


# The impacts of racisms on the occupations of the Black population: reflections for occupational therapy and science<sup>1</sup>


Os impactos dos racismos nas ocupações da população negra: reflexões para a terapia e a ciência ocupacional

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## Abstract

In Brazil, the many forms of racisms are structural and structuring, since they are rooted deep within society, in interpersonal relationships, and in institutions, traversing significant occupations of subjects and collectives. This explains the disparities in various sectors of Brazilian society, notably in the employability of Black people, as well as in their forms of getting sick and dying. In understanding the role that racisms play in the occupations of Black people, this study proposes to systematize observations that allow us to understand the phenomenon of the production of injustices based on racialized relations and, eventually, suggest ways to confront this reality. Thus, we discuss how racisms were established in Brazil, gathering elements for the understanding of human occupation and its conditioning factors. We then reflect on the concepts of occupational justice and injustice, which bring light to the occupational processes experienced by Black people. Considering that, in occupational therapy and in Brazilian occupational science, studies relating racisms and occupation are still incipient, we point out some strategies to reorient occupational therapists, practices to make them proactive and transformative.

**Keywords:** Racisms; Occupation; Black Population; Occupational Therapy; Occupational Science.

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## Resumo

No Brasil, os racismos são estruturais e estruturantes, pois estão enraizados nos arcabouços das sociedades, nas relações interpessoais e nas instituições, atravessando as ocupações significativas dos sujeitos e coletivos. Isto explica as disparidades em diversos setores da sociedade brasileira, notadamente na empregabilidade das pessoas negras, bem como nos seus modos de adoecer e morrer. Entendendo o papel que os racismos desempenham nas ocupações das pessoas negras, este estudo propõe sistematizar observações que nos permitam compreender o fenômeno da produção de injustiças, com base em relações racializadas e, eventualmente, sugerir formas de enfrentamento dessa realidade. Desta forma, discutimos como os racismos foram instaurados no Brasil, reunindo elementos para a compreensão da ocupação humana e seus condicionantes. Em seguida, refletimos sobre os conceitos de justiça e injustiça ocupacional, que evidenciam os processos ocupacionais vivenciados pelas pessoas negras. Considerando que na terapia ocupacional e na ciência ocupacional brasileira ainda são incipientes os estudos que relacionam racismos e ocupação, apontamos algumas estratégias para reorientar as práticas profissionais de terapeutas ocupacionais, de modo a torná-las proativas e transformadoras.

**Palavras-chave:** Racismos; Ocupação; População Negra; Terapia ocupacional; Ciência Ocupacional.

## Introduction

In the officially period of slavery in Brazil, the Black population was racialized as inferior, animalistic, erotic, primitive, violent, exotic, and overly emotional, and for that Black people were subjected to slavery in all its forms of domination and dehumanization. Meanwhile, white people were racialized as universal, civilized, and morally superior, and thus began to classify and diminish those different from themselves (Fanon, 2008). Slavery in Brazil lasted for more than 300 years, and only on May 13, 1888, was the *Lei Áurea* (Law that abolished slavery) signed. It is worth noting that this abolition occurred due to the demands and global movements of resistance, organized by the Black population, and not only due to the petitions of the white abolitionist population, as historiography usually portrays (Jaccoud, 2008).

It is clear that slavery and ethnic labels have consolidated racism. Munanga (2004, p. 7-8; our translation) reflects that:

Racism would theoretically be an essentialist ideology that postulates the division of humanity into large groups, called contrasted races, that have common hereditary physical characteristics, with the latter being supports of psychological, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic characteristics and are situated on a scale of unequal values.

As is known, the Black Brazilian population is often dehumanized, due to the racisms present in society, and statistics indicate that this phenomenon is responsible for the large number of deaths they suffer. According to the records of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2019), in Brazil, in 2017, the homicide rate among the white population was 16.0, while among Black or mixed people, it was 43.4 per 100,000 inhabitants. This means that, proportionally, a Black or mixed person is 2.7 times more likely to be a victim of intentional homicide than a white person. Also according to the IBGE (2019), between the years 2012 and 2017 the rate remained stable for the white population. In contrast, during this same period, the rate increased dramatically for the Black

or mixed population, from 37.2 to 43.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, which “represents about 255,000 deaths by homicide recorded in the Mortality Information System, of the Ministry of Health, in six years” (IBGE, 2019, p. 9; our translation). For all age groups, the homicide rate of the Black or mixed population exceeded that of the white population. In addition, the rate of gender violence to which young white women, aged 15 to 29, are subjected to is 5.2, compared to 10.1 for young Black or mixed women.

Racisms are rooted in the structure of society, in interpersonal relationships and in institutions, thus crossing the significant occupations of individuals and collectives (Pereira, 2022). Meaningful occupations are purposeful actions motivated by interest and will. Thus, in the racialized and unjust society, the white population performs occupations that favor their health, well-being, and material progress, while Black people perform occupations harmful to their own health, often provoking historical traumas with dehumanization and suffering symbolic and real violence (Johnson; Lavalley, 2021; Pereira, 2022; Valer; Ortega, 2011).

Understanding that racisms impact the occupations of Black Brazilian people, we seek, in this study, to systematize observations that allow us to understand the phenomenon of the production of injustices, based on racialized relations, and, eventually, to suggest ways of coping with this reality.

In the first part of the article, we present how racisms were established in Brazil. Next, we show the main historical, social, economic, and political milestones relevant to combat racisms, in its plurality. In the third part, we expose the historical indices of inequality between whites and Black people, the struggles of the Black Movement against the invisibility and violation of human rights and the demands of the Black population in favor of racial equity. Next, we point out elements for the understanding of significant occupations, articulated by both occupational therapy and science. Thus, we include the concepts of occupational justice and injustice that evidence the occupations carried out by Black people. Finally, we point out some counter-hegemonic and anti-racist strategies

in order to reorient the practices of therapists and occupational scientists, as well as to give more proactivity and potential for transformation to their actions.

## **Eugenics theory and racial democracy: a brief historical-social overview on the characteristics of racisms in Brazil, starting from the nineteenth century**

In Brazil, after the abolition of slavery and the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, no public policies were created to repair the inequalities experienced by the Black population. Between the sixteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, racisms in Brazil were explicit and based on eugenic theories, influenced by European theories that, in the name of science, justified a hierarchy between races (Jaccoud, 2008). Scientific racisms were disseminated by public figures such as Count Arthur de Gobineau, doctors Nina Rodrigues and Renato Kehl, as well as writers Monteiro Lobato and Gilberto Freyre, among others (Jaccoud, 2008).

Studies show that Count Arthur de Gobineau came to Brazil in 1869 on a diplomatic mission and, upon learning about Brazilian society, concluded that the country was backward and needed to advance economically and politically, but, above all, it needed to whiten. Due to the reflections made by the Count and other eugenicist intellectuals, whitening policies were adopted in Brazil and, thus, European immigrants were invited to live in the country, aiming at its whitening (Jaccoud, 2008). Additionally, after the abolition of slavery, bills were created in order to prevent Asian and African immigration to Brazil (Jaccoud, 2008).

**Brazilian racism**, a concept created by Lélia Gonzalez, reflects on the Black person the desire to whiten. Eugenics theories spread the idea that the Western white standard was adequate and superior, so everything that was different from this model was inferior. Thus, the project of whitening Brazil leads the Black people to deny themselves, their origins, and their culture (Gonzalez, 1983). From 1930, the system of ideas entitled **racial democracy** began in the country, which meant, however, a concrete

reconfiguration of the ideas defended by the theories of whitening (Jaccoud, 2008).

The depoliticization of race relations was articulated on several fronts. For example, Gilberto Freyre, when launching the book “*Casa-Grande & Senzala*,” in 1930, conceived racial democracy based on the discourse that, in Brazil, there was no racism, because the relationship between the white slave owners and the enslaved Black population was harmonious. These ideas denied that miscegenation in the country resulted mainly from the rape of Black and Indigenous women and suggested that the phenomenon occurred in response to consensual relationships (Freyre, 2003; Gonzalez, 1983).

Racial democracy and racism gave rise to what Gonzalez (1983, p. 234; our translation) calls **Brazilian cultural neurosis**: “we know that the neurotic creates ways of concealing the symptom because it brings him certain benefits. This frees him from the anguish of facing repression.” The love for the *senzala*, the slave quarters, is one of the examples of neurosis, which places the Black woman and man as objects of satisfaction of the sexual desires of the white man and woman, denying their human identities in the face of the status of hyper-sexualized objects.

## Racisms: the many faces of racisms in Brazil

According to Grada Kilomba (2019), for many years studies on racism were considered invalid and irrelevant to society, as much as the knowledge of the Black population was invisible, and the wounds and traumas resulting from racism were neglected. The author states that, from a certain moment, studies on the subject placed the privileges of the white population at risk and showed that:

At that moment, we and our reality with racism become visible, spoken and even written, not because we might be in danger or at risk, or in need guardianship, but rather because such an uncomfortable reality disturbs **white** common immunity. (Kilomba, 2019, p. 40)

The intellectual Emanuel Lima (2019) created the concept of **racisms**, as plural, because they can manifest themselves in different ways, for example, through phenotype, humor, culture, religion, science, and the relationship with the environment. It is worth mentioning that racists practices are reproduced in institutions, in interpersonal relationships, as well as in the structure of society and in everyday life. In this direction, Silvio Almeida (2019) presents three conceptions of racism: (1) individualistic, (2) institutional, and (3) structural. In the first conception, racism, one of individual character, is related to the subjectivity and behavior of a person or a small group; “from this angle, there would be no racist societies or institutions, but racist individuals, who act alone or in groups” (Almeida, 2019, p. 25). The author argues that this conception is imprecise since racist practices are not perpetrated by one person alone, but this phenomenon is present within the structures of societies. The second conception is related to the racism present in public and private institutions, as well as to organizations that create unequal conditions of access to services based on the phenotype. In this regard, the author states that:

Racial inequality is a characteristic of society, not only due to the isolated action of racist groups or individuals but fundamentally because institutions are hegemonized by certain racial groups that use institutional mechanisms to impose their political and economic interests. (Almeida, 2019, p. 27; our translation)

Thus, the white population creates social patterns that award privileges to whites and excludes people of color. Finally, the third conception understands that racism is present in the social, political, and economic structures of society since it prevents the Black population from accessing the dominant power structures. For Almeida (2019, p. 32; our translation), “in a society in which racism is present in everyday life, institutions that do not actively treat racial inequality as a problem will easily reproduce racist practices already understood as ‘normal’ throughout society.”

In addition to the conceptions of racism already presented, the author Grada Kilomba (2019) adds the perspective of everyday racism, defined as:

Everyday racism refers to all vocabulary, discourses, images, gestures, actions and gazes that place the Black subject and People of Color not only as 'Other' - the difference against which the **white** subject is measured - but also as Otherness, that is, as the personification of the aspects the **white** society has repressed. (...) one is used as a screen for projections of what **white** society has made taboo. We become a storehouse for **white** fears and fantasies of the realm of aggression or sexuality. (Kilomba, 2019, p. 44)

In addition to the definitions presented above, Gonzalez (1983) suggests that racism can be presented in two ways: open and disguised racism. Open racism is usually found in Anglo-Saxon countries and South Africa, its clear example being the *apartheid*, segregation based on skin color. This segregation demanded that the Black population of these countries, suffering the effects of this explicit racism, to unite and resist against the oppressive model while facing cruel responses from the systems of government.

Disguised racisms, also called denial, is found in Latin America. In Brazil, racisms are anchored in the theories of whitening, miscegenation, and racial democracy, which delayed for many years the implementation of affirmative policies and multiculturalism in the educational system, in addition to provoking divisions and doubts within the Black Movement itself due to the difficulty of identifying and understanding the signs of the phenomenon (Gonzalez, 1983; Munanga, 2004).

Racisms, as we have already mentioned, are related to the concentration of power, in which one group holds it and, therefore, oppresses and diminished the others. According to Kilomba (2019), only white people can reproduce racism, because this is the population that holds political, economic, historical, and social resources, which allow them to concentrate power. We emphasize that, although Black people reproduce racist actions in their daily lives, there are no reverse racisms, that is,

a historically oppressed and marginalized group cannot reproduce racist practices with a group that has always been privileged in society. Reverse racisms are, therefore, one of the strategies created by the white population to delegitimize the struggle of the Black population and to maintain its position of privilege (Almeida, 2019; Kilomba, 2019).

Bento (2002) affirms that there is a pact between white people, a narcissistic pact, based on the omission and silencing of inequalities, in order to preserve the hierarchies of power and not assume the responsibilities inherent in the inequity produced. Moreover, white people create a support network as they protect their interests and create obstacles to prevent Black people's rise to spaces of power. Thus, it is of paramount importance that white people engage in anti-racist struggles and use their privileges to denounce and combat the racisms present in societies.

## Historical indices of inequality, invisibility, and violation of human rights: the struggles of the Black Movement for the promotion of racial equity

Over the years, with the re-democratization of the country in the Vargas era, the difficulty of identifying systemic racisms persisted, because "the theme of inequality is identified almost exclusively with that of income distribution" (Jaccoud, 2008, p. 52; our translation). Black people worked in unsanitary conditions and had the highest illiteracy rates because they were denied any access to education and quality jobs.

The creation of the 1988 Constitution fostered a discussion on social inequalities, the fight against poverty and access to human rights (Brasil, 1988). Even in this period, the image of the Black person was related to poverty: "Poverty operates on the naturalization of racism, exerting an important influence on the situation of Black people in Brazil" (Jaccoud, 2008, p. 56; our translation). With the strengthening of the Black Movement in the country, the guidelines for confronting poverty, better conditions of education, work,

citizenship, leisure, and health were reiterated. Thus, the struggles to make the State recognize the existing racial inequality and then create policies to combat racisms (Lima, 2019; Munanga, 2004). The growing mobilization of groups of the Black Movement resulted in events such as the “Zumbi dos Palmares March against Racism, for Citizenship and Life,” held in Brasília, on November 20, 1995, which brought together about 30,000 people. The document written by the March was delivered to Fernando Henrique Cardoso, president of the country at the time, claiming the following rights:

Incorporate the data of color in various information systems; establish tax incentives for companies that adopt programs to promote racial equality; establish, within the scope of the Ministry of Labor, the Permanent Chamber for the Promotion of Equality, which should investigate and propose policies to promote equality at work; regulate the article of the Federal Constitution that provides for the protection of women labor market, through specific incentives, under the terms of the law; implement the Convention on Eliminating Racial Discrimination in Education; grant paid scholarships to low-income Black adolescents for access to and completion of Primary and Secondary Education; develop affirmative actions for the access of Black people to vocational courses, university, and cutting-edge technology areas; ensure the proportional representation of racial ethnic groups in communication campaigns of the government and entities that maintain economic and political relations with it. (Moehlecke, 2002, p. 205-206; our translation)

Despite the demands of the Black Movement and the progress in the creation of public and social policies aimed at this public, social disparities resulting from racisms have yet to be reduced. Thus, racism continues to be perpetrated in Brazilian society, while the strategies for oppression continue to be reconfigured (Gonzalez, 1983; Kilomba, 2019; Munanga, 2004). Almeida (2019, p. 47; our translation) effectively summarizes the process:

The issue with considering racism as the work of white supremacy occurs when considering this term outside of a historical context. There is no white essence imprinted in the souls of light-skinned individuals that would lead them to engineer systems of racial domination. Thinking in this simplistic and essentialist way about race can lead us to a series of misconceptions that only makes it even more difficult to deconstruct racism. To say that racism is the result of an ahistorical and phantasmagorical white supremacy reduces the fight against racism to rhetorical elements, concealing its economic and political determinations.

Due to the struggles of the Black population, in 1989 the anti-racism law (*Lei do Crime Racial* - Law No. 7.716) was enacted in the country, which punishes crimes resulting from discrimination or prejudice of race, color, ethnicity, religion, or national origin (Brasil, 1989). Despite racisms being considered a crime, racist practices remain present in Brazilian society (Pereira et al., 2021).

## Reflections on occupational justice and injustice from a critical perspective

To discuss occupational justice, we begin with the concept of justice. Next, we discuss how the concept of occupational justice was created, based on a more conservative and individualizing perspective, until we reach the most recent discussions, which adopt a critical and emancipatory social perspective.

The idea of justice refers to what is just. In general terms, justice is understood as a way of judging what is right and wrong. It is worth mentioning that ideas about justice and injustice are defined according to the morals, the ethical-ideological nature, the understandings of the world, and the beliefs of a given group. Therefore, its definitions are multiple:

In other words, there is not a single idea of justice. Modern political philosophy in its controversies has raised a variety of theories of justice, from individual liberalism, social liberalism

to communitarian theories, legal pluralism, among others. Each one is based on a belief system of fairness, power and freedom, equality, inequality, community, and individual. (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020, p. 5)

Moreover, conceptions of justice change over time. During the period of Brazilian colonization, for example, the legal structure only considered white men as citizens, since the system supported slavery and the expropriation of Indigenous and quilombola lands. It was only with the struggles of social movements that this notion of justice has been rectified (Jaccoud, 2008; Munanga, 2004).

In the scope of occupational science, a discipline of studies created in the 1990s to deepen the understanding of the role of human occupation, from the articulation between the concepts of justice and human occupation, the authors Wilcock and Townsend proposed the concept of occupational justice (Stadnyk; Townsend; Wilcock, 2009). Occupational scientists argue that humans are occupational beings, so everyone should have equitable opportunities and resources for appropriate participation in their different contexts, which would result in the creation of a just society. Occupational justice, therefore, prioritizes “meaningful and purposeful occupations (tasks and activities) people want to do, need to do, and can do considering their personal and situational circumstances” (Stadnyk; Townsend; Wilcock, 2009, p. 331). These significant occupations are influenced by culture, religion, and physical and social conditioning. Elements that allow the demands of individuals to be met and enable their active participation within the community (Valer; Ortega, 2011).

In the Global South there are, however, authors who reflect on the concept of occupational justice from a critical and pluralistic perspective, opposing the Eurocentric, hegemonic, and universalist vision defended by the Global North (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020). The conservative way of understanding occupational justice considers only the historical, political, and social movements of the countries located in

the Global North, therefore, the specific demands of the countries of the Global South, such as power struggles, racisms, and colonialism, as well as issues of gender, culture, and social class are excluded and neglected. We emphasize that the Global South to which Boaventura de Souza Santos refers is the geopolitical South, formed by the countries that, up until now, have dealt with the brutal consequences of colonization (Santos; Meneses, 2017). In this sense, the Global North is formed by the Anglo-Saxon and European countries, who have, since colonialism, undermined colonized peoples and exerted political, economic, cultural, and social influence in the world (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020; Santos; Meneses, 2017). Thus, in power structures, the knowledge produced by the Global North is considered superior and recognized worldwide, to the detriment of those produced in the Global South, which are silenced and made invisible (Santos; Meneses, 2017).

The Global South includes Black, Indigenous, Quilombola, Latino, immigrants, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, authors argue that professionals of occupational therapy and science, when working with Latin American populations, should adopt the perspectives of the Global South and seek to disentangle themselves from theoretical-methodological references imported from the Global North (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020). Thus, to think about occupational justice from the perspectives of the Global South, it is necessary for therapists and occupational scientists to develop practices with populations affected by occupational injustices, in order to favor social changes. In addition, broader perspectives of occupational roles should be included in the interventions, considering social markers, culture, spirituality, and socioeconomic and political aspects.

Emery-Whittington (2021) conducted a study on an Indigenous tribe in New Zealand to investigate the articulation between the impacts of colonization and occupational justice. According to the author, it is necessary to decolonize the concept of occupational justice and question how and why social, economic, political, and health inequalities are constituted and

2 The acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other gender identities that do not fit the cis-heteronormative pattern.

reproduced. It has been proposed that occupational justice is marked by four rights that allow the realization of significant occupations, these are: (1) being able to experience meaningful and enriching occupations; (2) perform occupations for health and inclusion purposes; (3) exercise individual or social autonomy by choosing occupations; and (4) benefit from privileges for a diversified participation in occupations (Durocher; Gibson; Rappolt, 2014). Nevertheless, while the concept of occupational justice is an advance, the discussions are still being held by, mostly, white authors of European origin and privileged (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020; Hammel, 2020). Thus, Pereira (2022) states that, in the case of the Black Brazilian population, it is necessary to expand the principles of occupational justice, since it deals with specific issues. Thus, in an Afro-referenced and diasporic perspective, the author proposes three additional rights: (5) promotion of occupations that provide a sense of collectivity and cooperative activities; (6) the right of access to and preservation of ancestral activities; and (7) the inseparability between occupational life and territory (Pereira, 2022). Therefore, the occupations carried out by Black people must overcome the individualizing logic, giving space to collective occupations, which must be emphasized. Likewise, Afro-Brazilian ancestry and knowledge must be rescued and valued (Pereira, 2022).

In an unjust society, there are people who perform occupations that favor their well-being, while others perform occupations that are harmful to their own health or that do not meet the needs of those who perform them. Thus, occupational injustice is conceptualized as “any limitation of the person’s meaningful and dignified participation: be it restricting, prohibiting, segregating” (Valer; Ortega, 2011, p. 9; our translation). In the literature, five forms of occupational injustice have been emphasized: (1) occupational deprivation; (2) occupational imbalance; (3) occupational alienation; (4) occupational marginalization; and (5) occupational *apartheid* (Durocher; Gibson; Rappolt, 2014; Kronenberg; Pollard, 2005; Valer; Ortega, 2011).

The five forms of occupational injustice are criticized by Hammell (2020) because, for her,

this can segregate and/or leave out other oppressions that happen in society. The author emphasizes that the focus should be on the negative impacts that injustices have on ways of life. For Hammell, the only category well delimited in the concept of occupational injustice is occupational apartheid, because it articulates the processes of ethnic-racial exclusion rooted in societies. Occupational apartheid is manifested when occupations are offered to some people at the expense of others due to ethnicity, social class, age, disability, sexuality, religion, culture, gender, among other aspects. Commonly, it happens at the institutional, economic, social, cultural, and political level (Durocher; Gibson; Rappolt, 2014; Kronenberg; Pollard, 2005).

Apartheid was a policy of racial segregation, implemented in South Africa in the seventeenth century and in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century. In both countries, this segregation was instituted by a minority group of white people (Casseres, 2020), determining that white and Black people should not attend the same places: separating clubs, neighborhoods, schools, bus seats, and drinking fountains, for example, as well as prohibiting interracial marriage. This racial separatism lasted for many years, and due to the struggle of the Black Movements and with the international support against *apartheid*, racial segregation imposed by law ceased to exist in South Africa and in the United States (Casseres, 2020). In Brazil, while apartheid was never instituted by law, intellectuals emphasize that both eugenics theories and racial democracy fostered racial segregation within the daily life of society (Ambrosio; Pereira; Coelho; Magalhães, 2022; Casseres, 2020). Thus, it can be said that, due to the configurations of racism in Brazil, a **Brazilian apartheid** was instituted, in analogy to Brazilian racism, because it is always veiled and/or discredited, even though it continues to be reproduced within society (Gonzalez, 1983).

The literature reveals that the unequal distribution of resources limits people’s choice of occupations and prevents people from exploring their individual and collective potential. In this study, we understand that the impacts of colonization and racisms assume central stage in the face of the



disparities observed between non-white populations and the general population, which led us to systematize observations that allow us to understand the phenomenon of the production of injustices based on racialized relations and, eventually, to suggest ways of coping with this reality.

## **Racisms and occupational injustice: the impact of racisms on significant occupations**

Occupational therapists and scientists from several countries have discussed the impacts of racisms on the occupations of the Black population (Ambrosio et al., 2021; Beagan; Etowa, 2009; Faria; Leite Junior; Costa, 2018; Johnson; Lavalley, 2021; Martins, 2021; Pereira et al., 2021; Pereira, 2022; Pereira; Allegretti; Magalhães, 2022; Pereira; Magalhães, 2022). As we have mentioned, racisms are not a problem at the individual level, but a system rooted in societies, which is present in its structures, in public and private institutions, in social relations, and in significant occupations. In the academic production of both occupational therapy and occupational science, human occupation is understood as synonymous with well-being, health, inclusion, independence, and justice, even though some authors denounce excessive optimism with occupational processes, which obviously can also be harmful to human beings (Johnson; Lavalley, 2021). However, few studies have associated daily occupations to injustices and inequalities. In a racialized society, occupation can promote both justice and occupational injustice (Pereira, 2022). Inefficient public policies; lack of access and permanence in public and private environments; denial of access to health, education, and social assistance services; precarious living conditions; violation of rights; dispute over housing; and denial of citizenship place the non-white population in a state of vulnerability. This influences how, where, and when Black people can occupy their time (Johnson; Lavalley, 2021). Thus, in racialized and capitalist society, whose power is concentrated in the hands of white supremacy, human occupations are crossed by racisms, gender, sexism, and capitalism.

As we have already mentioned, several internal and external factors influence the realization and social availability of occupations. Thus, individualizing mentality, which holds subjects accountable for the situations of vulnerability they are experiencing, is unfair, imprecise, and perpetuates disparities. This view is based on the idea of meritocracy, in which it is assumed that the subject should be rewarded only for their own physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities, without considering the socioeconomic conditions, as well as the weight of structural racisms (Sterman; Njelesani, 2021).

Farias, Leite Junior, and Costa (2018) show that racism harms the social participation of Black people, because it restricts the access and permanence of this public to certain services and social spaces. In Canada, Beagan and Etowa (2009) studied the impact of racism on the occupations of African Canadian women. To do this, they used the Daily Life Experiences Scale to investigate how often these women suffer racism. The study concludes that being observed, followed, and disrespected by strangers are everyday situations for this population. For the participants, racist practices have an impact on all areas of life. Moreover, women reported suffering racism in the workplace, and the women who did not report these negative experiences, justified that at the time they were unemployed, were self-employed, or had co-workers who were Black women. This makes it evident that, even at work, which is often already precarious, they are exposed to racism, since many have their intellectual capacity diminished, being considered incapable of performing complex activities and, consequently, prevented from assuming positions of high social prestige (Beagan; Etowa, 2009). The authors argue that, although the experiences of racism are subjective, this phenomenon crosses the lives of Black people and compromises their daily activities, because they are prevented from performing their occupations, going places they want to go, and even having moments of leisure, in fear of validating racist stereotypes.

Johnson and Lavalley (2021) relate the impact of racism on the lives of enslaved people in the United States and the restrictions created by

occupational *apartheid*. From the discussions fostered by the authors, it is possible to project and reflect the impacts of racism on the occupations of Black Brazilian people, because, within a slave society, the enslaved people have no right to come and go, they are prevented from studying, voting, and occupying relevant positions in society, for example (Pereira, 2022). The reality, however, shows that even after the abolition of slavery, former enslaved Black people and their families continued to be victims of racism and their occupations continued to be restricted, both in North America and the Southern Hemisphere (Johnson; Lavalley, 2021).

We know that in occupational therapy and science there are still incipient studies that relate racisms and occupation. However, a recent study by Sofia Martins (2021, p. 286; our translation) reflects on the impact of racism on the maternal occupations of Black Brazilian women:

To us, occupational therapists, it is worth problematizing how something as invisible as racism can be a destructive device by attaching itself to the bodies, to people's occupations, generating behaviors, inhibiting people's feelings, and bringing about so many processes of deprivation. Racism is dehumanizing because it penetrates the dimensions of being, doing, becoming, belonging, and, above all, feeling.

Thus, despite the historical oppressions and violation of rights to which the Black population is constantly exposed, occupations can also promote justice since the engagement of Black people in significant occupations is a political, ethical, and resistance act: "Occupation continues to be a vehicle emerging through and carrying racist culture, policy, habits, and ideas. (...) Yet, occupational scholars cannot neglect that occupation simultaneously offers opportunity to rebel against this oppression" (Johnson; Lavalley, 2021, p. 7).

## Final considerations

It is known that, in Brazil, racisms are camouflaged, discredited, and it changes according to time and space, making it difficult to identify the

phenomenon. Despite the struggles of the Black Movement toward the promotion of racial equity and the creation of public policies, the indices of social and economic inequalities remain either unchanged or worse, such as in the case of incarceration and morbidity and mortality of the Black population (IBGE, 2019). In this way, racisms continue to be perpetrated within society and in the gears of the racist and capitalist society, Black people continue to occupy positions of little social prestige, as well as remain under numerous risks. In understanding racisms as producers of injustice and recognizing the impacts that the phenomenon causes in the occupations of Black Brazilian people, Pereira (2022) ponders that, in the case of occupational therapy, awareness of the moral and ethical responsibilities of professionals in relation to the production of inequalities is urgent. The author warns that the process will be time-consuming and challenging, but that it may reorient the practices of occupational therapists. Anti-racist and counter-hegemonic practices are therefore urgent:

The anti-racist intervention seeks to value ethnic-racial diversity; the identity of Black and Indigenous people; to value, ensure, and recover traditions, cultural practices, and religious practices; to guarantee security; to nourish memory and recovery within the needs and cultures of all; to ensure housing, education, health, work and a decent income for all people, with the security of their traditional practices. (Ambrosio et al., 2021, p. 11; our translation)

Farias, Leite Junior, and Costa (2018) highlight awareness and empowerment as strategies for an anti-racist practice. Paulo Freire (1979) maintains that every human being is capable of having a critical look on the world around him. Thus, awareness enables empowerment, for people to question the *status quo* and understand that the unfavorable situations they live in are not only a reflection of their actions, but a product of social determinants that perpetuate disparities. It is up to occupational therapy professionals to reflect on their practices and prioritize the promotion of spaces for listening and welcoming the ethnic-racial

demands listed by Black people (Farias; Leite Junior; Costa, 2018; Pereira et al., 2021). One should also think about whether the theoretical and methodological framework that guides these practices is hegemonic or counter-hegemonic (Ambrosio et al., 2021; Martins, 2021), which implies identifying whether the processes favor the individual to be conscious, political, and agents of change or if they perpetuate/naturalize exclusion and alienation (Farias; Leite Junior; Costa, 2018). Occupational therapists must recognize the specific demands that the Black population faces (Beagan; Etowa, 2009), and it is up to the professionals to decolonize the **being** and **doing** of individuals and collectives. This entails developing practices, with traditional peoples and communities, considering their ways of life, beliefs, spirituality, culture, and their relationships with the elements of nature (Emery-Whittington, 2021; Pereira, 2022). Additionally, it is up to professionals to reflect on their conduct outside the services in which they operate, as well as to understand their role as political citizens (Pereira, 2022). We reiterate that this is not an isolated struggle, exclusive to people of color; for a radical transformation of society, all citizens, white and non-white, must be committed to social (Bento, 2002) and occupational justice, as well as to the production of equity (Sterman; Njelesani, 2021). Practitioners should critically examine and problematize pedagogical curricula and foster a critical dialogue with their students so that the students question, challenge, and change the *status quo* (Sterman; Njelesani, 2021). In this way, considering the analysis of occupational injustices, critical dialogue and counter-hegemonic knowledge should be prioritized (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020).

In this article, we argue that occupational therapists need to create multiple coping strategies against racisms. We reiterate that the approaches to this cannot be standardized; they need to consider the cultural, social, political, and economic conditioning, respecting the subjectivity of the individuals and collectives (Sterman; Njelesani, 2021).

We recognized that we could not address the conditions in which several markers simultaneously affect a population, as in the case of Black people

who have a disability, or who differ from the sexual orientation sanctioned by their groups. In these cases, the impact of racisms can be even more deleterious since each marker operates exponentially when combined with the elements already experienced by the populations.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to build a professional identity from the epistemological frameworks proposed by Latin American critical occupational therapy, which defends collectivity and critical dialogue, as well as it is based on an anticolonial, ethical, anti-heterocispatriarchal, and anti-capitalist logic (Guajardo Córdoba, 2020).

Furthermore, in Brazil, occupational therapists need to know the historical-social trajectory that engendered the ways in which racisms were instituted in Brazil, so that this allows them to understand the legacy of racisms that continues to operate the exclusions of expressive portions of the population even today, in order to favor practices that benefit the consciousness and identity of racialized populations.

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