


# Nutricide and food racism in the neoliberal crisis and social and health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil


## Nutricídio e racismo alimentar na crise neoliberal e socio sanitária da pandemia de covid-19 no Brasil

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### Abstract

This essay aims to comprehend the intersections between racism, capitalism, and the social and health crisis of hunger and food insecurity that plagues Brazil in the context after the COVID-19 pandemic. For this, it uses the concepts of nutricide and food racism, bringing them closer to the concepts of necropolitics and the genocide of the Black population in an understanding that the State fails to provide food security conditions to marginalized populations, especially peripheral ones in large municipalities, mostly Black people, under a logic of letting die and generating death of these segments by excluding public policies and/or potentially harmful policies to human nutrition. The approximation between public health, hunger, and racism may subsidize the elaboration of health, food, and social assistance policies, creating, at the same time, a territory of study and research in the field of food, nutrition, and health.

**Keywords:** Food; Racism; Health; Nutricide; COVID-19.

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## Resumo

Este artigo é um ensaio que visa compreender as intersecções entre racismo, capitalismo e a crise social/sanitária da fome e insegurança alimentar que assola o Brasil no contexto posterior à pandemia de covid-19. Para tal, são utilizados os conceitos de nutricídio e racismo alimentar, aproximando-os das concepções de necropolítica e genocídio da população negra, em um entendimento que o Estado deixa de dar condições de segurança alimentar às populações marginalizadas. Isso ocorre, especialmente, nas regiões periféricas das grandes cidades, cujas populações, em sua maioria, são negras, e se tornam vítimas de uma lógica de “deixar morrer” e gerar morte desses segmentos com políticas públicas excludentes e/ou potencialmente danosas à alimentação e à nutrição humanas. A aproximação entre saúde coletiva, fome e racismo é potencialmente geradora de subsídios para a elaboração de políticas de saúde, alimentação e assistência social, sendo, ao mesmo tempo, produtora de um território de estudos e pesquisas no campo da alimentação, nutrição e saúde.

**Palavras-chave:** Alimentação; Racismo; Saúde; Nutricídio; Covid-19.

## Introduction

This essay intends to reflect on the social production of hunger and food insecurity based on the problematic of socioracial inequities in health regarding the hidden facet of food and nutrition, which is sometimes neglected in its symbolic, subjective, and social lines and often remain uncaptured by the naked eyes of the biomedical rationality that hegemonically study this phenomenon.

The concept of food insecurity currently reflects a multidimensional phenomenon that ranges from cyclical to structural problems, especially socioeconomic ones that impose themselves when individuals and/or families permanently or temporarily lack access to healthy, safe, and sufficient food to meet their dietary needs and preferences (FAO et al., 2023).

Studies on nutrition, diet, and food security indicate that demographic, social, and economic differences directly influence health-disease manifestations (especially when linked to low income, Black/mixed race/color, and the female gender) and indicate a higher prevalence of food insecurity (Silva et al., 2022). This situation sometimes manifest itself as malnutrition and other problems resulting from nutritional deficiencies, sometimes as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic non-communicable diseases stemming from what is recognized as nutrition transition (Mondini; Gimeno, 2011).

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2020), Brazil has the largest African descendant population outside Africa in the world as 46.8% of its inhabitants self-report as Mixed and 9.4% as Black, totaling 56.2% of its population. Regarding racism and food, it is appropriate to introduce a key concept called “nutricide.” Coined by Llaila O. Afrika (2013), it discusses the genocide provoked against the Black population by distancing them from the production and consumption of healthy foods. This stems from food racism, in which precarious food, hunger, and deprivation of the right to choose what to eat directly and more strongly affect the Black, poor, and peripheral population.

The hunger of the Black subject remains a challenge to as public health scarcely perceives

it as an element that deserves specific interventions without an objective anatomopathological basis that justifies a social, economic, and historical issue so the health system, operating under the biomedical rationality of intervention, refuse to deem it a problem. The Brazilian scientific basis still contains only a few empirical studies that investigate the magnitude and influence of racial inequalities in health.

It is essential to discuss racism in public health. Although the National Policy for the Integral Health of the Black Population (Brasil, 2009) considerably advanced the rights of Black and Mixed-race people – who endure historical oppression and lie in the cradle of social vulnerability—research that articulate race and food have observed the small capillarity of the aforementioned National Policy within the National Food and Nutrition Policy and point out racial inequities in the care of the nutritional status of the Brazilian population (Canuto; Fanton; Lira, 2019; Jesus, 2021).

This essay will argue that racism configures a social construction and a debate that is structurally maintained by a system of oppression and denial of rights (Ribeiro, 2019), directly interfering with the problem-solving capacity of social and health public policies as a racist ideology lies at the foundation of the fiction of the hierarchy of races (Almeida, 2019) that shapes Brazilian society according to a White, colonial, neoliberal, and heteropatriarchal capitalist power matrix (Gonzalez, 1987). Moreover, the analysis of the condition of the poor and Black subject (marked by power, race, and class relations) favors the understanding of the specific conditions that stem from them (Silva et al., 2022), including food insecurity.

Establishing the relation between the right to food and health from a socioracial point of view gives rise to the question: who are we discussing? Who are the subjects on the margins of sociability and at the bottom of the capitalist-neoliberal power matrix, who, since the African diasporas, have been and still are denied basic rights for a life with dignity? Can the subordinate, then, eat? We discuss the subalternized Black subjects and the political project for their extermination in various ways, one of these facets being nutricide and food racism.

As a complicating factor in this situation, the COVID-19 pandemic brings to light a new

dilemma linked to the old problem of structural racism. The disease has been worse and more lethal to those who have been historically scarred by racism. In a publication by the *Grupo de Trabalho Racismo e Saúde* (Working Group on Racism and Health) of the *Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva* (ABRASCO – Brazilian Association of Collective Health) based on the perspective that the World Health Organization conceives racism as a social determinant of the process of illness and death, the authors consider that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in a society structured by racism penalize vulnerable groups (especially Black people) and is directly related to the health, social, political, economic, moral polycrisis; crisis in globalization; migratory flows; etc.

Thus, this context shows that food insecurity carries political, cultural, and legal aspects and configures a case of collective health, despite many sectors reducing it to a technical and/or social problem. The approximation between collective health, food insecurity, hunger, and racism gives rise to an urgent need to establish an interdisciplinary field of knowledge and practices given that a discussion such as the one in this essay may subsidize the elaboration of public policies, teaching, research, and extension in food, nutrition, and collective health.

As a result of the context above, the basic argument of this essay is based on a crucial question: how can the intersections between racism and capitalism contribute to the understanding of hunger and food insecurity in Brazil amidst the socio-health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Based on this question, this essay aims to expand the understanding of the crisis of food insecurity and hunger that plagues Brazil, locating it in the racist-capitalist-neoliberal structure as a country with slave and colonialist roots, the pillars of which are indispensable to think about the connection between hunger, precariousness of life, health, and society.

## **The social construction of hunger and its interfaces with food, food (in)security, and nutrition**

According to Freitas (2003), the word of hunger in Portuguese (*fome*) comes from the Latin *fame*, which

stems from *famulus*, meaning slaves or servants. *Famulus* would later have the same meaning as “family” to distinguish it from the Semitic term *gen* (“tribe”). For the author, hunger is linked to the ideas of servitude, slavery, and poverty since its semantic origin. Thus, such a designation would have a social connotation that evince scarcity, subservience, and withdrawal of rights at its core.

The social dimension of hunger is so profound that a hungry person, even without showing physical symptoms of hunger, continues to think and maintain a relationship with food as a hungry person. Freitas (2003) problematizes that the construction of the concept gradually deemed hunger as a social problem. According to the author, from the 18th century onward, Malthusian thinking founded a naturalistic understanding of hunger in which the growth of the population would greatly exceed the capacity of the soil to produce food, thus causing a scenario of scarcity and famine that would be diachronically inevitable.

Freitas (2003) also points to the studies of physician and geographer Josué de Castro (2001), who, in the middle of the previous century, produced a vast bibliography to unveil or show that this problem also stems from the economic and social development model of a nation. Thus, he coined terms such as “acute hunger,” and “chronic hunger,” “epidemic hunger,” and “endemic hunger” (*idem*).

Josué de Castro (2001), a pioneer, announced that poor diet results from an unequal distribution of income between the Brazilian population and those from other countries. He also stated that the social production of hunger exceeds the number of ingested daily proteins and calories, stressing the phenomenon of “hidden hunger,” which occurs in the lack of micronutrients (such as iron and vitamin A) and establishes a totalizing view of the phenomenon of hunger, incorporating the socio-nutritional component as indicators of the quality of food and nutrition of the Brazilian people.

Furthermore, Castro’s (2001) anthropological works on hunger in Bahia use the concept of chronic hunger as a way to describe the social inequality due to capitalism. Also inspired by Castro (2001), Freitas highlights the concept of “hidden hunger,” a subclinical moment of malnutrition yet invisible

as a disease per se but which would show signs of hunger in people. This common and little noticed issue would constitute another nefarious form of the impact of capitalism on the poorest populations.

The concept of food insecurity seems to emerge to objectify the condition of hunger by health and public policy indicators, trying to consider the social conditioning factors of malnourishment and malnutrition. The 1974 Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition deems food security as the creation of a global system that permanently ensures sufficient availability of food at reasonable prices regardless of fluctuations in climate and other political and economic conditions (Macedo, 2021).

Brazil has deemed that food, nutrition, and food security are intrinsically linked to health promotion and require political, social, and economic support to guarantee this right since the 1980s. This is in line with the construction of collective health as a field that is organized between public policies, epidemiology, social sciences, and humanities and reaches a complexity between reinforcements and tensions between the biomedical and biopsychosocial paradigms regarding the nature and process of food health (Bosi; Prado, 2011).

The Organic Law on Food and Nutritional Security—Law no. 11,346—was enacted in 2006, establishing the principles, guidelines, and objectives of the *Sistema Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional* (SISAN - Brazilian National Food and Nutritional Security System), having the incentives for the rights to adequate food and the fight against malnutrition and hunger as its legal framework. In 2014, Brazil halved the prevalence of malnourishment and, for the first time, was not listed in the Hunger Map, reaching the target of the Millennium Development Goals. This was based on inclusive economic growth, enabling greater access to goods and consumption for the poorest and most vulnerable people, improving family farming, and reinforcing social protection.

Even in the face of unquestionable advances, the dismantling and weakening of public food and nutrition policies have occurred since 2016, contributing to the country returning to the Hunger Map in 2022, according to UN data. That year saw the

dissolution of the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, transforming Food and Nutrition Security into a minor discussion within a branch of the Ministry of Social and Agrarian Development. A political crisis followed the gradual decline in economic growth in Brazil, marked by the government distancing itself from social policies, rendering structural policies (such as those on health, food, education, and social assistance) as no longer priorities. This happened by fiscal adjustments, public spending cuts (especially by Constitutional Amendment 95), reductionist institutional measures, and dismantling of social rights, which truly threatened food sovereignty. In 2019, Bolsonaro's government weakened policies in the area, dissolving the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition, a consultative and deliberative social participation body on Food and Nutrition Security (Guerra et al., 2020).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations report confirms the impact of this setback by pointing out that 70.3 million people in Brazil were moderately food insecure (a state in which they find it difficult to feed themselves) and 21.1 million, severely food insecure in 2022 (FAO et al., 2023). In this epidemiological context, hunger represents what is understood as "severe food insecurity," which can lead to what is known as "malnutrition."

This social architecture of hunger (Freitas, 2003) stems from the absence of the organic components that are vital to life, causing complex impacts in the Brazilian population. The fundamental issue points to the a priori violation of the human right to adequate food and possibilities of food security and healthy eating habits. This issue, in turn, results from and reflects a social, political, and economic structure that generates and maintains inequality based on the hegemonic capitalist-neoliberal matrix and a welfare state with minimal policies.

The violation of this right has implications beyond the physiological and organic levels. The anthropology and sociology of food (Carvalho et al., 2019) deems that food constitutes a structuring element for the formation of a society since the use of fire and the revolution in agriculture and livestock configure a significant leap by our species toward culinary

practices, techniques, and cultures. When reflecting on people under food insecurity, misery, and poverty (who know neither what they are going to eat nor if they are going to eat in the coming days) we are talking about bodies under extreme physical, psychological, social, and subjective vulnerabilities.

According to Carvalho et al. (2019), the act of eating is in itself civilizing, constituting a perspective in which the anguish of hunger (Freitas, 2003) is crossed by the violation of the right to become a social subject and to produce sociability from all the power food can offer to human development. Denying access to a concomitantly visceral, physiological, social, and subjective element produces an unprecedented violation.

## **Nutricide, food racism, and neoliberalism: what starves and kills**

This essay understands food crisis as the commodification of food and the act of eating. Machado, Oliveira, and Mendes (2016) point out the need to critically reflect on the indigestible food-commodity system, a consequence of the structural crisis of neoliberal capitalism. It loses both its symbolic (from commensal traditions) and nutritional importance by constituting just another commodity within this economic structure. The most consumed foods consist of those that are best adapted to the market under an industrial logic, rather than necessarily the most nutritional ones, often generating more illness/death and negatively affecting the health of populations (especially the poorest) who have less power of choice in the market and are, for the most part, Black.

In the meantime, the market logic of commensalities from Europe and food industrialization from North America has been supplanting and erasing the food traditions of the peoples of Africa (Afro-diasporic). The relationship the diasporic Black population establishes with food and some household utensils is taken as a social fact (Afrika, 2013), which, in turn, leads us to the reflexive key of two aspects regarding the construction of the Black Brazilian identity: the first of which concerns the way these actors perceive and socially locate themselves in the world of food, whereas the second refers to how they relate to their identity history based on their food choices.

We took Corrêa e Silva's (2021) analyses of racial-food gentrification as record sources since they studied Quilombo Santo Antônio in Concordia do Pará, and Quilombo São João in Salvaterra, on the island of Marajó—both located in the state of Pará. These settlements are linked to food, especially by artisanal fishing, hunting, small animal husbandry, horticulture, the rice-bean-flour trinomial, and the consumption of tubers and cereals. These communally made meals strengthen domestic and local economic dynamics and constitute the main source of supply for school meals. Still, these communities struggle against the expansion of agribusiness and the industrial pollution of rivers and forests that threaten their food security as they also depend on extra income from public policies, such as the *Bolsa Família* program.

Rigotto, Santos, and Costa (2022) studied the territory of traditional communities in Serra do Centro in Campos Lindos, in the state of Tocantins, where Black peasant families have occupied since the late 19th century. Their relationship with the land provided commensality and community medicine as they extracted fruits, seeds, bark, and roots from medicinal trees in the Cerrado. In 1997, the territory became a space for real estate speculation. The advance of agribusiness expelled several quilombola families from their territories, forcing them to inhabit urban peripheral areas.

Almeida's (2023) study on territorialities and nutricide reinforces that the mechanisms to expel Black and Indigenous communities for agribusiness production are not isolated cases. These mechanisms belong to a colonial-racial-capitalist technology that aim to guarantee White supremacy interests, making it impossible to make land, biodiversity, and spatial, racial, and cultural belonging impossible.

From this, the knot that imprisons territory-work-body is established. Regarding territory, the erasure of the Afrodiasporic identity territory emerges, rendering the Black population mostly urban peripheral. Additionally, there is a split between work and community, in which the focus is no longer on sustainability and collectiveness but productivist, market-oriented, and subordinated work in the logic of the racial division of labor, placing Black people at the base of the pyramid. Thus resulting in destruction of the Black population's individual,

social, and cultural body—with the precariousness of life, work, and food linked to the sickening effects of their way of being in the world. In view of this argumentative basis, the genealogy of the territory-work-body “knot” is a fundamental device to produce and maintain nutricide.

This essay offers the concept of “Whiteness” (Bento, 2014; Ramos, 1995) to describe the exercise of self-preservation of the White figure to perpetuate the matrix of their white, rich, and heteronormative power and to conserve economic and social privileges and the private guarantee of social rights. The imperative of Whiteness happens throughout the life of White people, placed by society on a level of superiority, which always constitutes a place of structural advantage for Whites in societies structured by racism. At the other extreme lies the economically disadvantaged groups who emerge wherever capitalism prevails. Thus, understanding the historical construction of the Brazilian population evinces the disadvantaged place of Black and poor people at the base of its pyramid (Fernandes, 2007).

Therefore, to recognize Whiteness and its technologies to maintain power—including neoliberalism as a device that gives the sense of the market in all instances of life—finds that whoever dominates the economic scenario in time-space dominates and controls political and social relations, especially subjectivities and ways of life. To exemplify this control over the subjectivities and ways of life of Black people, Brazilian *favelas* still operate as a refuge and main area of living for this population and function as a social cradle of human misery (Morrison, 2019).

From quilombos to *favelas* (an aesthetic and political symbol of exclusion) emerge an image that prohibits us to forget that capitalism, roughly speaking, generates hunger and food insecurity as it deems profitable to obliterate any indication that attests to the existence of peripheries, a process that seems to be constantly ratified by predatory practices such as creative and identity destruction, nutricide, food racism, the genocide of the Black population, among others.

In view of this, this racial economic structure configures a strategic element to understanding the transformation of the problem of hunger into a

food and nutritional issue. Going beyond this debate, we evoke the term “nutricide,” coined by Afrika (2013). The expression is developed alongside the concepts of genocide of the Black population, structural racism, and necropolitics, characterized as the possibility of the large-scale death of the Black, poor, and peripheral population by their relationship with a hegemonically colonialist, Eurocentric, and North American food system. In other words, the concept shows the food genocide against Black population inside and outside Africa that stems from hunger, malnutrition, malnourishment, or death from diseases related to the lack of access to adequate food given the organization of the compulsory food system arising from the global process of European colonization and North American domination.

The studies by Afrika (2013) portray two important and inseparable concerns. A priori, hunger must undergo a debate with political and intersectoral instruments due to the associated purchasing power, production, work, income, family composition, social protection, and public health. Talking about hunger must exceed the occasional debate on types of meals and their dietary structures. It is insufficient, for example, to launch a food health guide as a strategy of the Ministry of Health that includes diets unattainable by the majority of the population and contradicts a policy that favors the use of pesticides, transgenics, and ultra-processed foods.

The epitome to understand the genocide of the Black population as a product of nutricide is based on the argument that a diet that fails to nourish but kills denounces the historical physical, psychic, and identity markings endured by Black people. This materializes itself based on what is known as the racial erasure of the African food culture, which is especially based on grains, cereals, roots, tubers such as sweet potatoes and cassava, vegetables (cabbage, spinach, chard, tomatoes, onions), and collectively produced regional seasonings (Afrika, 2013).

In dialogue with this concept, Canuto, Fanton, and Lira (2019) and Jesus (2021) describe the results of some research that relates socioracial inequalities to food insecurity. These authors reviewed national surveys on food consumption and address the problem of social inequities. In summary, Black or Mixed skin

color/race was associated with higher consumption of beans, meats with excess fat, and milk with high fat content. On the other hand, the consumption of sweets was lower among Mixed-race people, and the regular and/or recommended consumption of fruits and vegetables was higher among White individuals.

Residents of *favelas*, communities, and peripheral neighborhoods face more spatial obstacles to buy fresh and non-industrialized products daily. Landless in the rural or urban setting, they produce no food of their own. What lies within their reach (when in reach) are foods of low nutritional quality and rich in saturated fat, sodium, and sugar. In the short, medium, and long term, this can trigger diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes, which are more prevalent in the Black population (Macedo, 2021; Silva et al., 2022).

In summary, acknowledging the dimension of race and the difficulties in food consumption, Afrika (2013) offers us a vision of how much the European and North American “White” food system has and still attacks us, and how important it is to turn our attention to the veiled racisms produced in the relationship between health, society, and food.

## Can the subordinate, then, eat? The “Post-COVID-19” production of hunger and food insecurity

Further developing the discussion between nutricide and neoliberalism, thinking about the right to food today is inseparable from analyzing the formation of the modern food system of transformation of food into merchandise, commodities, and its financialization. Since the 18th century, a legal, political, epistemic, and cultural form of appropriation of food has been structured, reducing it to a commodity, pricing it, and subjecting it to the speculative logic of the market (Machado; Oliveira; Mendes, 2016). A consequence involved food beginning to be understood as a commodity, rather than as a fundamental right that is part of culture, something elementary for the enjoyment of dignity. As a commodity, it can be traded speculatively and globally. Those who can afford it, rather than those who need it, have access to it. It is no wonder that hunger is a constant in a world of abundance (Davis, 2012).

On the one hand, the White population has the power to buy organic food that is free of pesticides, enjoying a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and vegetables. On the other hand, the non-white population, who lacks the right to choose because they are captured by capitalist and financial oppression and lie at the mercy of what is known as sterile palatability—which consists of the process of neutralization of taste by the excessive exposure to substances such as sugar, salt, fat, and additives that limit sensitivity to the flavor of some foods. This process was leveraged during the 20th century thanks to the replacement of fresh, higher-quality foods with low-cost, poor-quality raw materials in parallel with tax incentives, enabling the dissipation of industrialized foods for daily use (Guerra et al., 2020).

Hence the question: what are the governmental actions the State has been adopting, especially in the recent years of social and health crisis intensified during the pandemic process? This essay draws a parallel with the concept of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2018), which refers to the ability of a state to legitimize death policies for certain bodies—even if they are hidden, invisible, or disguised—to maintain the sovereign lives of others. Thus, it is necessary to situate models of actions, negligence, and absences of the Brazilian public power that are being developed in this area.

According to information from G1 (2021), the Brazilian governance run by President Bolsonaro demarcated, in the first year of the pandemic, one of the largest releases of pesticides in the history of the country as it authorized 493 substances to integrate the meals of the Brazilian population. Prior to that, the government had regressed since 2019, changing the toxicological classification of pesticides and interfering and hindering the control and inspection process of the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) as these pesticides were legitimized politically, scientifically, and institutionally as substances unlikely to cause acute harm. Thus, the relationship between the production of hunger and the malnutrition of the Brazilian population, especially of its poor and Black individuals, is only one of the hidden faces of food insecurity and especially of the notion that hunger has no relation to food scarcity, being associated with a negligence in the equal distribution of food (Caparrós, 2016).

It is also necessary to locate what is imbricated in the harmful consequences of the agricultural

industry. Most cultivated grains feed agricultural animals, and the distribution of protein, with the rise in inflation, occurs increasingly selectively. Thus, the problem begins with the use of land as 60% of it is exclusively designated for livestock. Intensive, monopolized, and speculative agriculture directly affects food security by generating more deforestation, the death of animal species, and global warming—with it, more floods, droughts, and storms that more greatly impact food production and thus intensify food insecurity (Frutuoso; Viana, 2021).

Moreover, the situation was vastly aggravated due to the political and health crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic (Souza et al., 2021). Government efforts required panoramic strategies, from controlling the Sars-Cov-2 virus to implementing measures transversal to social determinants, regarding the creation and maintenance of work and income, such as social and economic protection policies. Still, the Brazilian population was at the mercy of the high inflation, job insecurity, and unemployment that increased food insecurity, which, in theory, should not happen, if we consider the agreement signed via the 1974 Universal Declaration.

A survey UNICEF Brazil conducted pointed out the worsening of this scenario (Neuman, 2021), in 2021. According to it, 49% of the Brazilian population aged 18 and over declared having had to change their eating habits during the pandemic. About one in five Brazilians in this age group has experienced a lack of resources to buy food and the consumption of a diet low in proteins and vegetables and high in sugar, flour, and fats.

In the political-legislative scenario, most of the National Congress belongs to the Parliamentary Agricultural Front, known as the Ruralist Caucus, composed mostly of White, cis-straight men with assets. This scenario resulted in legislature determining who can live—in favor of the interests of the agribusiness sectors and the agrarian elite—and who should die—Black individuals, traditional peoples, environmental activists, the poor, the peripherals, and those who need greater state intervention to protect their lives in return for a minimum state of protection. This conjuncture exposes the power of the Brazilian State to operate necropolitics in diverse and perverse ways.



While the relation between food genocide produced against subalternized populations and its relationship with agriculture are highlighted, it is imperative to stress that organized resistance and struggles oppose this economic model based on the destruction and annihilation of the environment and living beings. Despite the increase in the number of murders against environmental activists and land defenders in Brazil, it is important to highlight traditional peoples and landless movements who organize a large resistance and struggle against environmental racism (Pereira, 2021; Pistorium et al., 2021; Soares, 2021).

## The color of flavor: the Black population and their forms of resistance against food nutricide

This section will analyze the demonstrations and struggles the Black population organized in the face of the hunger and nutrition crisis. In fact, it urges the understanding of the resistances and forms of emancipatory practices of Black collectives, often led by feminist women, who organize themselves based on the identity paths of gender, class, and race (Akotirene, 2019).

In a meeting with UN Women, the Black Women Committee Towards Planet 50-50 by 2030 (2020) emphasized the leadership of Black women during the pandemic. Nilza Iraci, from Geledés - Black Women's Institute, discussed how the Black population was on the death line in the pandemic based on a cruel negotiation between choosing to protect their lives or their work, their source of survival. Valdecir Nascimento, from Odara—executive secretary of the Articulation of Brazilian Black Women's Organizations—reported that the agenda not only refers to welfare (the offer of *cestas básicas*, a collection of goods that aims to ensure individuals' right to adequate and healthy food), but also to people's hunger for justice, peace, and equity. Givânia Silva, educator, quilombola, and member of the *Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas* (Conaq - National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities) and

Ana Lúcia Pereira, from the entity *Agentes de Pastoral Negros* (APN - Black Pastoral Agents), expressed their concern about the Black population's food and nutritional security.

The research entitled "*Impacto da pandemia de covid-19 em organizações da sociedade civil lideradas por mulheres e pessoas trans no brasil: ativismo e pandemia*" (Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on civil society organizations led by women and trans people in Brazil: Activism and the Pandemic) (Verdade; Fischer, 2021) portrays how solidarity, community trust, and resistance bonds were paramount in building bridges in the absence and negligence of the State. The ELAS+ Group, made up of Black, Indigenous people, and LGBTQIAP+ leaders acted in the face of malnutrition, malnourishment, hunger, unemployment, and the various forms of violence highlighted during the pandemic, offering affective, legal, and psychological support for women, LBTQIAP+, Black women, and traditional peoples.

The perceived driving force of intersecting collectives of those oppressed by gender, race, and class refers to an understanding that these segments inhabit the base of privileges or a non-place of privileges, with worse working conditions and income. Moreover, these groups suffer from various forms of violence arising from a colonial trauma and that, to survive, are summoned to a socio-cultural settlement, with "quilombo" being a geographical word that represents a device of agency, aggregation, and community in the fight against the silencing of Black people in the hands of Whiteness, as per historian Beatriz Nascimento (Ratts, 2006).

Hooks (2013), who taught us to transgress the matrix of oppression, reminds us that this emancipatory and resistance process has, as its basic axis, education, solidarity, and collectivity as a way to overcome the structural difficulties caused by an unequal society.

It is worth highlighting movements in Pernambuco that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the fight against food insecurity and hunger and promoted agendas in systemic spheres in society. The solidarity campaign "*Quem precisa tem pressa*" (Those who need it are in a hurry) was organized by the Pernambuco Workers'

Union together with the Union of Education Workers of Pernambuco and the Union of Bank Employees, making these unions their points to collect non-perishable food, hygiene and cleaning material, clothes, warm clothes, sheets, mattresses, among other items (Barbosa Filho; Melo, 2022).

Moreover, the *Coalizão Negra por Direitos* (Black Coalition for Rights), which brings together 250 organizations allied to the Brazilian Black movement, launched the national campaign “*Tem Gente Com Fome*” (There Are People Who Are Hungry) and raised more than R\$ 21 million, aiding 130 thousand families in all 27 Brazilian states. The funds also helped secure jobs and income for local warehouses and grocery stores and for family farmers. This essay extracted these data from the platform <https://www.temgentecomfome.com.br/>.

Notably, these organizations emerge from the embryo of Brazilian peripheries, such as the *Central Única das Favelas*, which promoted actions to mobilize and support *favela* residents throughout Brazil. Another interesting field is the encounter between the periphery and education from public universities, such as the extension project of Universidade Federal de Pernambuco “*Mãos Solidárias e Periferia Viva - a universidade no enfrentamento à covid-19 e em defesa da vida do povo*” (Solidarity Hands and Living Periphery - the university in the fight against COVID-19 and in defense of the life of the people” and the project “Solidarity Hands in the community). Both began by producing solidarity lunch boxes for homeless people and expanded to a network to discuss social rights, health, education, work, and the income of peripheral Black people (Barbosa Filho; Melo, 2022).

Thus, the Black population forms a movement empowered in various ways to face the socioeconomic crisis crossed by food inequities; and it is essential that it be supported and amplified in the pursuit of social justice and public health. We conclude with the phrase of Jurema Werneck (2010), who praises African ancestry in the struggle to exist and resist: “Our steps come from afar, but the road is still long.”

## Final considerations

The elements this essay analyzed succinctly seek to signal that the social and racial issue also manifests itself in the food and nutritional sphere, producing reflections in populations’ ways of eating, living, falling ill, and dying. The end of this essay raises some questions amidst its problematized arguments: how and why an important layer of the population still suffers from food insecurity considering the significant advances in agriculture, technology, and nutrition? What motivates the criminalization of the movements of Indigenous peoples historically persecuted by the State and agrarian elites? What interests do the discourses of monopolists and large representatives of agribusiness hide? Who do the political representatives of the Parliamentary Front for Agriculture and their supporters serve?

The theme centered on hunger, food insecurity, and their interfaces with the neoliberal capitalist crisis in the current pandemic context of COVID-19 in Brazil circumscribes the need to identify the position, place, and who are the people who inhabit human food deserts, socio-historically constructed from a capitalist, neoliberal, colonial, and necropolitical logic. It is worth stressing that this logic targets specific bodies and populations: Black, poor, and peripheral, who are at the mercy of market rationality and are extremely segregated with the advent of the health crisis; and the State fails to position itself to protect the most vulnerable people, operating policies of death by action/omission (among other dimensions) also by the production of hunger.

The scientific commitment to public health must be primarily linked to the interests of the well-being of society and, therefore, to the call for public agendas of intersectoral actions toward social transformation so the structure of policies adopted today oppose the control of the use of pesticides and support the unbridled exploitation of natural resources, the exclusion and abandonment of poor, Black, female, Indigenous, and peasant populations. Otherwise, we would encourage an

intellectual fiction that only produces fanciful arguments of reproduction of what is already instituted with biomedical political rationality.

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### Authors' contribution

Mariana Pompílio Gomes Cabral contributed to the initial conception of this research, developing its central idea on nutricide and food racism during the pandemic. Also participated continuously and systematically in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Also played an active role in drafting this manuscript, offering theoretical insights and critical analyses to each section of this study. Daiana de Jesus Moreira: Edited and proofread to ensure the clarity and cohesion of the final text. Data collection and analysis and analysis and interpretation of the obtained results. Erinaldo Domingos Alves extensively reviewed the literature related to the subject, providing the theoretical basis for this study. Raquel Cerdeira de Lima contributed with a critical analysis of the collected data, helping to interpret the results in the light of the theories and concepts discussed in the literature. Maria Lúcia Magalhães Bosi guided the entire process from the conception of this research to its final draft, ensuring its quality and integrity.

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