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The Via Crucis of the Transvestite Body

MARLON SANTA MARIA DIAS

Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS) – São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.
E-mail: marlon.smdias@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-0175-9217

ALISSON MACHADO

Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM) – Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil.
E-mail: machado.alim@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-1687-7248

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Abstract

This text investigates the mechanisms that facilitate, promote, authorize, and legitimize the violence to which Brazilian transvestites are subjected. The empirical case analyzed is the brutal murder of Dandara Katheryn, which took place in 2017, in Fortaleza (Northeast Brazil). The approach privileges the analysis of different media manifestations and communicative practices of the phenomenon. The methodology articulates documentary and bibliographic research. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's thought, the article develops two analytical operations: collection (selection and arrangement of materials) and montage (an exercise of approximation of different materialities for the description of scenes). From the discussion about the ethical-aesthetic dimension of image writing, the text proposes the Via Crucis (Stations of the Cross) as an interpretive strategy for the social constitution of suffering and specially of transphobia.

Keywords

Transphobia; Suffering; Violence; Image.

Introduction

In June 2015, a performance during the 19th São Paulo LGBT Pride Parade was at the center of a controversy: the actress and model Viviany Beleboni paraded in the top level of a *trio elétrico*¹ with her open arms in a cross, which bore the inscription “STOP HOMOPHOBIA GLBT”, on her head a crown of thorns, a cloth over her hips and body make-up that reproduced bruise and blood trails. This performance referred to a central image of Christian iconography: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. On that same day, Brazilian journalistic websites published photos of the “crucified transvestite”, as she was called. Many profiles on digital networks shared these pictures. Among them, profiles of influential Catholic and Evangelical religious leaders and conservative politicians, who classified the act as a profanation of a religious symbol and “christophobia”. Meanwhile, Beleboni defended herself claiming that she wasn’t intended to offend anyone, but “to represent the violence and the pain that the LGBT community has been through” (G1-SP, 2015, online).

The human figure of a crucified Christ dates to the 6th century (Réau, 2000). Before that, the crucifixion scene was alluded to through the representation of the cross and/or a lamb, but they would omit the most dramatic moment, as it would show the human face of Jesus – which, at that time, was a christological problem: “If Jesus Christ had to sacrifice himself to redeem the sins of humanity and it was necessary to remember that gesture, that, however, should not be done through the vision of his human moment of greatest agony” (Ragazzi, 2020, p. 149). When his dual nature (human and divine) was assumed, the first representations did not show the physical suffering, but a triumphant Christ (*Christus triumphans*), with open eyes, divine because he transcends death. Crucifixion and resurrection became a unique image. Only after the 11th century Christ is represented dead on the cross (*Christus patiens*), with closed eyes, his head down on his shoulders, his body collapsing and blood pouring from his wounds (Réau, 2000). The torture marks on his body prove his suffering, causing commotion and compassion – an important rhetorical recourse to impress the faithful. This is the dominant figure until the 16th century, when a different representation of this suffering appears: Christ nailed to the cross, but still alive, with twisted body, agonizing in pain, looking to the heavens (Ragazzi, 2020).

The image of crucifixion crystallizes the final moment of Stations of the Cross. It was exhaustively represented not only in sacred art, but in different cultural domains. Among those appropriations, Beleboni’s performance is just one. Let us remember, for example, of Madonna on *Confessions Tour* (2006); the album cover *Eu não sou santo* (1990), which brings Bezerra da Silva on the cross, with guns on his hands and waist and a slum in the background, image updated on the album cover *Marcelo D2 canta Bezerra da Silva* (2010); the Banksy’s consumer Jesus (2005) or the Jani Leinonen’s McJesus (2019); the football player Neymar on the *Placar* magazine cover (2012); and *Cruzando Jesus Cristo com Deusa Shiva* (1996), Fernando Baril painting, exposed on the *Queermuseu* exhibition (Porto Alegre, 2017), later censored and canceled; and the Mangueira’s float, on Rio de Janeiro 2020 Carnival, which brought a young black man from the periphery crucified, alluding the Joãosinho Trinta’s Cristo Mendigo, allegory censored on 1989 Carnival, which caused furor when the float entered covered in the venue, with a banner which could be read: “Even prohibited, look after us!” (Image 1).

¹ A hulking vehicle loaded down with massive speakers, popular in Brazilian Carnival and other parades.

Image 1 – Crucifixions



Source: João Castellano/Reuters; Madonna Confessions/YouTube; Wilton Montenegro/BMG; César Martín Tovar/EMI; Banksy/Hexagon Gallery; Haifa Museum of Art; Placar Magazine; Fernando Baril/Reproduction; Alexandre Cassiano/Agência O Globo; Agência Estadão.

The images above (Image 1) link a sign codified by Christianity in other symbolic languages, taking advantage of the suffering sense spread by the Christian narrative. These appropriations show the strength of this sign in contemporary visual culture. They point to both a symbolic (the martyrdom) and an indexical dimension, as they are anchored in the story of the crucifixion to tell another story (Nakagawa, 2015). For all of them referring to a religious symbol, all were refuted by Christian institutions on the charge of disrespect.

Despite the varied conditions of production and circulation, we can consider that all of them proposed ways of re-imagining who the crucified people were and, in addition, indicating sociopolitical forces that forged those crucifixions. This intention is central to Belebóni's performance, which creates an incendiary image by featuring a population that is the preferred target of death policies (Machado & Dias, 2018). The shock of the image displaces it from its traditional meaning while preserving the initial force of the sign, merging the figuration of suffering into a single image body.

Belebóni's performance motivated, to some extent, the writing of this text. If her staging represents the daily violence to which the LGBTQIA+ population is subjected, especially trans women and transvestites, what would be the mechanisms that facilitate, promote, authorize, and legitimize these acts? How to think about the social constitution of this suffering? We propose to investigate these processes from a communication perspective, through an attentive reading of different media manifestations and communicative practices that indicate how such mechanisms appear in the heart of social life.

To do so, we use the idea of the Via Crucis, a term referring to the path that Christ took carrying the cross to Mount Calvary. In this text, the Via Crucis works as a methodological and interpretive operation. The reflection starts from an empirical situation: the brutal murder of Dandara Katheryn, which took place on February 15, 2017, in Fortaleza, Ceará (Northeast Brazil). Perpetrated by a dozen men, on a public road, in broad daylight and in front of several witnesses, the transfemicide gained national visibility when a video of the torture, recorded with a cell phone camera by one of the executioners, was shared on the internet. This situation triggers a set of materials that help us to recompose (textually and analytically) the painful way of Brazilian transvestites.²

² Although we know that transvestite experiences are multiple and cannot be reduced to experiences of

A matter of method

Writing about suffering and violence implies an exercise of reflexivity about ethical-aesthetic issues. The affiliation to a form of writing indicates the understanding modes of scientific work, which demarcates “not only what kind of representation it is possible to create about others and what are our procedures when constructing interpretations, but what kind of criticism and politics we want to do” (Caldeira, 1988, p. 157). By recognizing the positionality of writing, we propose a textuality that plays with the interferences between scientific and fiction writing. Here the notion of fiction does not denote falsity or opposition to truth, but rather suggests “the partiality of cultural and historical truths” (Clifford, 2016, p. 37) and admits that our versions of others are inevitably biased, as are the readings of the text themselves are never neutral (Anzaldúa, 2009).

In view of this, we assume imagination as a critical force that allows a heterodox textual and narrative experiment, a deviant textuality (Silveira, 2019) open to an undisciplined methodological stance (Mombaça, 2016). Despite the fabled structure of this writing, we are dealing with the rawness of a real event. Therefore, we appropriated the mythical narrative structure of the Via Crucis to tell the story of Dandara – precarious, because unfortunately we know little about her beyond the conditions of her death. The allusion to the Via Crucis to deal with the suffering of trans people has already been used in artistic language: in the photographic series *Via Crucis* (2016), Brazilian artist Ariel Nobre portrays his transition, connecting it to Jesus' path through the Stations of the Cross.³

We deal with the media experience of the event, accordingly social and narrative, that refers to the murder of Dandara. The act of writing is at the service of the visibility of an experience that is not self-evident, given that it simultaneously presents and demands interpretation (Scott, 1999). It is admitted that experience is something with what we can learn, never “seized to be repeated, simply, passively transmitted, it [the experience] happens to migrate, recreate, enhance other experiences, other differences” (Lopes, 2002, p. 254).

We are inspired by Walter Benjamin's (2018) thinking about the collection and montage for methodological construction. Based on documentary and bibliographic research, we collected materials related to the case. For the nuclear composition of the narrative, the central sources were a newspaper longform report (Ayer & Bottrel, 2017), a film documentary (Ayer & Bottrel, 2018), a TV show episode (LGBT, 2017) and a statement given by Dandara's mother (Rizzo, 2017). As a tactile and archaeological sensibility, the collecting practice allowed the gathering of a set of materials of different natures: reports, essays, literary fiction, academic research, music, videos, fiction films and documentaries, websites, posts on social networks, advertising pieces, maps, and artistic installations.

Following the Benjaminian strategy of approaching the records together, in order to think of the totality through the fragment, we arranged the elements of the collection, organizing it within the fixed structure of the Via Crucis. Arranging objects is part of the montage exercise, but not only: montage, above all, is constituted by the clash between objects, by exposing differences, by recompositing. In an associative way, we approach the objects, evidencing affinities and convergences. This process of assembling and disassembling guides the construction of the text.

In this imagistic writing (Lopes, 2002), in which each station of the Via Crucis constitutes an image, which goes towards the original, but which is different from it, the reader is invited to face a scene created

suffering, we cannot ignore that Brazil has one of the highest murder rates among this population. Transgender women and transvestites die prematurely – their life expectancy is 35 years, while that of the general population is 75 years. The crimes, cruel in their majority, remain unpunished, as the number of suspects arrested is tiny. Thus, our reading considers the processes of precariousness, subalternity and abjection that characterize the life of this community (Pelúcio, 2009).

³ Retrieved September 4, 2022 from: <https://bit.ly/3yQgTBP>.

through a descriptive exercise. In the Benjaminian sense, the conception of image embraces not only graphic images, such as photography and audiovisual, but also verbal, mental and perceptive images. The unstable statute around the interpretative disputes of an image is also considered. Let's see how Dandara is entered into the criminal justice system:

In the *Reconhecimento Visuográfica de Local de Crime (Crime Scene Reconstruction)* nº 224/2017, a document produced by the Secretary of Public Security and Social Defense of the state of Ceará-SSPDS/CE, it is stated that Dandara had a conduct disorder, which in the document is called "homosexuality". In addition, Dandara is defined as a "drug [crack] user". At the crime scene "no signs of torture were observed" (Cavichioli, 2019, p. 12).

If we agree that the point of view builds the scene, in the police report Dandara's murder is interpreted because of her "conduct disorder". In a similar game of collecting evidence and reconstructing a scene, it is worth remembering that the Via Crucis, as a narrative structure, is a sequential and imagery composition. During Lent, devotees travel through the Stations of the Cross and meditate in litany on Christ's suffering. In this rite, they become witnesses of martyrdom. This expanded notion of witness is also claimed by us here, based on Jeanne Marie Gagnebin's proposition (2006, p. 57) that witness is not only the one who witnessed the event, but also "the one who does not leave, who can hear the unbearable narration of the other and who accepts that his words carry forward, as in a relay, the story of the other".

1st STATION: Dandara is condemned to death

Francisca does not know the exact date, but she remembers the day she caught one of her ten children "dancing just like Gretchen", as one of the brothers denounced. The child replicated the singer's wiggles to the sound of an imaginary *Freak Le Boom Boom*. Perhaps the child believed that inside the noisy TV screen lived that woman, with flowing hair, always wearing very short clothes and boots, who danced on stages lit by vibrant colors. *Je suis la femme*, Gretchen sang between one moan and another. Already intrigued by her son's feminine behavior, Francisca decided to take him to the doctor, who attested upon seeing a penis: it's a man!

The medical certificate only supported the harmful behaviors imposed for the child to behave like a boy, that is, to ensure the cisgender and heterosexual order. What is protected are not the rights of the child, but the sexual and gender norms (Preciado, 2013). When nonconformity is denounced, a war is declared against the effeminate boy, in whose body society's anxieties and fears are projected (Cornejo, 2012). Although these childhoods are crossed by gender regulations, the existence of media repertoires creates an affective engagement and works, to a certain extent, as support anchors for these children (Marconi & Ramalho, 2020). The strength of media imaginaries became evident, even when what they offer is a hegemonic place. Even so, when seeing Gretchen's "superfemale performance" (Bispo, 2019), that effeminate boy was possibly learning bodily gestures, subjecting his own idea of femininity and fabled a repertoire of existential practices.

2nd STATION: Dandara carries her cross

Dandara walks through the streets of Conjunto Ceará, one of the most populous neighborhoods in Fortaleza. Her family moved there when she was still a child, a few years after the opening of the public housing project, whose project moved the poorest populations away from the downtown. She is 42 years old and shows off her very thin body, just over 110.24 lbs distributed in a height of 5'8". Intermittent treatment for HIV weakened her health and made scarce her trips to Iracema Beach, a well-known prostitution spot in the city. By habit, she always carries condoms and sexual lubricants in her

short's pockets.

"Hey, neighbor, it's Dandara. Will you open the gate? Do you have something to give me? If you have money, I accept it too." As she walks down the street, she asks acquaintances for donations. She offers help with housework or grocery shopping. She sells most of the secondhand clothes she earns and gives part of the money to her mother. She dreams of having money to finish the six-room house she lives in with her mother, sister, and niece. The father left home more than 20 years ago because two of his sons were becoming "faggots". In the cis-heteronormative culture, the effeminate boy creates a discursive trope that associates male homosexuality with transsexuality, as well as proving the failure of authority that dishonors the father (Cornejo, 2012).

3rd STATION: Dandara falls the first time

February 15, 2017. Dandara got up from the hammock she slept in when the sun hadn't even risen. She went to the kitchen to make some coffee and told her mother that she was on her way out. She would go to Vitória's house, her childhood friend, whose house she cleans. Dandara's mother said goodbye to her wishing that God would accompany her. After finishing the household chores, she asked her friend, whom she called "my goddess" or "my queen", if she could come back at the end of the day.

It was early afternoon. The temperature exceeded 30 degrees and the movement of clouds announced what would be the wettest February in recent years in Fortaleza. Dandara was resting under the shadow of the treetops. She sat on a concrete bench, supported by shapeless blocks, in an empty lot on the side of the street from her house. The neighbors who were passing by saw her leave there and get on the backseat of a motorcycle piloted by a man. "Hey, guy. Where are you going?", asked one of Dandara's sisters when she saw her in the backseat. She responded smiling: "He's a client of mine... Bye-bye". She waved, jolted by the uneven pavement of the street. They traveled four kilometers to reach the Bom Jardim neighborhood, one of the most violent in Fortaleza. An hour later, Dandara would be dead.

4th STATION: Dandara cries out for her mother

The teenager picks up his cell phone and clicks the camera icon. REC. Recording starts. Manoel Galdino Street, Conjunto Palmares, Bom Jardim, Fortaleza. The boulders on the ground denounce the poor paving. In the background, two large black gates. It is windy, the movement of leaves on a tree indicates. Dandara is in the center of the frame. She appears seated on the ground, bloodied. Three other men appear on the scene. One of them kicks Dandara's face. She falls to the ground. Another young man with a backpack comes close. He stomps on her face, kicking her. There are twelve apostles of truculence. By the time filming begins, the torture session was nearing its end.

A few hours later, a man showed up at Francisca's house asking to see a photograph of Dandara. He wanted to confirm if she was the person who was murdered in Bom Jardim. He looked at the photo but denied it. He went out, crossed the street, and whispered to the neighbors. Francisca felt a pang in her heart. She knew the man had lied. During the aggression, Dandara cried out for her mother.

5th STATION: Nobody helps Dandara

Residents near the crime scene headed in front of their homes when they heard Dandara's screams. They were paralyzed, terrified. People passing by on motorcycles slowed down to watch the scene. One of the neighbors went back inside his house and hid. Like others, he claims to have called the police several times during the thirty minutes that the beating lasted. "Everyone who was watching wanted to help, but how will the person be able to help, right?", says a witness, trying to remove any

guilt from himself, even though the tremors in his legs denounce the discomfort. “They also mark us [for death],” says another neighbor about the killers. The police arrived when Dandara was already dead.

The fear of reporting, of denouncing, of getting involved, of being related to the conflict is characteristic of urban violence (Silva, 2004). In an excerpt from the documentary *Dandara* (2018), which deals with the crime, Francisca tearfully reports the situation of the lack of help while the camera, in a horizontal, unstable, blurred, and high-speed panoramic movement, shows the houses in the neighborhood, creating this environment of helplessness (Image 2). “It shows that everyone who lives nearby... Everyone locked up, afraid”.

Image 2 – Neighborhood overview



Source: Ayer & Bottrel (2018)

6th STATION: Verônica has a similar face to Dandara’s

April 13, 2015. Headline: “Male prisoner rips out jailer's ear in São Paulo and pictures of it circulate on the internet” (Tomaz, 2015). The news item copied from a police report omits that the “male prisoner” was, in fact, the model Verônica Bolina, a black transvestite, who was detained in a police station when she was beaten and tortured in state custody. Verônica bit the jailer's ear after he punched and kicked her. The agents reacted to this even more aggressively. Strangulation attempt with a plastic bag. Pepper Spray. The newspaper published only the picture of the jailer's ear, while other images were spread on digital networks: Verônica with her face disfigured by huge bruises, her hair buzz cut, handcuffed by the feet and hands, half-naked and with her clothes torn.

It is both paradoxical and cruel that, in some sense, the detailed exposition of the violations – like crushed heads, severed genitals, suffering bodies – humanizes the narratives by which these deaths are mourned and the calls for justice are carried out (Efrem Filho, 2016). The shattered bodies and the defaced faces of their humanity (Butler, 2011) become ways for political action to be exercised. Like Dandara, Veronica's mutilated body was exposed by media logics of abjection, subjection, and violence. The circulation of these images, however, was the necessary resource for the articulation of responses from social and institutional actors, mobilized by the atrocity.

7th STATION: Dandara falls the second time

“Faggot without tits”, called her one of the aggressors. “Go, go, beat him,” shouted the others. “Ugly fag”. “They're going to kill the faggot”. “You will die”. “We'll kill you if you get out of here”. Dandara cried and asked them to stop beating. It wasn't the first time she had been assaulted. Years earlier, she was beaten and raped by four men. She managed to get away, but she hardly talked about that day. When she had mentioned her pains, she said that losing her sister was worse. It hadn't been two years since Sheila had died after falling and hitting her head on the floor.

Seven years younger than Dandara, Sheila was also a transvestite. At the age of 25, she went to São Paulo with her sister looking for a job. The work was in prostitution. She spent R\$ 6,500 on silicone

implants, which Dandara never did. One day, Sheila decided to go to Barcelona. Advised by a friend, she told the agents at the airport that she was on vacation and would be staying at a five-star hotel. Suspicious with the little money she carried, they didn't let her leave the airport. Sheila was deported. The sisters lived for ten years in São Paulo and a few more months in Belo Horizonte before returning to Fortaleza, both living with HIV.

Bodies without truce (Silva, 1993), pushed to death in a type of war that starts and repeats itself from a very early age. Bodies to which everything is denied and that are built on fragile – but sustainable and sometimes effective – support networks, both those of friendship and complicity (Reidel, 2013) and those forged by illegal police extortion and pimping (Benedetti, 2005; Pelúcio, 2009). Bodies established on the sale of pleasure, but also read in the scars and razor cuts, in the tattoos that cover brutalities, in the bodily inflammations that move from one place to the other in their body, in the bruises that are daily made up, in the exhaustion as they come directly from one client to serve another. Like the wretched sisters of Lazarus “The Leper”, whose wounds, in the parable, were licked by dogs to assuage the pain, they continue to be licked, but for the excitement of those who can pay or whoever has the power to violate them, to the taste of each unspeakable desire in the light of prevailing moralities. Abject body (Kristeva, 2004) of those many who, subjected to human trafficking, also venture into a hope beyond the sea, as Gisberta did when she went to Europe.

In 2021, the brutal and cruel murder of Gisberta completes 15 years: she is forgotten, when not ignored by most Brazilians or remembered only in specific moments and, very often, in a romanticized way, when sung in the voice of Maria Bethânia, in a song by Pedro Abrunhosa – Balada de Gisberta. Inattentive ears did not realize that Gisberta was a transvestite victim of hatred, which reminds us of the reality that many trans people, especially transvestite and transgender women, know well, but which until then remained invisible and had impunity as a rule. (Benevides & Cunha, 2020, p. 15).

8th STATION: Dandara meets the transvestites from Brazil and Latin America

The Argentinean actress and writer Camila Sosa Villada (2021) tells in literature her life story, her gender transition, and the time when, in her youth, she lived with other transvestites in Parque Sarmiento, in Córdoba. It is in the description of the character Aunt Encarna, mother and guardian of all of them, that three elements are revealed: transvestites have a homeland; they are forced to inhabit a territory where they risk living under the logic of a system with multiple layers of violence and this same narrative of war and death crosses all their bodies:

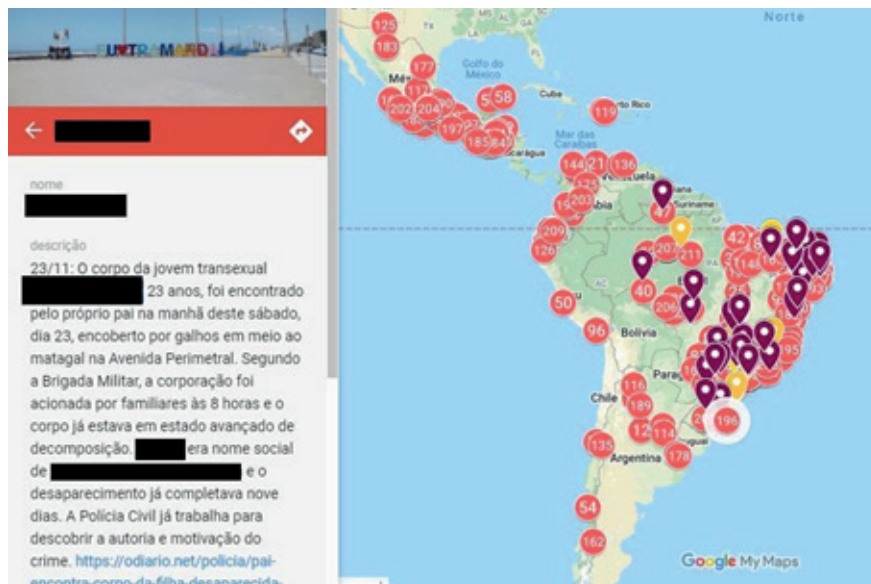
If anyone wants to do a reading of our homeland, this homeland for which we swore to die in every anthem sung in the schoolyards, this homeland that took away the lives of young people in its wars, this homeland that buried people in concentration camps, if anyone wants to an accurate record of that shit, should then see Aunt Encarna's body. We are that as a country too, the relentless damage to the body of transvestites. The mark left on certain bodies, in an unfair, causal and avoidable way, that mark of hate [...] those bruises were because of the airplane oil with which she had modeled her body, that Italian mamma's body that fed her, that paid for the electricity, the gas, the water to water that yard beautifully overgrown with vegetation, that yard that was the continuation of the Parque, just as her body was the continuation of a war (Villada, 2021, p. 26-27).

A homeland is not defined solely by its geographical borders. There are many edges and river deltas that intertwine and dispute in the territory itself, in language, in culture, in the distribution of resources and in the entire necrobiopolitical system of governance (Bento, 2018). In this country that legitimizes transvestites mainly as synonymous with sexual exploitation, which finds its heyday in Carnival

(Lanz, 2017), they are stripped of their dignity in the most diverse ways: in the legal helplessness and inefficiency of carrying out the required demands; in family abandonment; in childhood sexual violence; in community contempt; in police and institutional violence; in school evasion, which prevents them from formal work; subjectivized in the culture of ridicule or danger; in the memes of TV shows, which combine news and mockery; when they appear naked and torn apart in crime photographs in the news; and even dead, imprisoned in morgues awaiting a defining report or buried in the outrage of a genre and a name that for a short period or never belonged to them.

Recognizing the murder of transvestites as a crime against the homeland places us in a double game of words: we are transformed into “death counters” (Martins, 2017, p. 32), in the sense of both enumerating and narrating the cases.⁴ The dossiers of the Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais (Antra)⁵ and the Cartografia Latino America y Caribe do Observatorio Lac⁶ work in this direction, mapping a vast territory of murders. The map from Observatorio Lac (Image 3) exemplifies how transphobia does not respect national borders. In this tool – always unfinished because it starts from underreporting and depends on confirmation by news and police incident reports – it is possible to locate the number of cases, the name of the victim, sometimes their photograph and the description of the crime.

Image 3 – Map that counts deaths



Source: Google My Maps/Observatorio Lac

Caption: The body of young transsexual ██████████ 23 years old, was found by her own father this Saturday morning, the 23rd, covered by branches in the middle of the woods on Perimetral Avenue. According to the Military Brigade, the corporation was called by family members at 8 am and the body was already in an advanced state of decomposition. ██████████ was ██████████'s social name and had been missing for nine days. The Civil Police is already working to find out the authorship and motivation for the crime.

Projects like this resume the murders in the hope that they “do not summarize the dead transvestites in a number”. If, on the one hand, the number highlights and individualizes the cases, on the

⁴ In Portuguese Language, the word “contador” refers both to the counter of something enumerable (in this case, the death numbers) and storyteller (“contador de histórias”). That is why the authors mention this game of words, which cannot be found in the English Language.

⁵ Retrieved on September 1, 2021 from: <https://antrabrasil.org/assassinatos/>.

⁶ Retrieved on September 1, 2021 from: <https://bit.ly/3I5pkEe>.

other hand, it isolates the crime from the web of events, factual, symbolic, and territorialized operations that displace it in the networks in which the inequality that leads to death is produced. When it is not the State who transgresses, it is complicit with its compassionate laws, ensuring the environment of impunity that makes the act repeatedly enforceable. Individual, in this relation, is just the immobile body. The plots of these events are collective and cooperative: subjects attack, shoot, stab, kill, but in the culture of “cities that murder” (Martins, 2017, p. 32).

9th STATION: Dandara is stripped of his garments

The camera zooms in on Dandara's face. The yellow color of the dyed hair mixes with the red of the blood all over her face. She tries to wipe her face with the blouse that her executioners had already ripped off. Sitting on the floor, wearing only a pair of jeans shorts, she cries out: "Don't hurt me anymore, please".

In the installation art *The Good Garden* (2018), Nayara Leite explores the close-up of Dandara's face (Image 4), editing the image of her martyrdom in red, with her name written in white in a stripe across her eyes. The image is reproduced 136 times, with the names and stories of other trans people murdered in 2017 in Brazil. Reproduction revives Via Crucis of those people, even those who could not be identified. The images pluralize and collectivize Dandara's request. It is as if they all cry out: "*Don't hurt us anymore, please*". A request that echoes 137 times: *Don't kill us*.

Image 4 – Repeated stories



Source: Nayara Leite (2018)

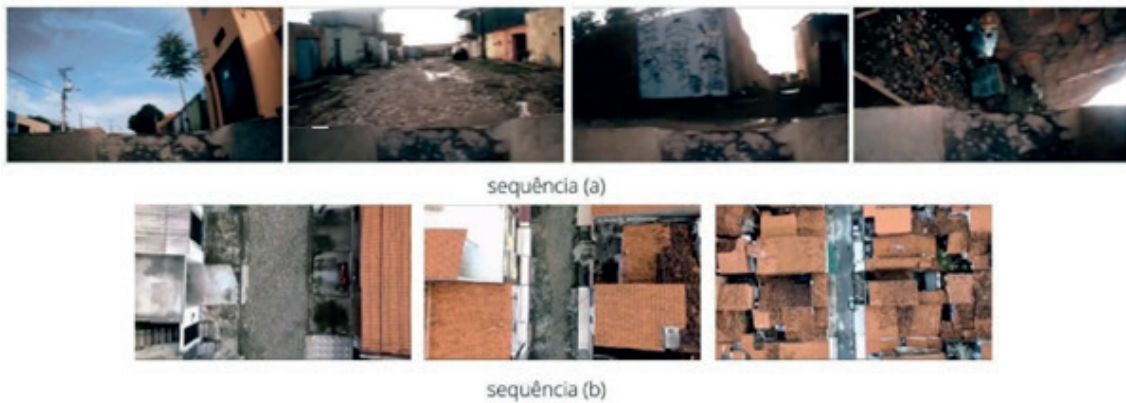
10th STATION: Dandara falls for the third time

One of the aggressors brings a wheelbarrow and places it next to Dandara. He orders her to get on. Another man points and yells, “Get on! Get on! Aren’t you listening to me, faggot?”. A third man appears and uses a flip-flop to slap her on the head. The one who brought the wheelbarrow holds it while Dandara tries to get up but fails. Whoever films mocks: “Get on soon! Filthy, wearing panties and everything.” Her exhausted body falls. Seeing that Dandara wouldn't have the strength, two men threw her into the pushcart. Another aggressor appears with a blue wooden board the length of his height. He takes a few strokes with the wood in Dandara. The recording ends after 1 minute and 20 seconds.

In *Dandara* (2018), for 1 minute and 8 seconds, a subjective camera puts us inside the wheelbarrow and travels the same path of irregular stones and muddy ground until we are thrown into the alley where the murder took place (Image 5, sequence (a)). Our point of view is framed by the metal rim of the wheelbarrow and the camera shakes because of the rough ground. The feature of projecting the spectator into the victim's place is disturbing, but we end this experience physically unharmed. We walk the path in the condition of those who leave it alive. The camera embodies the victim's point of view, in order to sensitize the spectator, although it cannot escape, in this narrative strategy, the reification of violence.

These diffuse notions of victimism, coitadismo [something like victimism too] and denunciismo [exaggerated complaint] that arise in the face of any storytelling ignore the transvestite experience itself in its radicality. The processes of violence and vulnerability experienced by the transvestite population are so terrifying that only general data such as deaths and torture gain a little attention from the media and the public – in a great freak show that denounces the systemic structure of exclusion and exotification of their mutilated bodies, often naked to remember that that body should not exist or be accepted as human (York et al., 2020, p. 3).

Image 5 - From where you look

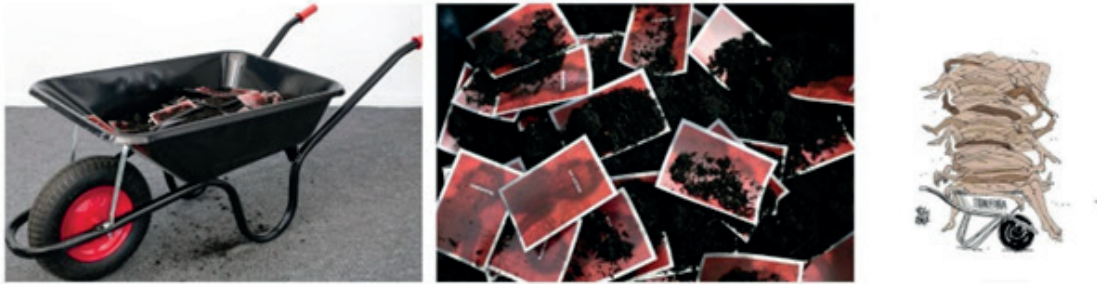


Source: Ayer & Bottrel (2018)

In the aerial images that are part of sequence (b), we perceive the street as a straight, narrow line, flanked by orange roofs. We see no corners, no crossroads, no bifurcations, but a kind of slaughterhouse that only makes it possible to go straight ahead. There are no alleys, transversals, drifts or escape routes, only an impartial straight line on which Dandara is led to her death.

Returning to *The Good Garden* (Image 6), we see the wheelbarrow again, now from another perspective: on a solid, grayish ground, but containing inside it dirty mixed with the images from Image 4. Also, different from the worn metal that we see in the bottom surface of sequence (a), Nayara Leite's wheelbarrow is new, varnished in black and red, converting it into a war machine. In this version of the Via Crucis, there is no one alive to make the journey. Into the dirty, they are all already dead. The wheelbarrow becomes a mass grave whose remains can still be seen. There is no dignity in this burial. This image converges with the one produced by the artist Matheus Ribs (2017), who stacks several bodies in a wheelbarrow so that we can read the word "TRANSPHOBIA". A series of questions, beyond the evidence of transfemicides, arises: what to do with these corpses? Where to transport them? Is this a disposal? Who, after all, pushes such a monstrous object?

Image 6 – Wheelbarrows



Source: Nayara Leite (2018); Ribs (2017)

11th STATION: Dandara is nailed to the cross

The young man turns off the camera and runs in the company of the other men carrying Dandara. They walk down the street until they reach an alley, throwing her into the alley, among pastures and remains of broken brick. They start to stone her. *Maldita Geni!*⁷

12th STATION: Dandara dies on the cross

Religious, Dandara used to frequently chant "Glory to God!" (Cavichioli, 2019). In the end, she asked for mercy.

Dandara died with a stone to the head and two shots to the face. *Why have you forsaken me?*

In the film *Indianara* (2019), we follow the routine of the activist and social educator who titles the documentary. The film's dramatic tension increases with the imminent eviction proceedings of Casa Nem, a project coordinated by the protagonist that welcomes LGBTQIA+ people in situations of social vulnerability. The apprehension is heightened by the context of the filming: in 2018, in the Dilma Rousseff's post-impeachment scenario, a climate of fear and unrest takes over the country with the assassination of councilwoman Marielle Franco and her driver, Anderson Gomes, at the same time that a far-right government announces itself with the election of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of Brazil. In one of the sequences, Indianara Siqueira separates several bags with pamphlets, handouts, notes, booklets, photographs, and other old materials for sorting. She finds a notebook sheet and reads it to her accompanying friend:

Indianara: Ah, this one was from when I was surveying the murdered transvestites. I used to stay up in the morning doing it. Maqueti Castro, transgender, 24 years old, murdered by hanging; Denis Brandão, 24 years old, shot to death; Dafne, 22 years old, shot dead; Trans, 27 years old, shot dead; Camila, murdered by asphyxiation, 19 years old; Stabbed to death, unidentified, to be clarified; Samanta, 30 years old, stabbed to death; Giovana, 34 years old, stabbed to death; Tiffany, 33 years old; Terezinha, 46 years old, stabbed to death; Karen Alanis, 23 years old, murdered by beating (Chevalier-Beaumel & Barbosa, 2019).

She crumples up the paper and says she is tired of the sad memories. She puts it away along with

⁷ "Maldita Geni" is a verse from "Geni e o Zepelim", a song by Brazilian composer Chico Buarque. The composition tells the story of Geni, a prostitute excluded and discriminated against by the city's residents. One day, a zeppelin arrives, and the commander threatens to destroy the city unless Geni spends a night with him. The citizens beg Geni to save the city and she accepts. Soon after the zeppelin leaves, the townspeople return to mistreat her as before. A well-known line from this song is "Joga pedra na Geni" (throw a stone at Geni). "Maldita Geni" can be translated as "Damned Geni", an exclamation that she is an indecent woman. In some interpretations of the song, Geni is a transvestite.

other materials that will burn in a bonfire. We are not facing the fire of condemnation or the purging of sins, but a silent farewell, a symbolic cremation of those who left by way of violence. In the scene, the character feeds the flames with these materials, body-memories of the murdered transvestites. These are stories of different people, but they meet each other in the similarity of how they were killed. There are loose sparks and the crackling that absorbs into the night the semblance of dignity with which the characters watch the fire (Image 7).

Image 7 – Symbolic Cremation



Source: Chevalier-Beaumel & Barbosa (2019)

13th STATION: Dandara is taken down from the cross

Dandara's case gained national attention 16 days after her murder, due to the circulation of the video on the internet. The news reported that the transvestite “Dandara dos Santos” had been beaten and killed by a group of men in the outlying ghettos of Fortaleza. Francisca once asked her daughter why she had chosen the name Dandara Katheryn. “It's an international name,” she replied. Francisca doesn't understand why the press writes “dos Santos”, since the family's surname is Ferreira de Vasconcelos. One of her granddaughters believes it's because Dandara is going to become a saint. As a martyr who does not renounce herself and as a victim of the cis-heteronormative culture, she is murdered without strength or chance for defense, tortured and brutalized as in several Christian narratives that precede the beatification.

So far, no miracles have been attributed to Dandara. Contrary to so many deaths, there seems to be an ongoing project not of sanctification, but of commitment to not forgetting these murders. The miracle consists in reminding and fighting for the acceptance of recognition. The project of the historian and visual artist Sy Gomes, in this sense, interrogates the violence on billboards spread along the avenues of Fortaleza. According to the artist, unlike the memory of white men, remembered in metal, in eternal material, such as the names of streets and squares, busts and statues, the memories of transvestites deaths are eminently ephemeral and urban – hence the choice of the materiality of the billboard (Martins, 2020). The work of art establishes a dialogue with the sale of consumer goods and lifestyles, the primary objective of this type of advertising piece, which, otherwise, could offer sex work like classifieds ads in newspapers and specialized websites. But, when looking for living transvestites (Image 8-a), the engineering of death is advertised. Furthermore, the emphasis on the repetition of the word “alive” shifts the status of living not only to the condition of a living being, but to the circumstances of the dignity with which that life could be lived.

Image 8 – Public Memories



Source: Muriel Cruz/ G1; Amigos de Pelotas; Semana Diversidade Pelotas
Caption: (a): Looking for alive alive alive transvestites in the state of Ceará.
(c): Where is the sign of transvestite Juliana Martinelli?

The right to memory is in dispute in cis-heteronormative culture. On January 29, 2019, a street sign was inaugurated in Pelotas (Southern Brazil) in honor of the transvestite and activist Juliana Martinelli, who died in 2017 (Image 8-b). Achieved by organizations and movements for LGBTQIA+ rights, the sign was attached to a traditional prostitution point in the city. Less than a month later, the *Semana da Diversidade Pelotas* page on Facebook released a video asking about the disappearance of the sign. In it, the narrator tells a little about Juliana's political performance and shows that the plate was ripped off (Image 8-c). In the footage, you can only see the signs with the names of the previous streets and the empty space where the one with Juliana's name was. Next to the pole, white flowers and ribbons were placed in tribute. This is also the case in Santiago (Chile), as described by Claudia Rodríguez (2016, p. 25). There, garbage and transvestites are considered contaminated objects that should, by obligation, disappear on their own. Santiago feigns “a blindness that passes through all of us, pressing us to leave, inch by inch, calculatedly, the city” and, even more, it silences the *city* that each transvestite carries with them.

14th STATION: Dandara is laid in the tomb

When Sheila died, Francisca had to bury her daughter's body in a borrowed tomb in the Bom Jardim neighborhood – the family's tomb, in Antônio Bezerra, was already full. Dandara would also have to be buried in Bom Jardim and this fact made Francisca despair. She couldn't stand having to go to the neighborhood where her daughter was murdered every time she wanted to visit her grave. To take that path would be to relive all the suffering. The mother raised R\$1,500 from neighbors and friends and managed to bury her in another cemetery. The neighborhood attended the funeral on a bus chartered by a friend. Dandara's wake was held with the coffin closed. Only her baptismal name appears on the tomb.

As a fable that reverses the circumstances of this burial, in *A Dama do Estácio* (2012), Zulmira, an old cisgender prostitute, becomes obsessed with the idea of owning a coffin so she can die in peace. She dated Timbira, the owner of a funeral home, who guaranteed the coffin but wouldn't allow it to stay at their house. She ends up going back to the nightlife. With the help of her best friend, the transvestite Suely, her friend's boyfriend and another partner, Joel, a funeral home employee, they steal the coffin. In the final sequence of the film (Image 9), Zulmira, dressed as a bride, Suely and Joel parade with the coffin in an open truck. As in a carnival float, they celebrate the overthrow of death dancing to a song by Noel Rosa, *O 'x' do Problema*, in the voice of Aracy de Almeida.

Image 9 – Allegory of death



Source: Ades (2012)

Owner of her coffin – therefore dominating death – the prostitute, from then on virgin, and the duo celebrate the joy of someone who can choose to die in peace. They are followed by several people who celebrate the procession until the truck disappears around a corner. Like a carnival allegory, this stylistic ritual not only inverts social hierarchies for a period but renews bodies through costumes (Bakhtin, 1999). Death is celebrated because it is welcomed. The street becomes a sambadrome, the funeral procession that follows the float represents those who live. The coffin, also closed, is empty, because it corresponds to the object of desire of the living character. It is only in the joy of welcoming death that prostitutes find the freedom to parade through the city.

Final remarks

In the 1980s, the Brazilian transvestite, multi-artist and activist Claudia Wonder realized that the song *Walk on the wild side*, by Lou Reed, was about marginalized characters: migrant transvestites, sexually violated women, prostitutes, gigolos, starving people, and those who used drugs to create other imaginaries, even if ephemeral. Everyone got out of the situation they were in and took a risk on the “wild side”. In *Barra Pesada*, a Portuguese version sung by Wonder in Truque Sujo band, she inserts the figure of Christ on the Stations of Cross of the transvestite body: “Jesus era chave de cadeia/ Era o preferido do xerife/ Mas ele não esquentava/ Nem quando sangrava/ E com a boca melada/ Ele lambia e engolia/ Toda essa barra-pesada/ Engolia toda essa barra-pesada” (Wonder, 2021 [198?]).

Jesus era chave de cadeia. [Jesus was a troublemaker]. A problematic figure, an outlaw, a challenger of tradition, fighting with the dishonest, a defender of the poor, the sick, the hungry, and the prostitutes, he confronted the rich and the powerful, a messenger of equality and social justice.

Era o preferido do xerife. [He was the sheriff's favorite]. The son of a god.

Mas ele não esquentava/ Nem quando sangrava. [But he didn't care/ Not even when he bled]. Even before he was born, fleeing to Egypt and then to Galilee, and before he was condemned to death, Jesus was already on the “other side”, facing the wild side. Sentenced, subjected to a series of actions of pain and suffering, he followed his purpose of giving his own life, going through trial by ordeal until death. He remained to hold firm, but not without agony, to the will of his Father. In this story, the road to death is a plot for which there is no escape. However, in Wonder's song, this path is unfolded.

E com a boca melada/ Ele lambia e engolia/ Toda essa barra-pesada/ Engolia toda essa barra-pesada. [And with a sticky mouth / He licked and swallowed / All this hard stuff / Swallowed all this hard stuff.] With his mouth Jesus sips, licks and swallows pain, suffering and death. Through the mouth, the painful way also becomes a way to pleasure. The metaphor here is accurate: *barra-pesada*⁸ represents (licking) the penis and (swallowing) the semen during oral sex, a common and hurried modality in the routine of anonymous and clandestine in clubs, saunas, and porn cabins, in public restrooms, on the side of highways, in urban parks, on the trails and in the woods, and when performing sex work. *Barra-pesada*

⁸ In Portuguese, “barra-pesada” is a slang term used to refer to both a troubled person and a difficult situation to deal with.

also refers to the force of order of a system that hierarchizes and normalizes sex (Rubin, 2017), which at the same time plays between desire and condemnation, from which there seems to be no way out. It refers, therefore, to the contexts of multiple forms of violence, insecurity, and subalternity to which these groups are subjected.

Jesus and Dandara have in common the fact that both were kissed by treacherous lips and sentenced by men on a fine line, deliberately political, if not fanciful, which sometimes separates and sometimes mixes human laws and wills and divine laws and wills. For more than two thousand years, the story of Christ has renewed its notoriety in the uninterrupted reproduction of the images of nativity and death on the cross. No one knows if, by agreeing to the announcer angel, the Virgin Mary would have had any idea of the painful path through which her son would go. A faithful devotee of this narrative and even more fearful, for having become pregnant in the same way as the Virgin, Maria das Dores, in Clarice Lispector's short story (1998), feared for the future that her son would face. Francisca, mother of Dandara and Sheila, also did not know whether her children had to walk the Via Crucis. In some way, *every transvestite does*.

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Marlon Santa Maria Dias is a temporary professor at the School of Communication and Creativity of the Community University of the Chapecó Region (Unochapecó). He holds a PhD in Communication Sciences from the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos) and a master's degree in Communication from the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM). Marlon is part of the Cyberevent Research Laboratory (LIC/Unisinos/CNPq). In this article, he contributed with the conception of the research design; development of the theoretical discussion; interpretation of the data; supporting in the text review; writing of the manuscript and revision of the foreign language version.

Alisson Machado is a professor at the Graduate Course in Gender Studies at the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM). He holds a PhD and a master's degree in Communication from UFSM. In this article, he contributed with the conception of the research design; development of the theoretical discussion; interpretation of the data; supporting in the text review; writing of the manuscript and revision of the foreign language version.