



Queer Sewing as a Way of Life: resistances to neoconservatisms of race and gender

Shirley Aparecida de Miranda¹

Jaime Peixoto da Silva¹

¹Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – UFMG, Belo Horizonte/MG, Brazil

¹Secretaria de Estado de Educação de Minas Gerais – SEE/MG, Belo Horizonte/MG, Brazil

ABSTRACT – *Queer Sewing as a Way of Life: resistances to race and gender neoconservatisms* – This article brings out strategies for confronting neoconservatisms of gender and race through what is here called *queer sewing*. Based on the *narrative patches* produced in doctoral research, the relationship between clothes and the norm is discussed. The concepts of ancestry and intersectionality are mobilized to problematize the remodeling of the self in the confrontation with cisheteronorm and normative whiteness. It was noticed that *queer sewing* can be seen as a strategic way of life, as it highlights a certain work on oneself on the part of the subject that speaks of an ethical way of existing in the world, a process in which not only clothes were produced, but, mainly, a form of existence.

Keywords: ***Queer Sewing. Ancestry. Neoconservatism. Gender. Resistance.***

RÉSUMÉ – *La Couture Queer comme Mode de Vie: résistance au néoconservatisme racial et de genre* – Cet article met en lumière des stratégies pour affronter les néoconservatismes de genre et de race à travers ce que l'on appelle ici la couture *queer*. À partir des *fragments narratifs* produits lors de la recherche doctorale, la relation entre le vêtement et la norme est discutée. Les concepts d'ascendance et d'intersectionnalité sont mobilisés pour problématiser le remodelage de soi dans la confrontation avec la cisheteronorm et la blancheur normative. Il a été remarqué que la couture *queer* peut être considérée comme un mode de vie stratégique, car elle met en évidence un certain travail sur soi de la part du sujet qui parle d'une manière éthique d'exister dans le monde, un processus dans lequel non seulement les vêtements sont produit, mais surtout une forme d'existence.

Mots-clés: ***Couture Queer. Ascendance. Néoconservatisme. Genre. Résistance.***

RESUMO – *A Costura Queer como Modo de Vida: resistências aos neoconservadorismos de raça e gênero* – Este artigo evidencia estratégias de enfrentamento aos neoconservadorismos de gênero e raça por meio do que aqui é nomeado *costura queer*. Com base nos *retalhos narrativos* produzidos em pesquisa de doutorado, discute-se a relação entre as roupas e a norma. Mobilizam-se os conceitos de ancestralidade e de interseccionalidade, para problematizar a remodelagem de si no confronto com a cis-heteronorma e a branquitude normativa. Percebeu-se que a *costura queer* pode ser vista como um modo estratégico de vida, ao evidenciar certo trabalho sobre si mesmo por parte do sujeito que diz de um modo ético de existir no mundo, um processo no qual não só roupas foram produzidas, mas, principalmente, uma forma de existência.

Palavras-chave: ***Costura Queer. Ancestralidade. Neoconservadorismo. Gênero. Resistência.***

Introduction

Late for life in the important and difficult task of dressing. In the fabric of my skin, other fabrics are inscribed. The clothes I no longer wear, I don't know. From the parts that don't make me up, I remake. I'm reborn (Hoffmann, 2015, p. 52).

Situated in the context of gender and sexuality studies from a post-critical perspective, this article analyzes the reinvention of the self, based on the “composition of appearance” (Cidreira, 2005), from the experience of one of the participants in the doctoral research on how young LGBTQIA+¹ black people create ways of experiencing their dissidence in terms of gender, sexuality and race in times of political and moral neoconservatism. In which ways are resistances to the banalization of dissident lives produced?

The political and social context in which the research was carried out was that of the strengthening of neoconservatism and rejection of policies aimed at overcoming racial and gender inequalities, which intensified in the last decade and materialized in the political-religious organization popularized in the form of the syntagma/slogan *gender ideology*. Neoconservatives seek to strengthen visions and values based on moral, religious and authoritarian frameworks, while reiterating the naturalization of the social and moral order (Junqueira, 2018), creating a type of “moral entrepreneurship” (Miskolci, 2017).

The dissemination of interpellations through the slogan *gender ideology*² and the formation of the self-declared Escola Sem Partido (ESP)³ movement have contributed to the construction of a rhetoric that is hostile to gender dissent, while at the same time allowing for greater organization of neoconservative discourses.

The neoconservative pressure on schools has not changed the fact that black LGBTQIA+ lives pass through the school space every day, affirming difference and challenging the cis-heteronorm. This article discusses the resistances to neoconservatism through what we call *queer sewing* as the creation of other possibilities of existence.

Here we understand *queer* not only as a concept that demarcates a theoretical field, but above all as an ethical movement that, by playing with identities, has the potential to destabilize/deny the imposition of normative

ways of life and invent other existences. Therefore, when used in this article, *queer* is not intended to defend the use of a particular identity, but to signal that in narrative games present in the research carried out, identities come into play in a strategic movement of the subject that speaks of an ethic of resistance within the processes of subjectivation. *Queer* here points not to the complete rejection of identities, but to their tactical use.

This article is based on the “narrative patches” (Bahia, 2016) produced by Bento⁴, an 18-year-old black who identifies as a non-binary⁵ living in the city of Belo Horizonte, and who, in 2020, when this research took place, was in their⁶ first semester of undergraduate studies in Fashion Design. The data was produced using two main methodological strategies: the semi-structured narrative interview and the participant’s self-narrative diary. The latter, an ethnographically-inspired tool, was used by the participant throughout the research, unfolding a kind of autonomous self-writing that allowed them to externalize what they felt outside of the interviews, in order to follow up on their reflections.

Experimenting with this methodological tool, which is inspired by an autobiographical process, allows for the first-hand construction of “an account of your life or part of it, whether or not there is a motivating question” (Pedro Silva, 2020, p. 48). Being constantly challenged by the political context exposed in the research and by the research process itself, the participant recorded what they felt, the formulations they were developing about what they experienced and about themselves in a freer way.

Through the narrative patches analyzed, we intend to demonstrate in this article how the *queer seaming* was operationalized in a certain work on oneself that tells of an ethical way of existing in the world facing the neo-conservatisms.

The following topics discuss the relationship between clothes and the norm in order to indicate the remodeling of the self in the confrontation with cis-heteronorm and normative whiteness. Finally, we look at *queer sewing* as an aesthetic of the self that makes strategic use of clothes to resist and create.

Rejecting models

I know how to sew, and I consider it humanly important. I've been sewing since I was 13, I crochet, I've done things that, thinking about it now, were never 'men's' things, I've always known that I was different, not that I was different, people were too much the same and I didn't fit in that. Today I sew practically everything I wear (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, April 29th, 2020).

The choices we make about how we dress are the result of various socio-political, economic and cultural factors. For researchers Campos and Cidreira (2020), clothing rules have a major influence on the ways in which social classes, gender and identities are organized. Imposed by a "superior structure that designates the correct way to cover the body" (Campos; Cidreira, 2020, p. 96), these rules make up a broader set of devices aimed at standardizing bodies. Fashion, in its complexity and reflecting the power relations that exist in society, "produces devices to maintain certain aesthetic standards and social representations, especially in the field of appearances", as Marques Filho (2015, p. 75) comments. Discussing the relationship between clothes and the norm, Lanz (2014, p. 260) comments that

The clothes embody the norm, and the clothed body is the embodied norm. The body of the clothes is the body constructed to meet the demands of the clothes-norm. The body of the clothes is thus a body that is manufactured, forged, modeled and, at the same time, divided and torn apart by the norms that constitute it.

The author points out that clothing is "a very powerful cultural vehicle" and, as such, symbolically communicates disputes, desires, worldviews and identities (Lanz, 2014, p. 96-97). How do you show off on the public stage a body that dissents from the norms that manufacture the normal body? Bento recounts their experience when they says:

Times ago I used to police myself a lot, trying to stereotype myself as a more masculine figure, but after adolescence I started to reflect on the things I needed to reflect on, things that were necessary for me, basic things, like do I like this outfit? Do I feel good wearing this color? (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, June 1st, 2020).

Breaking away from conservative models that have historically imposed certain ways of existing in the world is about active movements to in-

terfere in the processes of subjectivation. Cidreira (2005, p. 25) comments that this process of questioning “[...] reflects the way in which subjects position themselves in relation to society, to a large extent supported by the daily choices they make to construct themselves”. By managing the ways of dressing and adorning themselves, Bento produces their body in confrontation with the stereotypes that define the male figure. Bento assumes a “subject position” (Foucault, 1997)⁷ which, through refusals and negotiations, promotes ruptures in relation to the cis-heteronormative hegemonic model, seeking alternatives and pressuring for the opening of spaces in a field of possibilities.

According to Baga de Bagaceira and Renata Cidreira (2018, p. 129), the “[...] process of existence for the adorned body of the dissident is crossed, above all, by the process of resistance”. These are “disobedient people who adorn their bodies against the so-called correct ways of dressing” (Campos; Cidreira, 2020, p. 91).

As a powerful tool for confrontation and disrupting order, the act of dressing, or as Campos and Cidreira (2018, p. 120) name it, “forms of adorning”, can be a “[...] device for challenging socially acquired norms and behaviors and, for this very reason, those who dress differently can be the target of violent actions”.

For Mombaça (2016, p. 9), “[...] simply walking down the streets can be a difficult event when your clothes are considered ‘inappropriate’ and your presence is read as offensive just because of the way you act and look”. In line with what was said by Mombaça (2016), Campos and Cidreira (2018) state that the fact that clothes and the body are inseparable from each other “makes the subversion of appearance cause undesirable looks at a body that is not even seen as possible” (Campos; Cidreira, 2018, p. 122). The jokes directed at these bodies operate as instruments aimed at constraining and disciplining the individual. “Even in the form of looks and mockery, it is always about the body. A body that distorts essentialist compositions, as it is launched and felt in the world” (Campos; Cidreira, 2018, p. 124).

Bento, as a dissident subject, who breaks with the generifed norms about body and clothing, did not go unscathed. They felt the social disapproval over their body and way of dressing. Bento says:

I began to appreciate sewing and the art of making clothes. When I was 15, I wore green braids, dreads, let my hair grow and all of this scared people in the street, I've ever heard, and still hear a lot! I don't know if I've ever told you this, but I'm literally a chicken, my arms are so thin that even the wind can break them, so this weak body + shame = easy target. I feel like a very vulnerable person, sometimes I'm afraid to pass certain places, not to be mugged, but because some people look at me so aggressively that I'm really afraid to pass certain places where certain people are, because as well as being verbally assaulted, I can be physically assaulted (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, June 1st, 2020).

In a conservative society, the body that does not conform to gender norms is dehumanized and seen as dangerous. Bento's account of making their own clothes shows that, faced with the dangers that constrain their existence, they challenges themselves to produce an insurgent way of life that values their subalternized body. In Bento's words:

Fashion is a lot of resistance. Sometimes people don't even try to look at my face, they look straight at my clothes and already deduce something, already treat me differently, I've noticed that, when I'm dressed in a certain way. It was very interesting that after I started to create my clothes, the things I wanted to wear, I felt that people started to respect me more, because I used it to my advantage, I'd be like 'wow, I'm looking good today, and nobody's going to shake me', and then I'd go out with my head held high, fuck it, I don't care about anything and then I'd come home very happy because I'd worn an outfit that I wanted to wear, my body had been valued for that (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, June 1st, 2020).

Discussing what she calls "politics of style", Oliveira (2018, p. 198) comments that handmade clothing and customization, as well as the use of different accessories and elements to compose clothes can consist of "[...] a conscious and intentional reaction against the industry and consumer processes, in search of a more individualized, unique and non-standardized fashion in relation to factory-made models" (Oliveira, 2018, p. 198). Thus, the politics of style implies opposition to an "aesthetic imposed by capitalism, increasing possibilities for creative combinations" and, with this, engenders more autonomous ways of existing in the world. Bento made explicit the relationship between autonomy and the production of a style of living the body:

I always talk about the word autonomy and I like this word a lot, because it's very present in my family's history, here people build their own houses, make their

own clothes, make their own food and I find this very interesting, when you create autonomy you stop depending so much on others, because if I didn't sew my own clothes I'd be forced to buy ready-made clothes, I'd be dependent on a social system and that is very worrying because this social system is horrible, there's slave labor, for example, which is something I want to fight, so when I create autonomy, when I make my own clothes and encourage other people to do the same, I'm starting a fight against the system (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, January 4th, 2021).

The production of autonomy is a process of reflexive confrontation and involves the elaboration of one's own means and strategies that promote the disconnection with an identity logic socially attributed to Bento's body. A body called and named LGBTQIA+, which confronts heteronormativity. A black body that confronts racism and normative whiteness. Let's take a look at the dissident body's confrontations in the following topic.

Black body and the (Re)modeling of the self

I was thrown to the margins, they always treated me with indifference. They said: 'black people have to put up with everything' and I didn't! I'm not made of iron, I have flesh, I have bone (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, April 29th, 2020).

Bento's accounts presents us racism as a form of violence that crosses the dissident black body. Thus, the intersectionality⁸ of race, gender and sexuality sets the tone for their movements in the production of strategic ways of existing. In this respect, Gomes and Miranda (2014, p. 86) point out that the "[...] scenario of hierarchization that articulates gender and race has a direct impact on bodies, on the strategies for positioning them and living them amidst the rules that produce the normal body as a white body". Addressing this issue, Dumas (2019, p. 6) points out that: "[...] the black body in Brazilian society has had its materiality subjugated to labor gestures, control and repression of movements, punishment in corporal chastisement and gestural and vocal immobilization.

For the author, "cultural expressions associated with black Brazilian bodies are marked by the sensory forms structured by and in the slavery process" (Dumas, 2019, p. 7). The racist interpellations directed at the black body did not cease with the end of slavery, but were reconfigured, be-

came more sophisticated and disguised by different means. Thus, the “construction of a cast of reactions to this violence that shapes characteristics and behaviors” (Dumas, 2019, p. 8).

In Bento’s accounts, we see reflections about their racialized body, which led the “use of their own body and their clothes as ways of positioning themselves in the world, both in the affective sense and in political action” (Campos; Cidreira, 2018, p. 123).

In society, my biggest problem is the racism, but LGBTphobia doesn’t cease to exist. It’s very complicated because black men’s virility is a very complex issue within racism, so when I tell people I’m LGBT they’re a bit surprised because they expect me to be that virile man, that an arduous representation of the black man who is a slave, manly, strong and who, whatever, *trepá*⁹ – excuse the profanity – so, I was always exposed to this kind of heteronormativity ‘black man and gay? What do you mean? What a waste!’ (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

Gomes and Miranda (2014, p. 86) point out that, in our country, the black body has gained social visibility through the “tension between adapting to or overcoming the racist thought that sees it as erotic, exotic and violent, simultaneously or interchangeably”. Thus, in order to break away from these stigmas and stereotypes, the subject often has to “fight against themselves or against the expectations projected onto them”, as Campos and Cidreira (2020, p. 103) comment.

Doing so, however, is no easy task. Gomes and Miranda (2014, p. 100) also comment that “[...] this emancipated, insurgent, uncomfortable black body, which refuses to be exoticized, or which plays with the very production of the exotic, still can’t get out of the meshes of racism”. The narrative patch provided by Bento and reproduced below makes this evident.

I’ve been verbally attacked by people saying ‘go get a haircut’ or ‘you’re awful’ and they’ve sent me these things on the app. I don’t just get attacked in the streets, on apps either. And I have a homosexual friend who is white and he doesn’t listen to this, he leads a normal life, he doesn’t have this problem with himself, he can relate very well to other men and I can’t anymore. So, I started to feel very neglected, when someone showed that they liked me I kept doubting ‘no, that person can’t be liking me’, ‘how can a beautiful person like that like me?’ Because, really, I already suffer a lot of racism in my life and then in the place where I was supposed to like people, they make me hate myself and that bothers me a lot (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

Foucault (2014) points out that the subject's relationship with power implies a struggle against the processes of subjection or, in other words, a refusal of what they want us to be through the exercise of power. It is in resisting politically regulated modeling processes that certain positions-of-subject can be assumed as a lifestyle, as a practice of self-care in which

[...] the individual circumscribes the part of himself that constitutes the object of this moral practice, defines his position in relation to the precept he respects, establishes for himself a certain way of being that will be valid as a moral realization of himself; and, to do this, he acts on himself, seeks to know himself, controls himself, tests himself, perfects himself, transforms himself (Foucault, 2003, p. 28).

Confronting racism speaks to the ways in which Bento chose to act in the webs of the processes of subjection, opposing not only the violence and racism they suffered, but above all the image they maintained of themselves. Bento began to see the expression of their blackness through their body as a positive way of expressing their culture and affirming the identity they had chosen for themselves. The possibility of this shift emerges as a result of a “politicization of black aesthetics”, as Gomes (2017, p. 75) states in her thesis on the black movement as a political agent that produces and systematizes knowledge. The author emphasizes aesthetic-corporeal knowledge as a strategic way of combating racism and deconstructing the perverse place in which the black population has been placed: that of racial inferiority. In this sense, the expression of blackness “[...] moves from an internal movement, built within the black community – not without conflicts and contradictions – to an external movement, valuing black aesthetics and corporeality on a social and cultural level” (Gomes, 2017, p. 95).

In Bento's case, the re-signification and valorization of the self occurs through the clothes they makes for themselves, “drawing a certain plasticity that shows the break with the logic of prejudice for a place of recognition”, as Campos, Cidreira and Carvalho (2019, p. 18) say. Bento narrates:

I think that when I started sewing, I started to change my view of my body, I started wearing clothes that I like and that say a lot about me, we have a habit of thinking that clothes are something very futile, but when an outfit is designed, when you create the pattern, you think about the fabric, you think about the finish, you create a whole structure for it. Every day we discover who we are and re-discover ourselves and get lost in who we are, it's a battle against the self. And with

fashion it's no different, you know, to this day I make clothes that when they're finished I don't identify with them, I'm like 'this has nothing to do with me', even though I made it myself, I was there planning it, life is like that, you know, it's the process of discovery, we have to go through them, so I'll know that, for example, that type of clothing doesn't suit me, so when I go to make another outfit, I'll run away from the model I didn't like, it's a whole process of self-knowledge (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

In this process reported by Bento, we see a movement that involves creating the conditions for what we call the *(re)modeling of the self* taking place. This way of living the body occurs by "tearing down old pillars and setting up new structures" (Campos; Cidreira, 2020, p. 101) in order to deconstruct a logic of subjectivity production. In practice, this implies, still thinking along the lines of Campos and Cidreira (2020), in a departure from compulsory masculinity and whiteness. Bento's black body, which used to be adorned to correspond to a *locus* of virility and obedience to their race and assigned sex, now "[...] moves away from this concept by the way the plasticity of their modes of adornment intertwine with their mannerisms and body in a tireless march of disobedience" (Campos; Cidreira, 2020, p. 106).

Black bodies, as Dumas (2019, p. 6,7) points out, exist beyond the desires and projects of colonizers. Black bodies' ways of resisting and making themselves exist transcended the imperative action of domination, the attempts at docilization, the control imposed as a way of living. For Dumas (2019, p. 9),

[...] if we think of the black body or bodies in terms of transposing or even eliminating the concept produced in the colonizing project, elevating ancestry as a way of accessing and constructing blackness, we can think of new inventions of bodies that are more connected to liberation from the ties and limitations of dominating systems.

In the confrontation with the colonizing project, ancestry occurs as an articulating concept of African tradition in Brazil. It is not a reference to relationships of consanguinity, but an analytical category developed by organic intellectuals of the African tradition reinvented in Brazil. Thus, ancestry functions, as defined by Nascimento (2020, p. 31):

[...] as a sensitizing vector for thought and bodies, so that they open up to this encounter with the figures denied by our colonial history, building for

them – and for us – other spaces, other meanings, other experiences and thus rebuilding ourselves as historical subjects.

Ancestry is understood here as the “common trait that can be established with most of the diverse cultures that exist in Africa” (Nogueira; Andrade; Vásquez, 2016, p. 174). The construction of an identity based on valuing the black body involves restoring the values of their destroyed civilizations and their denied cultures, including, in this legacy, languages, customs, ways of dressing and adorning oneself, among other marks that refer to an ancestral culture, which precedes modern black slavery and brings autonomy as a turning point. With regard to ancestry, Bento notes:

Returning to the question of ancestry, my great-grandmother is my most recent memory of the people who came before me, a black woman, who always worked to support the household. She had 12 children, she was widowed very early and worked sewing and did it until she couldn't do it anymore, she taught her daughter who also sewed all her life, keeping herself going, and if there's one thing I like about my ancestry, it's that they were always autonomous people, and I try to pass that on to my life, I know how much good it did for them and I want it to do good for me too (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

In conjunction with Bento's definition, Santana (2019) emphasizes that ancestry can be “an infinite source of inspiration and strength to achieve this or that movement of resistance production” (Santana, 2019, p. 29). In line with what the author says, Vilaça and Dumas (2019, p. 54) comment that, by seeking inspiration from ancestry, we get closer to our history, while at the same time strengthening our awareness that those doings (and knowledges) make up a tradition, a culture and an epistemology that structure our bodies and our life in society. Thinking along the lines of Nascimento and Odara (2020, p. 203), we understand that, by modeling clothes, it is possible to “express an ancestry that runs through us, feeding us with our ancestors and the very memory that takes the form of ancestry”.

Bento's accounts reveal the references they uses to derive a performance. This is what we see in the next narrative patch:

When it comes to meaning, that's where the sewing comes in. The black population has always been very autonomous, you can ask Rupaul¹⁰ how much she worked alone to build the image that everyone has of her today. I re-signify this exclusion by creating my own fashion, giving life to my imaginary, which is why I like subculture movements, because they are autonomous and performative. For

example, I'm very much into these Black movements from the 60s and 70s, so I always take inspiration for my clothes from this type of fashion and it was built for the valorization of Black people at that time and, as I think we've been de-characterizing over time, from whitening, from fast-fashion, you go to Riachuelo¹¹ and buy an outfit and then you see ten other people wearing the same outfit and sometimes that whitens you, because white people rule fashion and if you're wearing what they produce, sometimes you're being whitened by it (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

For Batista (2019, p. 299) the black aesthetics and clothing that Bento uses, by referring to black ancestry reconfigured in the diaspora, not only refer to the struggle, they are the very weapon of war, of confrontation. They are the objects that empower the black body to confront “normative whiteness” (Gomes; Miranda, 2014). We adhere to Gomes's (2017) formulations on the knowledge that emerges from the discursive practice of black movements, which indicate the “overcoming of the exotic and erotic vision of the black body”. The “aesthetic-corporeal knowledge”, as the author calls it (Gomes, 2017, p. 75), concerns the demand for an end to a dictatorship of bodies that imposes the normality of a Eurocentric and white aesthetic. To the extent that clothing combats racism and racists, it also helps to build an aesthetic of resistance for black people. We understand that the development of a style for the black body is an undertaking of this kind of knowledge that positions the young black LGBTQIA+ person as the subject of their choices. In the words of Hoffmann (2015, p. 43), it is necessary to “[...] see clothing beyond the shell of the body, highlighting the visibilities of the human being in the world. Sewing is the visible subjectivity of the individual”. We will see how this is evident in the narrative patches below.

Sewing Sensations

Some call it art, why? I can't explain it! I call it love, but I also call it hate, I call it mourning (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, November 29th, 2020).

Queer sewing, as a sensitive tool of resistance and struggle, can enhance reflections on the “political-affective role of clothing in expressing the sensitivities necessary for the existence of dissident subjects”, as Campos, Cidreira and Carvalho (2019, p. 63) point out. A true subversion is imposed when you feel “[...] the sensitivity of the elements that make up your ap-

pearance and reveal your place in the world, in a brilliant, sparkling way and any other adjective that makes it a possible body in its humanity” (Campos; Cidreira, Carvalho, 2019, p. 70). These are the sensitivities that emerge in the process of experiencing desire, pleasure and passion, but also indignation, pain, fear and resistance.

For Lanz (2014, p. 92), “clothing is the visible and removable skin that expresses aspirations, fantasies, dreams and desires”. In this direction, Hoffmann (2015) elaborates the concept of “clothing of sensation”, understanding it as a “[...] movement of freedom that does not seek only to reproduce the model, but to twist it and from these twists, to admit what will give rise to the stylistic trait of its existence” (Hoffman, 2015, p. 19). To this end, colors, textures, volumes, shapes and trims are taken as traits and intensities and highlight a certain way of seeing the world. Still on the sensitive plane Hoffmann (2015, p. 33) comments that “[...] invisible forces are present, by touch, by smell, by the leftovers that the fabric produces on the body, by the pressure it exerts on the skin when the clothes are too tight, or even by the imagination”.

In this respect, it is possible to see, in the narrative patches, how this issue is discussed by Bento.

When you buy clothes, you fall in love with the aesthetics, with the detail, but you don't fall in love with the whole, because that whole wasn't thought up and planned by you and for you, it was thought up by someone else and for several people, because in a store it's not just you who's going to buy, it's several people... And when you make your clothes, you have the possibility of using the fabric and pattern you want, the details you want and when you put it together, you start to elaborate, you start to draw, you start to understand who you are from what you're putting in the clothes, for example, I really like the color black, why is it that whenever I go to buy fabric I only buy black fabric? Because I only have black things, you know? Then I stop to understand, it's not just a color, it's a color that represents mourning, the subculture movement, it's a color that bothers, it's remarking, so as you build the clothes, putting your desires into them, you understand your desires. I mean, I'm not liking who I am, the person I want to appear to be, leaving the house and feeling good about my hair, my clothes, a bag or shoes, whatever... when I started to reflect on this, I started to change my stereotype (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

The homogenization of bodies through clothes, fostered by the white cis- heteronormative logic, produces a series of ethical violences that deform

subjects in what is most unique about them, by imposing on them a certain script for dressing that is socially shared by the majority of people who, influenced by the force of consumerism in a capitalist society, consume uncritically, without questioning the meanings and effects of this process on the image they construct of themselves.

Queer sewing is a procedure through which young Bento shows the world how they is choosing to be and, at the same time, “distances themselves from an unbearable present” (Stallybrass, 2008, p. 33). With this, their clothes signal dissidence as a value, creating a “[...] self-portrait capable of expressing various angles of the personality and of reflecting externally both desires and internal conflicts that are not always purposeful or so rationally thought out” (Stallybrass, 2008, p. 14).

This is because the way we dress is not just a form of protection or adornment, but a “kind of language – the translation of identities, desires or even states of mind. The simple use of certain colors can indicate a feeling of an individual or a group” (Stallybrass, 2008, p. 42). The preference of Bento for the color black is not something random, nor does it fall outside of the self-reflexive movements of young people. Black people are among the majority of those killed by the police in Brazil (78%¹²). The black portion of the Brazilian population is 37%¹³ more socially vulnerable than the white population. According to the Brazilian Federal Senate’s website¹⁴, research presented in the final report of the Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito (Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry – CPI) on the Pandemic, showed that the black part of the country’s population was the most affected by the effects of the pandemic. It is the necropolitical logic that makes the death of the black population go from being an eventuality in life to being what the black color of Bento’s clothes refers to.

In addition, the process of self-knowledge triggered by *queer sewing* is evident not only in the refusal of predetermined neoconservative models, but above all in the appreciation of clothes as a vector of meanings that also speaks of political demands. Through “[...] textures, colors and shapes we project our feelings, express our longings, emotions, affections, affinities, concerns and political positions” (Campos; Cidreira, 2020, p. 77). According to Lima (2019), in addition to aesthetic pleasure, individuals can,

through clothing, reaffirm their inclusion or not in certain socio-cultural groups. On this matter, Bento says:

So, when I go back to my essence, to that feeling of liberation, you know, when black people started doing 'Black Power' with their hair and started wearing baggy pants, colorful blouses and phrases that expressed their pain, suffering, they started creating their own rhythm of music (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

We see here how Bento draws on the aesthetic-bodily knowledge produced by the black community in the United States, which gave rise to the expression "black beauty", configured in the body, dance, music and other forms that art takes. As Gomes (2017, p. 83) points out, this is the agency of political movements for equal rights and the fight against racial segregation in the United States, South Africa and Brazil. Celia Regina Silva (2020, p. 22) comments that black clothing and hairstyles "[...] express a contesting protagonism, promoting anti-Eurocentric reflections against ideologies that produce feelings of white superiority and black inferiority". For the author, stigmas such as ugly and bad, imposed on Africans and their descendants, undergo a process of revision by the stigmatized who turn the negative representation, constructed by whites, into a reversal of self-representation, in which "symbols of stigma become symbols of affirmation: *Black is beautiful, I love my Hair*" (Celia Regina Silva, 2020, p. 22-23).

These are re-significations that participate in a contestatory and aesthetic ethic, which oppose hegemonic standards; opening up reflections, bringing silenced voices to the surface, which sculpt black bodies positively affirming their place in the world. For Pereira and Lima (2019, p. 21), thinking about the aesthetic composition of black bodies is "thinking about how this process highlights an adherence to anti-racism as a way of life". The body, with its clothing, contours, gestures and sensibilities, imposes itself on reality to affirm its place in the world.

This body perceived as strange provokes a kind of revenge insofar as its clothes and the sensitivities they arouse help to break with the normalizing racist aesthetic, "provoking shock, the shock of monster", as Campos and Cidreira (2018, p. 129) put it. Borrowing the image of the monster brought up by Campos and Cidreira to analyze Bento's narrative patches, it is possible to see how the signs of monstrosity add to the sensitive processes of self-production through *queer sewing*. The young person's narratives highlight this:

I sew because I need to, I sew because the fashion world doesn't consider a witch, people don't want me in their stores (they want my money, but my presence is never welcome), I sew to remember my ancestry, I sew my body and in the end I create my second skin: the one I wear, the one that helps me to be more 'witchy' in the eyes of society. I like people to be afraid of me, I don't know, I spent a lot of my life dealing with what I didn't want to deal with, today I don't wanna deal with it, I want people to be afraid of me and not talk to me. Before, everyone was very aggressive with me, they said what they wanted, they treated me the way they wanted and when I started wearing my clothes, too black, gothic and exoteric, people started to avoid talking to me, in the street people look at me with a lot of depreciation, I really feel that I have a witch's big nose, I feel that people see me that way, but, it's good because it's a way for me to be seen (Bento, narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, November 29th, 2020).

Cohen (2000, p. 39), when dealing with "human monsters" or, as Foucault (2010, p. 69) called them, "moral monsters", presents the figure of the monster as a regulatory instrument, "the monster exists to demarcate the boundaries that must not be crossed" (Cohen, 2000, p. 42). For the author, the monster establishes the crisis of categories by refusing to be part of the classificatory order of things. Resisting any classification constructed on the basis of a binary opposition, goes beyond the limits of what is permitted and breaks with expectations of human behavior.

For Cohen (2000), monstrosity refers not only to physical aspects, but above all to ways of behaving, of inhabiting the boundary between the known and the unknown, the permitted and the forbidden. In the meantime, Cohen places the monster in a much more organic relationship with society. This is because anyone can be "monstrified" (Peixoto, 2020, p. 109) by simply escaping the established norms.

Bento thus feels like a monster in the face of the accusatory stares that don't allow their body to circulate without being pointed out, weirded out and loathed, because in them the human being seeks a stable image of oneself, even if by contrast. Bento, however, re-signifies:

I think that the words take on a new meaning, I think it's good, because it's not me who considers myself a monster, it's you who considers me, in the case of the person who judges me. I'm going to reframe it, I'm going to take this monster that you say is ugly and call it beautiful. It's a form of resistance that forces that person to create other ways of fighting you (Bento, narrative patch, source: narrative interview).

If, previously, their dissident body was the target of violence and made invisible in what was beautiful and productive, now, through *queer sewing*, a new perception of themselves can be constructed, one that plays with the symbols of the monstrous to enhance their dissident existence in the world, which is effective as a tool for communication, protection and revenge. They says,

To this day I don't know myself, but I find myself in what I see in the mirror and I feel comfortable, I'm aggressive, but I take it as an instinct, don't mess with me, I'll cast a spell on you! (Bento narrative patch, source: self-narrative diary, November 20th, 2020).

Thus, the sensations and feelings invested and generated in the operationalization of *queer sewing* are combined with Bento's other perceptions of themselves through the clothes they produce for themselves. These are the ways in which, through *queer sewing*, the subject produces support to continue existing with dignity in society.

Conclusion

This article problematized the strengthening of gender and race neo-conservatism in order to highlight the different forms of anti-gender and racist discourses in Brazil, which, as a consequence, create scenarios that sometimes intensify the precariousness of black LGBTQIA+ lives, requiring a complex arsenal of strategies to help them survive in safe and powerful ways.

Queer sewing is understood as a strategic way of life. This strategy shows a certain amount of work on oneself on the part of the subject that tells of an ethical way of existing in the world, a process in which not only clothes were produced, but, above all, a way of existing. To this end, conservative models that have historically imposed certain ways of existing in the world were broken. In this process, the black body was used here as the primary input through which *queer sewing* was created. The black body appears as the product of an ethical movement that is, above all, about an "active, daily construction, a making of oneself that requires desire, knowledge, dedication, investment and resistance" (Starosta; Machado, 2020, p. 27) and that is about active ways of interfering in the processes of subjectivation. Creating an image, handling props, manipulating hair, sewing a pat-

tern, adhering to a color, customizing a body are not random choices. As Bento showed us, they were alternatives that mobilized sensations, feelings, reflections on the self, setting in motion a performance of the black LGBTQIA+ body in the diaspora.

Through *queer sewing*, another perception of the self is constructed, one that plays with the symbols of the monstrous, of sensations, in order to enhance its dissident existence in the world. These are the ways in which, through *queer sewing*, the subject produces support to continue existing with dignity in society.

There is evidence of a work on oneself that speaks of an ethical position of occupying the public scene. Producing and being produced by the desire that mobilizes resistance, *queer sewing* demonstrates that, in the interpellative games of power involving the body, gender and race, the subject's position, based on ancestry and the exercise of autonomy, is a fundamental point for producing possibilities for confronting neoconservatism, while at the same time producing a life, an existence.

This ethical position on life, which translates into an ethics of resistance, defines “[...] practices of freedom that make it possible to articulate valid and acceptable forms of individual and collective existence” (Foucault, 2010, p. 265; p. 266). Here, freedom is understood as “a strategic problem, linked to the actions of individuals and power” (Orellana, 2012, p. 39). It is an “effort to rid ourselves of the identity imposed on us and not a struggle to achieve what we really are” (Orellana, 2012, p. 40).

We can therefore conclude that the path of resistance promoted by *queer sewing* involves the process of promoting new forms of subjectivation by refusing the forms of individuality that have historically been imposed on us. All this so that black LGBTQIA+ lives are more possible, more viable and enable new existences and affections.

Notes

- ¹ The acronym LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) is used in social and academic movements to designate the population that is not cis-heteronormative. The “plus” sign at the end of the acronym appears to include other gender identities and sexual orientations that

do not fit the cis-heteronormative pattern, but which are not highlighted before the symbol. The way in which one of the research participants calls themselves led us to the designation *young black LGBTQIA+*. In the narrative fragments provided by the research participants, the acronym has been kept as it is commonly used, mostly the LGBT acronym.

- ² To check out some of the works on “ideology of gender”, see: Pedro Silva (2020), Celia Silva (2020) and Lemos (2017).
- ³ For a critical analysis of the self-called *Escola sem Partido (School Without a Party)* movement, see Penna (2016).
- ⁴ Fictitious name, according to ethical standards in research that aim to preserve the identity of participants as a way of reducing damage and embarrassment.
- ⁵ The way in which Bento names themselves led us to the name *young black LGBTQIA+*. In this formulation, we consider that the acronym LGBTQIA+ does not present a definition of identities that can be fixed in each of the successive segments of the locution. We understand that this is a discursive practice instigated by social movements that put into operation a set of strategically constituted statements to establish games of truth that “[...] take shape in technical sets, institutions, behavioral schemes, in types of transmission and dissemination, in pedagogical forms, which at the same time impose and maintain them” (Foucault, 1997, p. 11).
- ⁶ *Translation Note:* Out of respect for the participant, who declares to be a non-binary person, the neutral plural is used here, avoiding the gendering of pronouns and articles when referring to Bento. Throughout the text, for example, words such as “they is”, “themselves” or “they says” appear, not as a corruption of the cultured norm, but as respect for non-binary identity.
- ⁷ In the context of Foucauldian theory, positions-of-subject would be the result of a successful fixation of the subject to the flow of discourse. However, one must consider the multiple entrances for subjects to assume certain subject-positions available in different discursive practices, including counter-hegemonic ones.
- ⁸ We consider Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) formulation according to which intersectionality is a conceptualization of the problem that seeks to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. Following Collins and Bilge (2021), we assume that what makes an analysis intersectional is not the use of the term or the standard

citations, that is, what intersectionality is, but rather “what intersectionality does”, what an intersectional approach allows us to see and say about social inequalities and power asymmetries in order to invent just forms of existence.

- ⁹ Word popularly used to refer to having sex.
- ¹⁰ RuPaul André Charles (San Diego, November 17, 1960), also known as the Mother of *Drags*, is an African-American black actor, *drag queen*, supermodel, author and singer. He became known in the 1990s when he appeared in a wide variety of television shows, films and music albums. Since 2009, he has produced and presented the reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, for which he has received four Emmy Awards, in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.
- ¹¹ Riachuelo is a Brazilian department store chain belonging to the Guararapes Confecções Group. It is the third largest department store chain in Brazil, after C&A and Lojas Renner.
- ¹² Research available at: <https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/cidadania/2021/04/segundo-pesquisa-78-dos-mortos-pela-policia-sao-negros/>. Accessed on: June 28, 2022.
- ¹³ Research available at: <https://exame.com/brasil/negros-sao-37-mais-vulneraveis-a-pobreza-e-exclusao-no-brasil/>. Accessed on: June 28, 2022.
- ¹⁴ Available at: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/radio/1/noticia/2021/10/29/relatorio-da-cpi-aponta-que-populacao-negra-foi-mais-atingida-durante-a-pandemia>. Accessed on: June 28, 2022.

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Shirley Aparecida de Miranda holds a Master's degree in Education from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (1998), PhD in Education from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (2008) e and a Post-Doctorate in Social Sciences from the Centro de Estudos Sociais, CES/ Universidade de Coimbra (2016). Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Member of the teaching team of the Intercultural Training Course for Indigenous Educators (teaching degree). Deputy Dean of Student Affairs (PRAE/UFMG). Develops research on educational policies and ethnic-racial and cultural diversity with a focus on indigenous education and quilombola education, thematizing race and decolonization of educational processes.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8312-2262>

E-mail: mirandashirley48@gmail.com

Jaime Peixoto da Silva has a degree in Social Sciences from the Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE, 2013). Master's in Education from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG, 2016). PhD in Education from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG, 2022). Sociology teacher in the Minas Gerais state public school system, in Belo Horizonte.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3799-2678>

E-mail: jaime.peixoto@educacao.mg.gov.br

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