context outlined in the previous chapter, we can understand the consequences of years of "Políticas de Branqueamento" and the "myth of racial democracy" translated into racism that not only structures institutions but permeates all public and private spheres of social coexistence. What Sara Ahmed and Frantz Fanon describe is a concretization of white universalism in the colonized world that ends up orchestrating not only the relationship of whiteness with colonized peoples, but the relationships that these individuals have with their own subjectivity and with their own group. To the extent that the universalization of whiteness as the norm is established and instrumentalized within the operating and coercive institutions of these countries, the annihilation on various levels (psychological, cultural, political) of *othered* peoples continues to be legitimized and tolerated.

2.2 Transgenerational haunting

A parallel between the diverse racisms that permeate contemporary Brazil can be drawn to talk about racism against Asians with its specificities and contradictions. After more than a century of the first Asian immigration waves, "yellow" people occupy this intermediary space in between the dichotomy white/black (Takeuchi 2016), of both oppressed and oppressor. Asian Brazilians are oppressed as a non-white minority that has its ethnic diversity reduced to a homogeneous and stereotyped block, under the gaze and regulation of whiteness and reinforced by non-yellow races and ethnicities. However, the same individuals can also benefit from other myths created for their race, as is the example of the "model minority myth" (Pyke, 2010). Although this myth essentially demarcates the spaces in which Asians are allowed to inhabit and oppresses a majority that generally does not correspond to the established stereotypes, as a result of this myth, several doors are also opened that guarantee them some prospect of social mobility. It is also important to point out that social mobility is a right not guaranteed to the majority of the population that operates in a logic of capital exploitation, and that in this context the Asian becomes "oppressor" to the extent that they are granted these rights at the expense of the detriment of other social groups. For those who have climbed up the social hierarchy, "defensive othering" might have been one of the mechanisms that guaranteed their ascension, which is per

definition of Schwalbe et al. (2000) in Pyke (2010) an “identity work engaged by the subordinated in an attempt to become part of the dominant group or to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with the subordinate group.” This contradictory position ends up also contributing to a system of reproduction of structural racism, and igniting relations between different ethnic and racial groups as it creates internal and external tensions that affect both the individuality and the collectivity.

In fieldwork, during a discussion group about “racism against Asians”, it was clear how difficult it was for this group to legitimize their feelings and experiences by nominating it “racism”. Many participants would otherwise prefer to refer to it as “micro aggressions”, according to them, in respect to violence enacted against black and indigenous peoples in Brazil. “Compared to what they suffer, like Black people get killed everyday in Brazil for the sole reason that they are black, we [Asian Brazilians] don’t feel the right to say that we suffer from racism”, said one of my interlocutors who prefers to remain anonymous. However, this ranking of racist experiences that only classifies as “racism” extreme cases in which there is physical violence and death, ends up being counterproductive in a discussion that tries to find the roots of such problems, generating discomfort instead of alliances between peoples from different groups that have the same oppressor in common. Besides, another participant of this debate group told me on this occasion, “legitimizing our pain does not mean signing up for an Olympics of suffering. Why do we have to call it microaggressions and not just aggressions?”. This debate group made me reflect on the concept of “overcoming fear” made by Shirley Anne Tate (2018) to talk about black feminist work on the identifications of "mestizo" women:

> “[...] It is all too easy to remove ourselves from the perception of the ruptures of what is assumed when fear acts to silence us. Fear of being wrong, fear of being an outsider, fear of being ridiculed, fear of being seen as not politically or sufficiently aware as a black woman, fear of being labeled "the angry black woman", fear of being put "in a box". Fear is a paralyzing feeling, but one that must be dealt with if we are to think of a black feminism that recognizes and makes room for differences in class, sexuality, mixed race, gender, age, ability, and background, for example. We must overcome fear to keep exploring how we can still hold Black feminist politics as a point of identification, mutual recognition, and respect in and across differences. [...]”
>
> (2018, p.192)

Reserving respect for the differences that exist between the black and Asian feminist movements, I invite the academic reference of black women authors regarding the silences and emotions arising from the colonizing processes. Tate (2018) as a Black feminist, works with the

idea of recognizing and legitimizing “rage” as a driving force emerging from racist injustice and violence that no longer can be ignored nor left out of “feminist discourse”. The idea of the “angry black woman”, according to her, “has been constructed by whiteness as a prelude to the erasure of black feminist critique” when their writings go against what whiteness perceives as established regarding "race" and racism, and against a supposed objectivity of academic production. Her research ultimately exalts the agency and origin of "black feminist rage": “we have a responsibility to feel rage, but we locate it as not *ours*. We must realize that it emanates from white supremacist feminism and the heteropatriarchy. This responsibility to feel anger as something that does not come from us allows us to become Black women on our own terms, even under conditions we do not choose.” Critical reflection on the emotions that are commonly left out of the objectivity imposed by academia, in Tate's discourse, becomes essential to understand the contemporary situation in which diasporic bodies are exposed to. Acknowledging the coexistence of such emotions that are not detached from any analysis, even those proclaimed objectives, means regaining authority over discourses on diasporic bodies and subjectivities that had been denied to them for decades.

Considering that the Okinawan diaspora in Brazil went through several processes of silencing and erasure, in which monolithic narratives are still in the process of being debunked by groups that are fighting for access to their memories, the current diasporic generations might be experiencing what Grace Cho recalls as “transgenerational haunting”. In her work “Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War” (2008) she defines it as:

> “In what is legitimated as history there are gaps, which come to be lived as transgenerational haunting. [...] More specifically, the theory of transgenerational haunting demonstrates how a silenced trauma can become a dynamic force – one that produces “countermemory”, disruptions, articulations, visibilities, assemblages, and new configurations of kinship.”
>
> (2008, p.173)

Through the work of Cho (2008), it is possible to understand this state of communal discomfort in the face of silences that move alongside generations. Even if these traumas are not passed on through a retelling of lived stories or remembered memories, it passes through generations that somehow continue to live the discomfort of these traumas that refuse to remain fixed in the past. In turn it generates, as per my interlocutors, a movement that "wants to look at Okinawa's history

without covering its wounds," as Lúcia explained to me about one of her motivations to engage in this research.

According to Cho (2008), the study of ghosts allows us to rethink a society's relationship to its dead while acknowledging its haunting effects as a mode of memory and an avenue for ethical engagement with the present. In her work recalling stories of *yanggongju* (forced prostitutes[8]), she recalls with great emotional level the situations in which she/they perceived these ghosts in their lives:

> "I began searching for a history. My own history. Because I had known all along that the stories I had heard were not true, and parts had been left out. I remember having this feeling growing up that I was haunted by something, that I was living within a family full of ghosts.
>
> … There was this place that they knew about. I had never been there yet I had a memory for it. I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born. We had been moved. Uprooted. … She tells the story of what she does not remember."
>
> (Rea Tajiri "History and Memory, videorecording (1991) in Cho (2008))

Over the course of the Japanese imperialism, around 360,000 to 410,000 women[9] (mainly Okinawan, Chinese, Korean and Philippine women) were coerced into forced militarized prostitution, Okinawan women being the first "comfort women" coerced before systematization of prostitution during the pacific wars (Yunshin and Ichiro, 2022), facilitated by the colonizing mission over the Ryukyu kingdom. The stories of haunting that diasporic bodies encounter in their "new homelands" described by Cho (2008) resonates with the stories of silencing and erasure enacted by diasporic Okinawan women, who inherited the suffering of sexual violence and systematic objetification of their bodies under the rule of the Japanese empire. In face of the great sadness lived by the *yanggongju*, Cho (2008) says that "she tells the story of what she does not remember, but remembers one thing: why she forgot to remember".

During conversations with elderly Okinawan women in São Paulo and Campo Grande, they would never openly mention the words "prostitution" or "comfort women" while talking about the past in Utiná. However, there were always little "ghosts" that would shyly appear

[8] The term yanggongju, according to Kim (2012), refers to Korean women working in militarized prostitution with foreign men to the lowest status within the hierarchy of prostitution.

[9] According to Professor Su Jiliang of the Digital Museum The Comfort Women Issue and the Asian's Women Fund, there's a lack of official documentation that has made estimating the total number of comfort women difficult. His entire research can be found here: https://www.awf.or.jp/e1/facts-07.html

within their discourses denoting a “fear of military men”, or saying “I get goosebumps when I see a Japanese flag”. Whenever asked why, they would remain silent. In the documentary “Okinawa Santos” (2020) by Yoju Matsubayashi about the “*Expulsão de Santos*”, Ana Maria Higa the only woman interviewed, recalls the fear her father had of leaving her mother and her sisters alone in the shelter “because there were a lot of military men around”. This specific fear of “military men” would also resonate around my own family, who although has never spoken openly about the battle of Okinawa, would have as their only line on the subject the fact that “Japan has not yet fully redeemed itself for the war crimes it committed against Okinawan and Korean women”. According to Cho (2008) on the concept of diasporic vision:

> “If, as Johnston suggests, machinic assemblages are a “a new form of collective psychic apparatus,” we might consider transgenerational haunting an example of machinic vision and of distributed perception more generally. Like the transgenerational phantom who seeks other bodies through which to speak, the subject’s inability to see the trauma that takes place before her very eyes causes her eyes to be distributed across bodies and generations. A diasporic machinic vision is perhaps the only means by which haunted histories can be “seen,” through a distribution of the senses that at once resides in the film images of the Ukishima Maru exploding, in the eyes of the viewers of the film, in the silences of those who remember the incident but never speak about it, in the grief of survivors, in the bodies of those who absorbed their grief, in the skeletal remains found on the ship, and in the effects of the disaster itself. Diasporic vision is an assemblage of the body memory of transgenerational haunting and the haunted subjects’ own cultural productions disseminated through technological apparatuses that make visible the trauma that one’s own eyes could not see in time.”
>
> (2008, p.174)

As Gordon (2009) claims for “the political and ethical urgency of “mourning modernity’s ‘wound in civilization’”, I wonder how much sadness and pain still resonates in our diasporic unconscious that we are unable to consciously access, and mourn it. Diasporic peoples currently live through an accumulation of violences, lived or inherited, recounted or remembered, and have it sedimented by policies that deny the right of access to their own history. How can we mourn something that we don’t even know? The stories of violence of the people who were colonized are difficult to access because of the political interests of their colonizers, who resist to answer for their own crimes. The story of the colonization of Okinawa, of the "Expulsão de Santos" of 1943, of the comfort women are some of the stories that the diaspora tries to stitch together like a patchwork, as the official narratives fail to tell these stories and leave behind their voids and silences, which haunt us and disturb families to this day.

PART III

LA CURA AND *LA PRAXIS* (“THE CURE AND THE PRAXIS”)

3. Healing: the way back home

I had already witnessed the same scene the other days at my grand aunt’s house. The talking TV, loud words, songs, laughs, on an almost non-stop program, day and night. Somehow the TV seemed like an entity that monopolized the attention of the residents and shared its attention with us, its visitors. It is commonly the main object in the living room of any Brazilian family. In the case of the Brazilian Uchinaanchu families I met, it seems that the *butsudan* - the Okinawan altar dedicated to ancestor worship traditionally located in the main room of Okinawan houses - was moved to the bedroom, and replaced by the TV. I would come to observe a very similar behavior from my family and from the Brazilian Okinawan families I had the opportunity to make longer visits. Their half words and grunts, the silences and the looks that never crossed mine. What happens on TV is rarely commented on or criticized by its passive viewers. The TV talks, talks, talks, and depending on the channel, without any filter, in contrast to the short and practical conversations of the people in the house: "do you want some tea?”, “put on the soap opera”, “so horrible this violence”.

One day returning late and in a hurry to my grand aunt's house, who, according to my cousin, was waiting for me crocheting and watching TV in the living room, I entered the house ashamed for arriving so late and already apologizing, as my mother had taught me. I was surprised by the disposition of my aunt, who was knitting a long piece while watching "Programa do Ratinho" on TV. Perhaps because I myself do not have a TV in my house and have been living alone for years, it is impossible for me to ignore a program as noisy as "Programa do Ratinho". There was some "prank" with some "midget" actors harassing women from the audience and making strange sexist jokes. I noticed that my aunt was watching and not watching the program, while she was putting the threads of her crochet hooks together with the needles perfectly with a very serious face. It was a mixture of looking and not seeing; hearing and not listening; appearing and disappearing with each ticking of the clock that marked the passing of the hours. She was there all that time, but she didn't say much about

herself, she didn't tell her stories. Her children and grandchildren who live in other cities marked their presence in the photographs scattered around the house. They seemed to speak of a different past than the monotony of that night. The TV then seemed to be the only thing that would *talk* to my aunt.

My reverie in the middle of the room was interrupted when she said: "there's a little jar with honey and lemon on the kitchen table. I made it for you because you were coughing a lot at night, right?" Immediately the image of my *obá* came to my mind, and I remembered all her affection and care through attitudes, food, crocheted sweaters as gifts, and not words. Until then, my aunt had not given me a hug beyond the formal conventions of greetings, but after that I gave her such a strong hug that she giggled delightfully amidst my canine agitation around her.

When I arrived in São Paulo to start my fieldwork, Hiromi Toma did not hesitate to invite me for two *hajichi* sessions of extreme importance to her work: a double session for Tieko and Silvia, mother and daughter interested in marking on their bodies the ancestral tattoos of Ryukyu women as a symbol of a movement to rescue the *Uchinaanchu* history erased by colonization and immigration; and for her mother Hatsuco, who in addition to the retouching of her first *hajichi*, also wanted a tattoo of a hibiscus flower - which for her, also symbolizes Utiná. According to Hiromi, the two sessions were of extreme importance, for her as *hajichaa* and for the community that excitedly followed her work digitally, because it was about two "older" women deciding to have their hands tattooed, against all the prejudices towards tattoos within the community and as a symbol of a memory of *Uchinaanchu* women. In Tieko's case, it was especially moving for Hiromi and for me to hear her recollection of a "faded black dot" in her mother's hands. Our generations would not come to know elderly *Uchinaanchu* women with *hajichi* on their hands; we would know them only through photographs as *hajichi* were prohibited once Japan colonized Utiná.

There are several versions about the origin of *hajichi* in the Ryukyu Kingdom. During my fieldwork, I would hear from older women in my family that *hajichi* functioned as "passports" to know where an *Uchinaanchu* woman was from, due to the regional character of the figures that make up the tattoo (each region of Ryukyu has its own designs). Other women would come to say that tattoos symbolized rites of passage in a woman's life, from childhood on, and that they

were as common as "earrings in the ear". Laura Kina's (2019) illustrated book "Okinawan Princess: da legend of hajichi tattoos" works with the version that *hajichi*s would have been created by one of the princesses of Ryukyu when she had been kidnapped by a Japanese pirate. In order to escape from him, she tattooed herself on her hands. Those tattoos would cause her to be rejected by the Japanese pirate because "she would no longer be beautiful with such tattoos". In her version, what would be unpleasant for a Japanese man, would be a symbol of pride and beauty for Okinawan women. Other versions during the Japanese colonization, when *hajichi*s were forbidden and *hajichaa*s (tattoo artists) and shamans persecuted, tell that women insisted on making hajichis so that they would not be taken to forced prostitution houses. During conversations with Hiromi, the first *hajichaa* of our generation in Brazil, she told me that she found it more interesting to work with the diversity of stories about the origin of hajichi rather than fixing one real story. As Okinawa has an oral tradition of storytelling - mainly through speech and songs - Hiromi thinks of them as narratives that constantly change each time a story is told by the same or a different person. "So it is natural that there are several versions about the origin of *hajichi*s, and I don't think we should be obsessed with a single narrative." Moreover, her own work reviving and re-signifying *hajichis* among women in the community is not intended to impose guidelines and limits on what hajichis mean to each woman today. "each one will have her own process, she will be able to see which *hajichi*s should be in her hands, and what subjective meanings it will bring to her life."

At the end of Hatsuco's *hajichi* session, Hiromi started to propose a "Hajichi caravan" to Campo Grande, in Midwest Brazil, the city of her family. She purposely stated that she wanted to include the Campo Grande Okinawan community in my research. I readily accepted, and we began to plan it. Over the course of three weeks, Hiromi connected with a couple of artists and researchers to be part of the caravan. We had five Brazilian uchinanchu women that would go to Campo Grande to meet the Okinawan community, and make personal and cultural exchanges. Besides me and Hiromi, we counted with Laís Miwa Higa, anthropologist from Santo André, São Paulo; Carol Nakadomari, psychologist from Londrina, Paraná; Silvia Naomi Asato, social sciences student and sanshin researcher, from Casa Verde, São Paulo. The cultural event, named "Shimanchu no Moashibi" would be hosted at the Okinawa Association of Campo Grande, one of the oldest Okinawan associations in the country founded in 1922 and that today counts with 498 associated families. Marcel Asato, the youngest *kaicho* (president) in the history of the

association, and Patrícia Aguena, first female biracial vice president, together with their whole dear crew warmly opened the doors and gave us all the necessary freedom to organize activities that were unprecedented in the history of an Okinawan association in Brazil. Besides traditional Okinawan culture presentations like *Odori*, *taiko* and *sanshin,* it was the first time that a live *hajichi* session took place in a kaikan. We watched and debated about three documentaries produced by the community: the first named “Flores de Bálsamo” by Lucas Miyahira, Henrique Arakaki and Karen Freitas; the second one “Nas agulhas de costura da obá: fragmentos e o trabalho do tempo” by Silvia Naomi Asato and Rodrigo Lima Cassemiro de Melo, and the last one “Uyafaafuji refusal: and ode to the yanbaru” by Sho Yamagushiku and Yana-Imi from the US and Canada. In the following week, Miwa lead a group from Campo Grande that organized a two days course about who tell and how the stories of the Okinawan and Japanese community in Brazil are told, together with three days of conversation sessions about Asian feminism, prejudice and racism against “yellow people” and the Asian LGBTQIA+ movement.

The event was something very unexpected in the lives of all involved, but with the strength of a well-synchronized group work, everything ran in an organic and fluid way. I would hear from many people at the time that the event would have been "organized by our ancestors" to have worked out so well, showing a strong “spirit of cooperation” described in the Okinawan saying “*Yui Maru*”. The event was attended by more than 250 people from Campo Grande and in total we spent two weeks together, living among the kaikan members' homes, exchanging experiences and affection in hajichi sessions and celebrating that sudden and warm connection we felt. For some people in the caravan, we felt for the first time what the famous Okinawan saying "*Ichaariba Choode*" says: “when we meet, we are brothers and sisters”. Besides the disruptive character of bringing minority narratives to be shown and debated within a traditionally patriarchal organization, the meeting was of great importance for those involved, both to establish bridges between the two largest Okinawan communities in Brazil and to reflect on "our right to exist as an ethnic community" in these places.

The event gained considerable repercussions in the city of Campo Grande and counted on some TV stations that came with journalists to conduct short interviews with the organizers. One of the reports, made by TV Moreno, an affiliate of Rede Globo, the largest TV and entertainment network in the country, caused great indignation amongst the organizers for its headline "Japanese party" of descendants of the "city of Okinawa". Regarding *hajichis*, the report treated

hajichi as if it referred to the hand poke technique, and not to history as an ancestral tattoo. This deconfiguration of information in the Brazilian mainstream media, which commonly exoticizes and simplifies "*othered* cultures", continues to speak to Takeuchi's work (2016) in insisting on categorizing such expressions within a narrative "digestible to the majority of the lay population" appealing to stereotypes, carefully selected to reinforce the status quo.

The two-week stay in Campo Grande, in addition to the relationships with both the young community of the association (*seinenkai*) and the community of adult women (*fujinkai*), was of great importance and joy for me as a researcher and as a Brazilian Uchinanchu woman. On this occasion, I felt that I could put into practice some decolonial doings of communal feeling-thinking and contemplation, letting my field affect me in a way to achieve both moments of intense synergy with the group and moments of reflection as an observer of this group. The two weeks worked as a kind of group therapy, in which we had the opportunity to share our stories and experiences counting on the attentive, receptive and warm listening of the participants. Joy permeated this experience for me and for my interlocutors, which reminded me of this quote from Musser (2014): “joy is something shared that can unite physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual differences to create new understandings and diminish the threat of differences as communities are formed through affective flows”.

Furthermore, I feel extremely grateful for having had the opportunity to be part of such a disruptive and graceful moment in the history of the Okinawan community of Campo Grande and São Paulo.

4. Hacer decolonial: decolonial epistemology

In the previous chapters I proposed a historical context to place the process of silencing and invisibilization of colonized diasporic Okinawans in Brazil, as an attempt to understand how narratives were *othered* and systematically excluded from the arsenal of information about the diaspora that we have access to today in the Western world. The second part attempted to analyze some of the effects (or ghosts) that resonate amongst the diaspora nowadays and the movements towards rewriting certain chapters of this history from *othered* perspectives. At this point I would like to highlight though that, despite historical facts, the narratives from my interlocutors present the need to be understood as fluid perspectives and that this work resonates as a positioned analysis of what they have shared with me, within this very historical time and context, and not

as an monolithic truth trying to *speak for others*. In view of the epistemic violence that *othered* narratives historically suffered, I decided to look for alternative approaches to conduct this research in fieldwork, relying on decolonial authors and practices I have encountered over the course of this masters program and a lifetime wondering what exactly happened to *us*.

I reinforce in this chapter the use of the term "hacer" (from Spanish, "to do") instead of the term "methods" to propose a praxis for anthropological research and filmmaking that has its foundations in the decolonial turn of the 1990s in Latin America. If colonization can be seen as a disease in which its effects shape Western modernity, decoloniality as a field of studies emerges as a praxis to comprehend the effects of colonialism in our societies today and to propose paths of emancipation from colonial trauma. "*Hacer*" therefore is a term that denotes its positionality, refuting the idea of positioning decolonization as "methodology", precisely because fitting decolonization into a tested, approved, labeled "methodology box" contradicts decolonization and legitimizes the structures of Eurocentrism, as "if it is a method, it cannot be decolonial, because every method is colonizing" (Ocaña and López, 2019).

4.1 Epistemic disobedience

"Onde está você, meu irmão, minha irmã
eu te procuro porque nossas vozes farão ecoar a resposta
omissão, não se omita, emita
o som que cria, o som que ecoa, o som que escoa antigas crenças
do não poder, do não saber, do se esconder
agora não precisa mais
pode sair de trás dessa palmeira que Palmares já se foi
e na selva da cidade, nesse novo mato, sei quem é o capitão
já olhei nos olhos dele e não me assusto não
pois ele também olhou nos meus e não encontrou sequer nenhum vestígio de submissão
pois não sou mais sua escrava
e finalmente eu disse "não"
e o som brotou da escuridão."

["Where are you, my brother, my sister
I seek you because our voices will echo the answer
omission, don't be omitted, emit
the sound that creates, the sound that echoes, the sound that drains away old beliefs
of not being able, of not knowing, of hiding
now you don't have to
you can come out from behind this palm tree that Palmares is already gone

and in the jungle of the city, in this new bush, I know who the captain is
I've looked into his eyes and I'm not scared
for he also looked into mine and found not even a trace of submission
for I am no longer his slave
and finally I said "no"
and the sound sprang from the darkness."]

("Não pise na bola" (2018) – Craca e Dani Nega e Roberta Estrela D'Alva)

For Mignolo (2009), "epistemic disobedience means to disengage from the illusion of the epistemology of point zero", that is, to free ourselves from the illusion caused by the geopolitics of knowledge based on European universalism that often justifies the neutrality of its research methodologies in social sciences. Knowledge, therefore, must necessarily enunciate its positionality because all knowledge is situated, not universal. Mignolo justifies this rupture by explaining that:

> "Because the geo-historical and biographical *loci* of enunciation were located by and through the creation and transformation of the colonial matrix of power: a racial system of social classification that invented Westernism (e.g. the West Indies), that created the conditions for Orientalism; distinguished southern Europe from its center (Hegel) and, in this long history, reclassified the world as first, second and third during the Cold War. Places of non-thought (of myths, non-Western religions, folklore, underdevelopment involving regions and people) today are awakening from a long process of Westernization. The anthropos inhabiting non-European places discovered that he or she had been invented, as anthropos, by a locus of enunciation self-defined as *humanitas*."
>
> (2009, p.26)

Decolonial practices, or paths, or praxis, being developed around all regions once subjugated by European universalism have their colonial wounds as the common issue that fuels the debate about Western epistemology. As people around the world have been repeatedly classified as underdeveloped, economically and mentally, the task of decolonial thinking is to reveal the epistemic silences generated by Western epistemology and open an inclusive discussion to legitimize *othered* knowledges. For a democratic inclusion in the sharing of knowledge, social sciences need to question their own founding structures and propose means for academic production to be able to achieve a praxis consistent with the needs of the peoples that anthropology enjoys so much to study.

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) criticizes anthropology as "mainly a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them,' of the white man with the white man about the primitive-nature man, in which 'them' is silenced. 'Them' always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless . . 'them' is only admitted among 'us,' the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an 'us' ". The existence of "native" social scientists who rely not only on classical social sciences but also on the arts and knowledge produced by native and diasporic peoples to understand these ruptures, also proves the need for the disciplines to break away into *othered* fields of knowledge. It is necessary to understand the usefulness and role of such studies in order to demarcate their role of enunciation as sciences that seek to understand the fallacies of the modern western world that continually disrupt and disturb the life course of people once subjugated by the same sciences. If the production of knowledge is not neutral, neither does it represent an universal truth (Dulci e Malheiros, 2021). Silences, as eloquent concepts, have to be understood as components of discourses, which are necessarily composed of a dance of words and moments of silence. However, in studies such as this one in which silences are more the norm than words themselves as a result of a cycle of violences, both experiential and epistemic, it is necessary to understand the nature of these silences and the (other) ways that words find to give vent to what needs to be expressed/communicated. Furthermore, social sciences are necessary as tools capable of understanding certain social constructions inserted in positioned contexts in which these silences are immersed, and it becomes much richer with open gates to *othered* knowledges.

> “Anthropological and non-anthropological explanations may share the same subject matter, but they differ in the way they produce meaning. The unreliable constructs are the ones that do not obey the rules of anthropological authority, which a concerned expert like Evans-Pritchard skillfully specifies as being nothing else but "a scientific habit of mind." Science, defined as the most appropriate approach to the object of investigation, serves as a banner for every scientific attempt to promote the West's paternalistic role as subject of knowledge and its historicity of the Same.”
>
> (Minh-ha, 1989, p.93)

In the words of Mignolo (2009), “decoloniality is therefore the energy that does not allow the operation of the logic of coloniality nor believes the fairy tales of the rhetoric of modernity.” Decoloniality would, therefore, be used as a tool to understand the world from the very world we live in, from the epistemes that are proper to them and that were prevented to be seen by “coloniality of knowledge” (Porto-Gonçalves, 2005). For Dulci and Malheiros (2021) and

Puentes (2014), the role of a self-proclaimed decolonial researcher is not to think interculturality with those who already built it for a long time. It is necessary to think about interculturality with those who have not built it yet. However, to imagine that this research will provoke a decolonial turn in the methodologies constructed and sacramentalized in five centuries of modernity is to be naive. Altogether, researchers that place themselves as disobedient in a proposal of knowledge production that makes itself universal, question us and provoke us to feel, to experience *othered* possibilities (Dulci e Malheiros, 2021) emerging from the borders.

4.2 *"O sol nasceu ao leste e o leste também é o meu lugar*[10]*"*: emerging from the borders

Brazil has been flooded with decolonial manifestations brought to the popular mantle by the black and indigenous movements, as well as by the intersectional feminist and queer epistemic pathway. Even if these manifestations sometimes come up against schemes of commodification of culture (hooks, 1992), decolonization as *hacer* has transcended the limits of the academic elite and reached the hands of the subaltern, as the result of a democratic process of conscientization (Freire, 1996) – in the sense of making exchanges between those who have access to a certain knowledge and those who do not – and as the praise of knowledge of a non-Eurocentric matrix. It is important to emphasize, as Dias (2020) suggests in regards to "Ocidental knowledge", that it is not about rejecting it but:

> "It is about, from an equitable dialogical stance, shedding light on other possible paths. Therefore, admitting the aforementioned risk, we assume the project of breaking with Eurocentric rationality, fundamentally, as a break with the violence and the silencing of its universalistic pretension perpetrated throughout history and still today."
>
> (2020, p.50)

As a way to combat the epistemicide (Santos, 2010) committed by institutions, several Brazilian and Latin American researchers, artists, and activists have worked in the direction of rescuing, resignifying, and recreating narratives to (re)inhabit spaces that belong to them and to their rights as humans. Even with the difficulty of reaching higher education in the country –

[10] A passage from MC Tha's (2019) song named "Avisa lá". She explains in her social media profile that she wrote these lyrics thinking about her position as a Black woman from a marginalized neighborhood in São Paulo city. "Zona leste" would refer to one of the most marginalized areas in São Paulo city. In her song, "the place where the sun arises" and also "the place where she comes from".

which continues to maintain its elitist tradition of concentration of knowledge – Brazilian academia has been slowly inhabited by cultural minorities historically deprived of academic spaces. These individuals have started to occupy these spaces mainly since the policies of access to higher education, showing a successful result of years of articulation and political-social struggle undertaken by them (Dias, 2020). Besides the flourishing of a plurality of academic works, it is also remarkable the effect that individuals have on their own communities by sharing knowledge that can be reflected upon and instrumentalized for social movements. This movement of minorities circulating through once restricted spaces can be seen in this critique from Laura Marks (2000):

> "I would argue that these any-spaces-whatever are not simply the disjunctive spaces of postmodernism, but also the disruptive spaces of postcolonialism, where non-Western cultures erupt into Western metropolises, and repressed cultural memories return to destabilize national histories. In this case the "new race … kind of mutant" to which Deleuze refers (in terms that suddenly take on a rather xenophobic cast) describes the very real conditions of migration, diaspora, and hybridity that characterize the new populations of Europe and North America, especially in the periods following wars. The end of the modern period is characterized not only by industrial ruins but also by the dismantling of colonial power, whose ruins are perpetuated in the lives of the people it displaced. These people are "seers" in the metropolitan West, aware of violent histories to which its dominant population is blind. They possess what Fatimah Tobing Rony (1996) calls a third eye, which allows them to perceive the dominant culture from both inside and outside."
>
> (2000, p.27)

I would see a similar pattern happening within the Brazilian Okinawan community, in which the ones who had access to higher education – especially in the fields of social sciences and arts – would start to instrumentalize their knowledges in favor of their communities and/or social movements. In the work of José Yamashiro (1993, 2001), the first Brazilian Okinawan to publish a work about Okinawan history from a diasporic perspective and also the first one of his lineage to access higher education, he entails a narrative that fills many gaps left by other western historians on Japanese and Okinawan immigration. His work as a journalist and activist during the cruel *Anos de Chumbo* ("lead years" of military dictatorship in Brazil from 1964 to 1985) continues to be of utmost importance for the community to also see themselves as active agents in the struggle for democracy in Brazil. Knowing about the possibility for us – Asian Brazilians – to inhabit places not predicted by the myth of the model minority is still a barrier that we need to overcome as an ethnic community in order to advance in the critical exercise of

the "race laboratory" in which we live. I would hear from many of my interlocutors in fieldwork that "Okinawans often turn to the social science disciplines in the West precisely because there is a latent feeling of wanting to question the status quo from way back when we were colonized by the Japanese and inserted into the West". This may perhaps be an expression of the "ghosts" that Grace Cho talks about in her theory of "transgenerational haunting". This "latent desire" born out of these ruptures has certainly generated several works that "don't try to cover these wounds", as Lúcia Kakazu said.

The work of Gabriela Shimabuko (Kemi) is an example of a conscious praxis enacted within social movements and organizations in São Paulo. As a social scientist, she published an academic paper named "Asadoya Yunta: da resistência ao amor pelo colonizador" (2020) ("Asadoya Yunta: from resistance to love for the colonizer") in which she analyses the lyrics of "Asadoya Yunta", a popular song from the Yaeyama islands, part of the Okinawan district in Japanese territory today. By comparing the lyrics of the song before and after Japanese colonization of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Shimabuko concludes that its original meaning of insubordination of the Ryukyu people toward the Japanese government got complete erased in the "Japanized" version that served as a "slogan song" for the propagandist version of a touristic Okinawa in postwar years. In her words:

> "In the original version, Asadoya nu Kuyama personifies the feeling of insubordination of the people of Ryukyu toward the Japanese government. Even willing to break with Confucian tradition, the minority populations reject the imposition of a new model of life. But when the music is reinterpreted in Japanese, the cultural negotiation is done in disproportionate terms, without Okinawa having autonomy. Thus, the "translation" takes on a tactical function of emptying meaning, cultural erasure, silencing and commodification, contributing to Japanese "cosmetic multiculturalism".
>
> (2020, p.96)

Kemi would be part of a group of researchers and artists who would propose counternarratives within academia and the Okinawan community, as well as maintaining a praxis interwitneted with social movements in São Paulo. Once she brought me to one of the houses that was refurbished by the political party Unidade Popular pelo Socialismo (UP) in which she is an active member. She mentioned the fact that this house is located in Liberdade, the "Japanese" neighborhood in São Paulo, recently renamed "Japão – Liberdade" by the current prefecture.

According to her, the history of this neighborhood expresses, in fact, the cycles of violence that immigrants are subjected to in capitalistic societies. The Liberdade neighborhood, located in the very city center of São Paulo, was once known by the Largo da Forca, where indigenous and black slaves were hanged in the 19th century. The name of the neighborhood actually comes from this time, when slaves shouted "freedom" to those condemned to be hanged. The neighborhood would come to be traditionally a black neighborhood of São Paulo in the decades after the abolition of slavery, and home to São Paulo's first samba house, the Lavapés Pirata Negro created in 1937 (Magalhães, 2021). However, as a government project, the neighborhood gradually expelled its black inhabitants with the gentrification of the city center, and became a tourist spot that praises the presence of Japanese immigrants in São Paulo, being something like the touristy ChinaTowns of the global north. Kemi would come to tell me that it was particularly important to rehabilitate properties unused by the government in the region that historically belonged to them. She decided to dedicate herself to work in social movements and at UP as a result of a lifetime reflecting on her social position as a daughter of the Okinawan diaspora in São Paulo who understands as her life role to continue “breaking the cycles of violence”.

As once subaltern people start to emerge from the borders and inhabit elitist spaces, it becomes necessary to question whether those spaces are *prepared* to welcome them. As per the experiences in British academia described by Tate (2018) as a Black feminist, quoting Scarry (1985, p.53): "it brings with it all the loneliness of absolute privacy without any security, all the self-exposure of the total public without any of its possibilities for camaraderie or shared experience". As debated in previous chapters about the “myth of racial democracy”, academia as the ultimate knowledge creation institution in the West, needs to work towards tolerating and including differences in its working methodologies, not eliminating and silencing them. It is necessary to legitimize "othered" experiences within academia, so that a constructive and sustainable dialogue can be established among once subaltern researchers who have increasingly come to inhabit these spaces as the result of years of articulation of their political struggle.

4.3 Sentipensar (feeling-thinking) with moving images

I see my process as a researcher in fieldwork like scavenging in a tide pool for the small, speaking objects that are briefly revealed there before the water rushes in again (Marks, 2000).

My research process, which basically consisted of individual or group conversations, doing activities together with my interlocutors or observing them living a multiple range of experiences in certain spaces and historical moments, resembles the movement of waves on the beach bay. This movement of going forward and backward, of filling and emptying, acting and contemplating, describes in a general way how I perceive the interactions during the three months in São Paulo and Campo Grande.

Great part of the conversations I had in fieldwork were guided by the concept of "*sentipensar*" (feeling-thinking) by Moraes and De la Torre (2002) in which it "expresses the process by which thought and feeling, two ways of interpreting reality, are configured through reflection and emotionality, until they converge in the same act of knowledge and action". According to Dulci and Malheiros (2021):

> "[...] *sentipensar* research must combine reason and love with the body and the heart, as the indigenous peoples do from the wisdom of their ancestral practices. In this way, it proposes a dialectical understanding of the subject-object relationship, part of an epistemological decentralization, for "an emerging paradigm for us would produce an articulation of science with consciousness and of heart to rhythm with reason" (Fals Borda, 2015, p.336). This epistemological stance, which we can relate to the concept of "geopolitics of knowledge", allows us to think that methodological practices guided by a decolonizing practice must have at its core the recognition of the dimension of the "feeling-thinking being", which provides, in the words of Fals Borda, an "active and feeling-thinking" generation."
>
> (2021, p.180)

While filming and interviewing people in fieldwork, I had in mind the ideas of Ocaña and López's (2019) work "Decolonial doing: disobey the research methodology" about "reflexionar configurativo" (configurative reflecting), "conversar alterativo" (alterative conversing) and "contemplar comunal" (communal contemplation) as actions that configure a decolonial "hacer". Since this research for me would have as a study site very familiar places in which affective bonds could already exist – as in conversations with my family members – I found counterproductive a cold scientific methodology that intended neutrality but that could easily fall into a paradigm of subalternization of the "other". Thus, this research relied heavily not only on spoken and written information but on silences, contemplations, gestures and emotions. More than conducting a study with specific directions and experimenting with decolonial practices applied to the field of visual anthropology, my intention was in fact to create and nurture

affectionate relationships with fairly mutual exchanges between myself and my interlocutors. I did not intend at any point to look at them as objects of study, but rather as subjects situated in a certain space-time that contributed in various ways to a research concerned with critiquing the structures in which we live. Cho (2008) in her approach to studying "ghosts" that haunt the Korean diaspora claims that:

> "Thus, this thing that can be neither found nor controlled also reconfigures the way we think about knowledge and knowledge production, for it compels researchers or readers to open ourselves to a different set of possibilities and questions about what might seep through our psychic and epistemological cracks."
>
> (2008, p.194)

Documentary realism must be understood in a way that takes into account the set of individuals who process and manipulate the information given to them for the production of a film. In this way, it is understood that such a group of individuals cannot hold the "power to represent reality" in their hands, since they cannot claim to be neutral either. Cinema cannot claim to be objective, as art and as a method of scientific knowledge production. What John Grierson in Hardy (1971) would propose, then, would be that documentaries operate as "something close to "a creative treatment of actuality". It engages in a process of inclusion and exclusion of an (already limited) amount of information that the filmmaker and their team is able to absorb and synthesize. Both what is left out of the making of a documentary and what is selected ends up being a subjective interpretation by several minds working on this creative composition of facts interpreted by one or more subjectivities (Minh-Ha, 1990), also subject to the gaze of a public that will open paths to an infinity of possible interpretations. Documentary, therefore, would be a fertile soil for the creation of fables (and perhaps myths).

> In these constant attempts at enforcing anthropology as (a) discipline and at recentering dominant representation of culture (despite all the changes in methodologies), what seems to be oddly suppressed in the notion of reflexivity in filmmaking is its practice as processes to prevent meaning from ending with what is said and what is shown and-through inquiries into production relations-thereby to challenge representation itself even while emphasizing the reality of the experience of film as well as the important role that reality plays in the lives of the spectators. The production of one irreality upon the other and the play of non-sense (which is not mere meaninglessness) upon meaning may therefore help to relieve the basic referent of its occupation, for the present situation of critical inquiry seems much less one of attacking the illusion of reality as one of displacing and emptying out the establishment of totality."
>
> (Minh-Ha, 1990, p.94)

When it comes to films produced by/about diasporic narratives, the work of Marks (2000) proposes a new terminology for film production emerging from the borders: intercultural cinema. According to her, the term "intercultural" indicates a context that cannot be confined to a single culture. Instead, it evokes movements between cultures that are not intended to exercise dominance over one another, thus creating dialogue within the encounters of multiple cultures. It is also a cinema genre that is willing to acknowledge its limitations in regards to "scientific production" by embracing its subjectivity and opening paths for *othered* knowledges.

> "Intercultural cinema by definition operates at the intersections of two or more cultural regimes of knowledge. These films and videos must deal with the issue of where meaningful knowledge is located, in the awareness that it is between cultures and so can never be fully verified in the terms of one regime or the other. Yet the relationships between cultures are also mediated by power, so that the dominant regime – in the following examples, some configuration of the historical Euro-American hegemony - sets the terms of what counts as knowledge. Other knowledges cannot be expressed in its terms. They may evade expression because of censorship; because memory is inaccessible; or because to give expression to those memories is to invite madness. "
>
> (2000, p.24)

By inviting my interlocutors to "embrace a little bit of madness" in our conversations and in front of the camera, I proposed that we step away from existing Western media representations of Uchinanchu female bodies for a moment and reflect on creative possibilities for representations in an audiovisual format that appealed to them. In this way, my interlocutors were invited to spontaneously proclaim a free speech about themselves (their work, their experiences, their ideas or whatever else they wanted) in relation to the topic of the Okinawan diaspora. By sharing my experiences around the topic I also asked that we could have exchanges in spaces that are part of their lives, where they feel both welcomed and belonged to, so I could also understand their safe environments within the cities of São Paulo and Campo Grande. With some of my participants, I was invited to plunge into their worlds for a few moments. Furthermore, I gave them the freedom to act in any way they wished in front of my camera, trying to minimize interventions in their choices of "acting in front of the camera" while actively interacting with them as I wished to not be a mere "cold" observer of their lives. With an "active" camera, I aimed to abandon this place of observational cinema and appeal to an

approach in which possibilities of mutual exchange were opened. Thus, the conversations were made in order to create an environment of communal reflection and contemplation on knowledge, feelings, and practices of different natures.

4.4 *Colcha de retalho*s (patchwork)

The Brazilian Okinawan community has been living a historical moment of critical celebration of its ancient and contemporary cultural manifestations. Some aspects such as indigineity, feminism and political activism emerge as points of debate brought to the community by researchers and artists who have dedicated themselves to Okinawan studies from historically subaltern perspectives. The sharing of this knowledge has been of utmost importance for a critical awareness of the place the community occupies in Brazilian society. Furthermore, one can see the movement around a subjective and identity construction as the ethnic differences between the Japanese and Okinawan community are recognized. In conversations with Hiromi Toma and Lúcia Kakazu regarding artistic practices (or praxis), they demonstrated these concerns and reflections towards a meaning of Okinawan indigeneity, specially taking in consideration *Uchinanchu* philosophy and belief system in their creative processes. In Lucia Kakazu's practices regarding her work with dance and theater, she frequently points to the influence of the Brazilian Okinawan shaman Beatriz Nagahama and her ancestors in the spiritual direction of her "*hacer*". Over the course of her career development, she encountered professionals who would instigate her to look at "what she has inside her", to find the movements inherent in her body that were perhaps being neglected in Western dance and theater practices.

In one of our conversations, she described one of the moments when she realized that she was not exactly "Japanese" while watching the film "Seven Samurai" (1954) by Akira Kurosawa. In the scene she described, the peasants from a small village go to the big city to look for a *samurai* who would be willing to defend them. The film then shows the contrast between the "cosmopolitan" Japanese, "elegant, slender *samurais*" with the peasants who all looked a bit "too lost" in the big city, "showing a body that was not used to all that, body and gestures of farm workers" who resembled her own family. At this moment she began to notice some bodily differences between the Japanese descendants she knew and the Okinawan descendants,

assimilating the two groups to the characters in this film. Through practices with the traditional Okinawan dance (*Ryukyu Buyou*) and exchanges of experiences with people from the community, Lucia gradually became aware of the ethnic differences between Japanese and Okinawans, which brought her closer to her own family's culture. Besides, the movement of "rescuing her roots" described by her through research and art, would come to contemplate the identity building of her practice as an artist in São Paulo. Lastly, the contact with the Okinawan shamanic matrix brought Lucia closer to a traditional practice of counseling and spiritual direction from the kingdom of Ryukyu, where communities maintained bonds of trust and mutual aid with spiritual leaders.

In one of the conversations I had with Hiromi, in which we debated about epistemic violence, she claimed that she has been trying to find "an indigenous way of doing things", regarding her work as researcher, artist, and member of the Brazilian and international Okinawan community. “I want to do things the way our ancestors would do” she said, when she’s currently training more Brazilian Uchinanchu women to become *hajichas*. “I was afraid that my work would go down a path of ego, so I thought it is best to pass on the knowledge I have so that I am not the only one doing this work here.” Her reflexivity as an artist and researcher, allied to an appreciation of and connection with Utiná's spirituality, have been the basis for the ways in which she approaches a decolonial practice in the construction and transmission of her narratives, both within and outside the community.

> “When I started tattooing, I started to access oral histories as well. [...] When you go to oral history, you live with it. You live it together, not only what the person is telling you, but you live it together with him or her. [...] it is very different from reading a story, a story that often has no face, no name. It is very cold this way of accessing research, I think. And going to oral history, I think that was what led me to a place of not undermining the energy and going to a place that is not passive, of not reading actions as a consequence of other actions, but you are seeing the person there from her own actions, you know. Things that she did, she is talking about, or that her grandparents did and that they lived. It is much more alive, much more organic, and gives much more strength.”
>
> (personal communication, 2022)

At the end of this conversation, she proposed the urgency of acting also outside academic boundaries and reach people who have not yet been listened to, because "we are probably the last generation that will have the opportunity to hear the stories that the elders who lived through the

war, the post-war and immigration have to tell". Here Hiromi enunciates what Rincón (2016) theorizes about "bastard cultures" that are systematically excluded and have their place of enunciation denied due to their own marginalized condition, while non-bastards are allowed to "speak for the other" with "scientific rigor." According to Rincón (2016):

> "The communication of the bastardized experience and celebrity citizenships is therefore to reinvent the narratives for the subversion of the mainstream and to make room for voices, bodies, realities and people. Not only through multicultural content that includes while maintaining the hierarchical structure of coloniality, always privileging the same aesthetics and formats. In short, bastard communication is that which assumes its condition as a legitimate place of enunciation, creation and production, not with the claim to speak for the other, but in which the other speaks, hears, sees, and is seen."
>
> (2016, p.41)

The two practices analyzed in this session would describe some of the existing movements within the community to work with alternative narratives that have been systematically oppressed throughout the centennial of the diaspora in Brazil. It is interesting to note that in the two cases analyzed, the movements arise in individual spheres, as practices of subjective work, before being articulated into social movements. The community exchange takes place in contexts of exchange of learning and punctual projects, such as the cultural event "Shimanchu no Moashibi" in Campo Grande. The work of the individuals I met in this fieldwork would then assimilate like a patchwork quilt, in which each piece of fabric brings its own patterns to compose a community quilt. It is interesting to observe this movement in a context in which the diaspora continues to be seen as a homogeneous block, of homogeneous people in which even their bodies are non-identifiable in relation to their ethnic origin by the majority of the Brazilian population. I finish this chapter with the words of Rita Laura Segato (2012):

> "After all, what is a people? A people is the project of being a history. When history, collectively woven, like the stitches of a tapestry where threads draw figures, sometimes coming together and converging, sometimes going apart and going in opposite directions, is intercepted, interrupted by the force of an external intervention, this collective subject intends to resume the threads, make small knots, suture the memory, and continue. In this case, what we may call a devolution of history must occur, a restitution of the ability to weave its own historical path, resuming the plot of interrupted figures, weaving them into the present warp, projecting them toward the future."
>
> (2012, p.112)

FURTHER RESEARCH

At this point I would like to bring up Galloway's (2012) work “Does the whatever speak?” in relation to a conscious critique regarding the spaces of annunciation destined for subaltern populations in the digital age: social networks, also fertile ground for the development of digital activism. Amidst a naive euphoria in social networks in which the proliferation of the term "decolonial" reaches various audiences, whether or not supported by a decolonial praxis, we are perhaps going through a process of emptying of the term. In the case of the Okinawan community in Brazil and other countries in America, social networks are commonly used to disseminate information about the diaspora and to exchange knowledge and experiences, which has become a useful tool to bring together people who once could not connect so easily. Even if minorities manage to inhabit the digital space to make such exchanges, it is necessary to be aware that the structures of these networks still come from an elitized and biased model of information dissemination, and continue asking ourselves whether social media remains as a tool for such activism. *Hajichis* for example have been the target of cultural appropriation by several tattoo artists who claim it to be “tribal tattoo”, having it widely disseminated online with the help of algorithm-biased platforms like Instagram. Certainly the movement of Brazilian *uchinanchu* women has also benefited from the appearance of content about *hajichis* on social networks. However, even if it is tolerable that a western gaze about ancestral tattoos is perpetuated, it is also necessary that this place continue to be challenged so that hajichis do not fall, again, within a colonizing logic of exotization.

Generally, it is beneficial to reflect within the community on the spaces of annunciation and on the practices carried out in them, questioning if paths of dialogue are in fact being established and if there is a constructive exchange through these channels.

FINAL REMARKS

My intention with this research and this documentary was to work with *othered* narratives and practices regarding Okinawan immigration in Brazil. Through the plural perspectives of decolonial studies, my curiosity resonated in the process of conducting such research and artistic projects, seeking active listening and mutual exchange with my interlocutors. I would come to realize during the final elaboration of this work, that the conscious transformation triggered by decolonial work would be much more connected to the process, in the "how" one decides to do it, rather than in the final "product" one can aim for.

Nevertheless, the most gratifying aspect to notice at the end of this work is the *dance* that diverse and multiple knowledges can make when placed in spaces of equal respect, importance and contemplation. It's about recognizing that the colonial binarity in which "one is the negation of the other" can and must be debunked without any side effects more harmful than its very existence. It is about the recognition of positions of privilege and subalternization starting from a critical dialectic about the gaze that only *goza* (enjoys) at the expense of the pain of the other.

Finally, in the film "Maré" as a complement to this research, the black and white of the archival material from the Battle of Okinawa together with the photographs of Naomi's family, speak about this static and timeless place of the traumas intrinsic to the bodies of the Okinawan diaspora, which refuses to remain in the past. Throughout Lucia's dance practices, it is possible to *shake* these memories by means of art, which gives movement to such static images. From the critical reflection and communal contemplation proposed by Miwa, paths to emancipation from colonial traumas are opened: “it is why every decolonizing process is a self-decolonization" (Ocaña; Lopez & Conedo, 2018, p.182).

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