

Original Article

# Na EKO na EBA, goes and comes from immigration: daily, identity and demands of African immigrants' university students<sup>1</sup>

*Na EKO na EBA - o vai e vem da imigração: cotidiano, identidade e demandas de imigrantes africanos estudantes universitários*

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** By embracing cultural diversity, human rights, and social justice – in its practice and knowledge production –, occupational therapy has been interested in discussing the theme of Africa, problematizing different contemporary social dynamics. **Objective:** To understand the trajectory, the construction of identity, and the demands of young African immigrant university students. **Method:** Qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews for data collection and thematic content analysis. **Results:** The first category, “Culture, identity, and daily life: crossing the Black Atlantic”, encompasses the perception of young people about otherness and cultural differences/identifications between Brazil and Africa in their daily lives. The second, “A country of hunters?': prejudice, discrimination and colonial imaginary” dealt with reports of discrimination in everyday life and the imaginary about Africa in Brazil; The last category, “The house belongs to the other': institutional support/helplessness and coping strategies”, discusses the conditions of reception and permanence of the African immigrant student at the university. **Conclusion:** The trajectory of African students goes through institutional care, and social and relational needs, which overlap in daily life, culture, and academic performance, emphasizing the experience of racial discrimination inside and outside the university that guides otherness in the construction of subjectivity of young people. The appreciation of African themes demonstrates a tendency of the profession to seek new epistemes and decolonial theoretical-methodological constructions that produce other looks for human

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action in the tension of culture and power relations established by the modern world system.

**Keywords:** Human Migration, Cultural Diversity, University, Occupational Therapy.

### **Resumo**

**Introdução:** Ao abarcar a diversidade cultural, os direitos humanos e a justiça social – na sua prática e na produção de conhecimento –, a terapia ocupacional tem se interessado em discutir a temática da África problematizando diferentes dinâmicas sociais contemporâneas. **Objetivo:** Compreender a trajetória, a construção da identidade e as demandas de jovens imigrantes africanos estudantes universitários. **Método:** Abordagem qualitativa, utilizando entrevistas semiestruturadas para coleta de dados e análise de conteúdo temática. **Resultados:** A primeira categoria, “Cultura, identidade e cotidiano: atravessando o Atlântico Negro”, abarca a percepção dos jovens acerca da alteridade e diferenças/identificações culturais entre Brasil e a África no cotidiano vivido. Na segunda, “Um país de caçadores?: preconceito, discriminação e imaginário colonial”, tratou-se de relatos de discriminação no cotidiano e o imaginário sobre a África no Brasil. Já a última categoria, “A casa é do outro: apoio/ desamparo institucional e estratégias de enfrentamento”, discute as condições de recepção e permanência do estudante imigrante africano na universidade. **Conclusão:** A trajetória dos estudantes africanos perpassa por necessidades institucionais assistenciais, sociais e relacionais, que imbricam no cotidiano, na cultura e no desempenho acadêmico, ressaltando-se a vivência da discriminação racial dentro e fora da universidade que pauta a alteridade na construção da subjetividade dos jovens. A valorização dos temas africanos demonstra uma tendência da profissão em buscar novas epistemes e construções teórico-metodológicas decoloniais que produzam olhares-outros para o fazer humano no tensionamento da cultura e das relações de poder estabelecidos pelo sistema-mundo-moderno.

**Palavras-chave:** Migração Humana, Diversidade Cultural, Universidade, Terapia Ocupacional.

## **Introduction**

Historically, the first migratory flow of Africans to Brazil coincides with the forced diaspora of black enslaves during Portuguese colonization in the context of the growth of the capitalist market. This process forges the pillars of the colonial world-modern system, placing Europe – whose cultural assumptions are assumed to be universal – at the center of geopolitical power (Quijano, 2005). For more than three centuries, the colonial system moved between Africa and Brazil about 4 million black enslaves. Therefore, slavery came to play a central role in the formation of the country and the dynamics of Brazilian culture (Patarra & Fernandes, 2011).

The idea of race invented based on the Eurocentric perspective of modern rationality constitutes a political-social construction that adopts the idea of racial inferiority as a

discourse in favor of colonialism as a structure of power: it is the assumption in which a system of exploitation and exclusion – racism was organized (Hall, 2011).

Under the history of the demographic expulsion from Europe and the United Kingdom's restrictions on the slave trade, the Brazilian State, even before abolition, prioritized European labor, encouraging the arrival of mainly Italians for agricultural work: from the 11 million Europeans who migrated to Latin America, 38% were Italians against 28% Spaniards and 11% Portuguese (Cánovas, 2004). This preference for the labor of European immigrants, added to an abolition of slavery that did not offer guarantees of social inclusion, pushed blacks, previously enslaved, to the margins of the current structurally racist society, relegating them to the harmful social consequences of the colonizer process.

In 1937, the Federal Constitution limits the entry into Brazil of certain races or origins, openly safeguarding European immigration. Supported by this Constitution, Decree 383/1938 was issued, which vetoes foreigners from exercising political activities in the country. On the eve of World War II, Vargas also issues a decree that consolidates the entire legal situation of the foreigner. In this document, a list of immigrants whose nationalities would no longer be admitted is published, giving the Government the power to limit, for economic and social reasons, the entry of individuals of certain races/origins (Milesi, 2007). In these acts, the country's bourgeoisie mobilized for the eugenics of the nation, seeking to interrupt African immigrants during the middle of the 20th century, a period in which this continent was going through anti-colonial struggles in several countries (Tcham, 2012).

With the world wars, there is a loss of the rights of immigrants, and many nations started to establish limits on the migratory processes (Milesi, 2007). In 1945, Decree-law number 796, in its article 2, establishes in the admission of immigrants the need to preserve and develop, in the ethnic composition of the population, the most convenient characteristics of their “European ancestry” (Milesi, 2007).

Only in 1960, Brazil would establish agreements with African countries: the immigration of Africans from countries that gained administrative/political autonomy was allowed to study, inaugurating a new migratory modality (Tcham, 2012). In 1980, the Foreigner Statute created during the Military Regime was approved, a period in which the country experienced democratic restrictions. Based on the 1967 Constitution, the Foreigners' Statute was not created based on a vision grounded in human rights, being this the main document that regulated immigration to the country (Milesi, 2007). However, with the enactment of the Federal Constitution of 1988 – guided by principles based on respect for human dignity, citizenship, and the prevalence of human rights in international relations – the Statute no longer has a constitutional basis (Milesi, 2007).

In 2000, the number of African immigrants coming to Brazil was estimated at around 1000 people. In 10 years, that number jumped to 35,000, mostly from countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria (Faria, 2019). In November 2017, Law number 13,445 establishes migration as a right, making explicit the rejection of xenophobia, racism, and other forms of discrimination. In article 4, the law proclaims the inviolability of the right to life, liberty and security, and property, assuring immigrants the right to civil and cultural liberties, among others. By replacing the Foreigner Statute, the new law establishes the rights and duties of

immigrants, regulates their entry and stay in the country, and establishes principles and guidelines for public policies (BR-Visa Migration Solutions, 2017).

In June 2020, based on data from the International Traffic System managed by the Federal Police, the International Migration Observatory announced that, in that year, among the prominent African countries with a record of requesting recognition of refugee status in the annual report, there were 1.2% from Angola, 0.7% from Nigeria and 0.7% from Senegal (Cavalcanti et al., 2020).

Considered a migratory modality, we observed today that part of the African population in Brazil is linked to public and private education institutions (Tcham, 2012). An example of these technical agreements signed in Brazilian universities to receive African students is the Student Program – Graduation Agreement (PEC-G-*Programa de Estudantes – Convênio de Graduação*). Officially created in 1965 by decree 55,613 and administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Division of Educational Issues and the Ministry of Education, this program offers students from developing countries in which Brazil has an educational, cultural, or scientific-technological opportunity to carry out their undergraduate studies in the country. The program supports students from other countries at a time of increased immigration to Brazil, unifying the conditions of student exchange and guaranteeing similar treatment to students by universities, with Africa being the continent of origin of most students, with 76% (BR-Visa Migration Solutions, 2017). The problem of the African student in Brazilian institutions should configure an important object of systematic academic and scientific reflection (Coelho & Silva, 2015).

### **Human rights, interculturality, identity, and social justice**

Before formulating the issue of cultural identity in the globalized world, which imposes its particularities on the production of collective subjects in contemporary times, it is necessary to review the critique of the formulation of the notion of human rights: these rights – as universal as they are abstract – were, after all, written by whom and for whom?

Santos & Martins (2019) emphasize the western monocultural origin of human rights, anticipating the northcentral and hegemonic character in its formulation since its origins in linear historical narratives carried out by Europe and the USA. As an example of the historical paradoxes surrounding the Western construction of human rights, it is enough to remember that, during the European Enlightenment bourgeois revolutions in the 18th century, “freedom, equality and fraternity” were touted at the same time that thousands of black Africans were enslaved, forcibly transported across the Atlantic, and had their lives cut short by the colonial regime that sustained the foundations of capitalism and the economic enrichment of Europe. Historically congruent with the global order – and forged, in one of its narrative origins, during the most extensive forced immigration that took place in the modern era – the supposedly universal formulation of human rights proves incapable of “[...] confronting the systematic injustices caused by the capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy” (Santos & Martins, 2019, p. 13).

When considering the fundamental human right to come and go in the scenario of a globalized world, cultural diversity is guided as a prominent axis in the discussion

about a counter-hegemonic notion of human rights guided by the Global South, covering migratory and cultural rights in perspective of social justice. Immigrant populations that inhabit countries geopolitically defined as “North” in search of dignity are also part of the people of the “South”. What best defines the South is “[...] the fact that it has been silenced” (Santos & Martins, 2019, p. 15). In this way, it is a challenge to listen to these resistances and complex ways of life in the face of the dynamics of the contemporary phenomenon of globalization and mass immigration (Santos & Martins, 2019).

It is necessary to note that the conventional conception of human rights is monocultural and ostensibly excludes a significant part of humanity by ignoring, in its universal and civilizing arrogance, the founding violence of Eurocentric modernity (Santos & Martins, 2019). Therefore, a counter-hegemonic conception of human rights should be expressed based on interculturality and ecology of knowledge: In the sieve of intercultural translation, human rights are “[...] convened for a dialogue with cultures, theologies and agendas policies that take them out of place, bringing them closer to the South and the struggles for existence” (Santos & Martins, 2019, p. 24). In this ecological and intercultural conception of human rights, the so-called emerging humanities are constituted by those that keep in their cultural legacy a history of resistance to the capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal oppressions founded in the modern era (Santos & Martins, 2019).

At the heart of the articulation of these concepts around counter-hegemonic human rights, interculturality, and social justice, we contextualize the phenomenon of the African diaspora and the dynamism of social identity processes arising from the migratory flows of black Africans. The unregulated flows of peoples and cultures are as vast and as unstoppable as the sponsored flows of capital and technology (Hall, 2011). Therefore, it is important to see this diasporic perspective of culture as a subversion of traditional nation-oriented cultural models. Like other processes, cultural globalization is deterritorializing in its effects (Hall, 2011).

Cultural identity can be understood as a “feeling of belonging to realities” and a “set of shared meanings”: it is positioning and not an essence, and can be formed by changing and continuous meanings in the life of the individual (Hall, 2011). In this sense, cultural identities, for the author, are unstable points of identification or suture, produced within the discourses of culture and history. In our reflections, the notion of postmodern fragmented identity forged in the dynamics of globalization does not erase the sense of cultural resistance of the emerging humanities that enclose in their legacies the memory of ancestral struggles created and recreated based on intercultural dialogue, weaving articulations that tend to what is called a subaltern cosmopolitanism in different parts of the world (Santos & Martins, 2019).

When considering the identity dynamics of the black diaspora and its relationship with different socio-historical contexts, it is important to note that, in the contemporary agenda of social justice and the appreciation of diversity, studies have emerged that analyze focusing on the migratory experience from the perspective of rights and interculturality. Among them, Pires et al. (2016), analyzed the experience of African immigrants residing in Brazil to understand and reflect on the enjoyment of rights allowed to these subjects and the main impediments to their being treated with equal esteem and consideration to other social groups. For the authors, even among

Portuguese-speaking African immigrants, integration is difficult in the country that must be based on the naturalization of traditional, patriarchal, Eurocentric, individualistic, heteronormative, and Christian values, impacting the distance between immigrants and Brazilians.

### **For a decolonial occupational therapy: the relevance of the theme of Africa**

When we admit that the understanding of the world must overcome the sieve of the Western view (Santos & Meneses, 2010), occupational therapy from a decolonial perspective – based on theories that criticize Eurocentrism – must question the “unique story” told by the West, whose power colonial-era caused the erasure of cultures, peoples, and cosmivision. The modern world system has a direct relationship with the violent construction of a pattern of power that is pulverized in several dimensions of human existence - especially colonized peoples -, impacting the processes of subjectivation, cultural production, as well as on the various forms of violation of rights, and social injustice.

In this perspective, our profession in recent years has carried out important productions, meetings, and congresses based on an epistemological perspective located *in* the South, *with* the South, and *for* the South (Silva et al., 2019; Córdoba, 2014; Díaz-Leiva, 2018; Ramugondo, 2018). Among these meetings, we highlight the opening of the last World Congress of Occupational Therapists held by the South African Elelwane Ramudongo, whose title was “The work of healing: intersections for decoloniality”, whose historical and symbolic importance must be registered (Ramugondo, 2018).

Critical occupational therapy, based on human rights and diversity, must necessarily be decolonial and, as Morán & Ulloa (2021) emphasize, epistemically disobedient. To this end, an ethical-aesthetic and political commitment must be established in its practice to reverse the epistemicide caused by the modern world system (Silva et al., 2019).

Over time, Eurocentric power has become widespread in the production of the colonial imaginary that is daily reproduced in social, institutional, and structural relationships and the very cognitive perspective of the world. Recent productions in the area reveal that, when working with populations that live, in their living conditions, the effects of inequality as a social and historical consequence of colonization, occupational therapy must encompass coloniality as an important analytical category in the problematization of its practice and the production of their know-how (Souza et al., 2021).

In the sieve of the discussion on cultural diversity, occupational therapy has been interested in approaching Africa by problematizing different contemporary social dynamics – from human mobility and social rights to playful culture and religiosity (Pastore & Sato, 2018). By providing a brief overview of publications on this topic, Pastore & Sato (2018) propose a discussion on the need for new research and practices that dialogue with the appreciation of cultures, different ways of life, and the demands of the groups studied.

Since the end of the 19th century, therapeutic-occupational practices that are concerned with the issue of African migrants in Brazil have been observed. The Metuia

program<sup>2</sup> – headquarters of the University of São Paulo – carries out several actions that involve the African population, both in Brazil and in Africa. Among the projects particularly developed with African immigrants, some actions promote everything from the cultural appreciation of weaving production to the appreciation of local languages and training of young people in audiovisual production (Barros & Galvani, 2016; Pastore & Sato, 2018). In this context, through the partnership established with *Casa das Áfricas*<sup>3</sup>, within the scope of occupational therapy, methodologies are developed to work on issues that converge on the theme of African migration in Brazil (Barros & Galvani, 2016; Pastore & Sato, 2018). Based on the scrutiny of human rights and mobility, Sato & Barros (2016, p. 91) discuss the developments of culture in social occupational therapy for the understanding of immigration, which forces the occupational therapist to “[...] review their technical-political position in the face of new contemporary realities”.

According to Barros & Galvani (2016), the theme of human mobility is thematized by “[...] a program to value the presence and contribution of Africans living in Brazil, as well as the attention and monitoring of African students” (Barros & Galvani, 2016, p. 101), expressing issues around alterity and knowledge about Africa. In the context in which Brazil starts to receive a significant number of African students through exchanges, important spaces for debate with themes involving religious intolerance, racial discrimination, and xenophobia are created through the “Africa Circles” in Brazil (Barros & Galvani, 2016).

The theme of social occupational therapy and in the field of culture seems to be strengthened by studies that thematize Africa and its human displacements. Pierote-Silva et al. (2014), based on the discussion of public policies, develops her research on the violation of human rights that afflict African immigrants. Sato (2017), through an ethnographic study, discusses the economic/social dynamics of African women, proposing an approach to these experiences as “[...] the production of meanings, emancipation, intercultural dialogue and collective arrangements” (Sato, 2017, p. 8).

From a critical decolonial perspective, occupational therapy in the field of culture must problematize social phenomena whose contemporary social dynamism unfolds based on structural racism. In this sense, we need to understand the impacts historically caused by “[...] capitalism in its colonial relationship with the world”, observing coloniality in the various dimensions of existence – such as culture along with the migratory flow - so present in the colonial-capitalist scenario placed in the contemporary era (Santos & Meneses, 2010, p. 13).

In sociocultural contexts, occupational therapy builds a field that is oriented toward the daily life of groups in processes of rupture of the social support networks, often cemented by the historical and social conditions perpetrated by the colonial and capitalist world system.

For the praxis of occupational therapy, everyday life has been the focus of researching various social dynamism. Galheigo (2003) states that everyday life bears the mark of the individual's uniqueness and takes shape based on their needs, values, beliefs, and

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<sup>2</sup>The Metuia Program emerged in the 1990s, involving professors of occupational therapy in the State of São Paulo with the aim of increasing the production of knowledge and practices in the social field in a critical perspective.

<sup>3</sup>*Casa das Áfricas* (2021) is a platform that brings together independent groups to respond to initiatives related to the debate/study of African themes. Formed in 2003, the equipment aims to contribute to the process of producing content about African societies.

affections. In the dimension of the daily life of these populations, the movement of production and reproduction of social relations of power takes place in the course of historical development.

Considering the importance of the theme of human rights and social justice for occupational therapy, this study problematizes the practices of everyday life, the difficulties, and the social demands of immigrant African students at the *Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro*.

## **Method**

The research followed the qualitative method which, according to Minayo & Gomes (2008), is concerned with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes. The research participants were contacted through data provided by the Teaching Support Division of the Dean of Education at the *Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro*, the sector responsible for immigrants who are part of the PEC-G program. We selected immigrant students from African countries linked to the program with more than 6 months of stay in the country, and these were the criteria for inclusion in the research. In all, 4 African students participated in the research, all black, with an average of 21 years old, from Angola, Cape Verde, and Ghana, who were studying biomedicine and medicine at UFTM.

For data collection, we used semi-structured interviews, carried out individually, in which the focus of interest was on the testimony of those who experience the immigration trajectory. The interviews were audio-recorded and, in the data processing phase, they were fully transcribed. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis (Bardin, 1979), recording the nuclei of meaning and, later, performing the analytical categorization.

## **Results**

In the first category “Culture, identity and daily life: crossing the Black Atlantic”<sup>4</sup>, the experiences and considerations of Africans about Brazilian culture and its relationship with some aspects of African culture are described, as well as the place of otherness. The African immigrant student points out the identifications and differences between the two cultures based on daily life, reflecting the situation of being an immigrant in Brazil. Also, the implications of the overlapping between culture and daily life are observed in the particularity of financial experience in the migratory context.

The second category – “A country of hunters?”: prejudice, discrimination, and colonial imaginary – describes how the African student perceives the Brazilian imaginary about Africa and how people in everyday life approach their continent, country, and ethnicity. These reports occurred through the experiences lived in the university routine and express the perplexity of African students as a result of misperceptions about the African continent and its various cultures. The experiences at the university, as a space occupied mostly by white people, also mark the process of identity construction of students coming from the African continent.

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<sup>4</sup>The term “Black Atlantic” is used in reference to the work of Paul Gilroy (2003).

In the last category – “The house belongs to the other”: institutional support/helplessness and coping strategies – the social demands pointed out by Africans in their reception, establishment, and stay in the country are described and what strategies they used or believed are possible to use, both personally and collectively and institutionally, to deal with the daily challenges of the migratory situation.

## **Discussion**

### **Culture, identity, and everyday life: crossing the Black Atlantic**

In Brazil, the African culture(s), in its plurality, do not have visibility, with Africa being treated as a homogeneous whole, without attention to the particularities and complexities of its diverse local cultures in countries, cities, and communities across the vast continental territory. For centuries, the importance of black Africans in the process of formation of Brazilian society, both in culture and daily life and in economic growth, was undervalued. The epistemic “erasure” of black people, their knowledge, and their culture took place in Brazil amidst the context of eugenics practices conducted by a Eurocentric perspective of the world, marginalizing black people and stigmatizing their cultural products. However, for the African students interviewed, it is possible to identify aspects of Africa in Brazilian culture.

*I think you ended up losing some traits, we left them behind, but some still survived. There is also the clothing, which has some religions here that I heard that the clothing is the same. I think it's candomblé, something like that (Student 4).*

The identification and reference to religions of African origin highlight some of the cultural aspects of African countries that for centuries have been transgenerationally preserved in our cultural practices. Candomblé appears in Brazil in the context of the African diaspora of the 19th century, “[...] from the traditions of Yoruba or Nagô peoples, influenced by customs brought by *fons* groups, here called *jejes* and residually by minority African groups” (Prandi, 2001, p. 44).

Historically, the identity construction of the black people, and also of the African immigrant, permeates the conjuncture of displacements, which, according to Hall (2011), is related to the provisions of the power of social structures, in which hegemonic “cultural strategies” of power create displacements, given the complexities of the subordination structures that shaped the way they were inserted into the African diaspora.

The geographic, identity, and cultural displacement by the “Black Atlantic”, paraphrasing Paul Gilroy (2003), brought not only the customs and rituals that in Brazil were sedimented through the gestures of resistance of the black people, but also the complex network is woven by modernity in around colonial power. These artistic-cultural and religious manifestations, which remain among the expressions of Afro-Brazilian culture, developed in the face of colonial society during centuries of enslavement, facing intolerance based on Euro-Christian power until today.

The outstanding participation of social movements in the elaboration of the Federal Constitution of 1988 contributed to the expansion of the conception of culture, in a

symbolic dimension that provoked a displacement towards the riches of African and indigenous matrices, expanded and gave visibility also to what is produced outside the spaces previously delimited as cultural (Dorneles & Lopes, 2016).

The growth of the expressiveness of Afro-Brazilian, indigenous, and periphery culture is due to the new paradigms present in recent cultural policies, capable of breaking with the processes of exclusion previously guided by the Eurocentric and elitist vision (Dorneles & Lopes, 2016). In this perspective, Barros & Galvani (2016), when addressing the issue of Africa in Brazil, state that the notion of culture as a right should support the theoretical-practical construction of the profession, although it is still little discussed in occupational therapy. Culture as a focus in human rights folders based on the mobilization of collective identities has generated important initiatives at the national level (Barros & Galvani, 2016), which demands an increasingly broad theoretical-methodological commitment from the occupational therapist in cultural rights perspective.

The African student is punctually faced in his daily life with cultural manifestations of historical resistance - the *terreiros* and *capoeira* - practices strengthened by the recent cultural policy in the country, as the result of the struggle of the black people:

*And, by the way, telling a story here, one day I was going to the wholesale market, the market next to the Catholic church, and then I saw the capoeira people dancing capoeira, right, then when they started to sing a song from my tribe, I said: look!! Seriously! I thought it was very funny, like this: me on the side, I was even moved, because they sang a song that we sing for the kings of the tribe, you know? Kind of praising the king, then the people were singing and dancing and then I found it very interesting [...] they also sang this line: "Na eko na eba". Na eko na eba means 'comes and goes, round', it is a dance of kings, of power over the earth (Student 4).*

For these students who are far from their cultural references of origin, in which they constituted as subjects and based on which they signify their reality, this encounter with aspects of African culture reduces the experience of racial loneliness experienced at the university, through the identification and rapprochement of the expressive symbolic originality of African culture. Among other factors, the loss of this frame of reference can put the person in a position of vulnerability (Girardi & Martins-Borges, 2017).

Cultural identity processes can be, simultaneously, as inclusion strategies and exclusion mechanisms: identity places the individual in a social group (in which the subject resembles and/or identifies) and distinguishes him from other groups (in which the subject is different or does not have a certain characteristic). In this way, identity becomes a modality of categorization based on the cultural difference (Moresco & Ribeiro, 2015).

Therefore, immigration is highlighted as a socio-cultural phenomenon that stresses otherness in the relationships established between peoples of two nations. In this context, cultural difference underpins the construction of identity and the emergence of new subjectivities produced based on the experience of daily life – especially among historically diasporic subjects.

However, the social and institutional relations established in the country of destination do not necessarily guarantee equality of rights or the effective inclusion of immigrant subjects. In this sense, such social categories must be contextualized in Brazilian society without leaving aside the background scenario of slavery that lasted in the country for almost four centuries: Brazil was constituted based on colonial violence, and this must not escape the analyzes that problematize any migratory movement of Africans on Brazilian soil in contemporary times.

The complex migratory dynamics imply the need to re-signify different spheres of daily life, ranging from food, clothing, language, relationships, norms, and cultural values to dimensions of the subjectivity of these immigrants who left Africa to temporarily give a segment to their lives in another country (Girardi & Martins-Borges, 2017). For Galheigo (2003), everyday life marks the individual's uniqueness and takes shape based on their needs, values, beliefs, and affections. In this dialectical movement, between the individual and society, the individual subject encompasses the collective subject, whether through artistic, labor, or scientific activity in care activities or activities related to social and political participation.

*When I came here, I wore a kind of different clothes, so people looked and thought it was kind of different and I'm a guy who doesn't like to get too much attention, you know? And I ended up buying some clothes from here, normal things like that. I didn't think it was bad, but some people looked, passed by me looking in a way [...] Then I felt a little uncomfortable with it, so I said: I'm going to change my clothes (Student 4).*

The situation narrated about the discomfort of being perceived as a highlight in the public space shows that the looks on him probably identified him based on a non-Western cultural belonging, which summarily leads him to the need to change aspects of his clothing in the daily routine. It is by no means a negationist posture in ancestral roots: the mechanics of diasporic identity are complex and take into account the cultures that are in contact, the power relations, and all the historicity that condenses them.

None of the reports of those who participated in the research brought moments of cultural identification that occurred in the university environment, as it shows that universities may not be culturally inclusive. In addition to being a place for science and professional training, the university campus must offer the academic and external community access to cultural experiences that value cultural diversity, exhibitions related to research in the humanities, and spaces for coexistence to exchange cultural experiences and general knowledge. The students' encounters with some aspects of the diasporic culture of Africa in Brazilian territory take place in the democratic space of squares, streets, markets, *terreiros*, in short, in the daily life they experience outside the university walls. In this sense, Barros & Galvani (2016) warn of the importance of the university's role in the dissemination of cultural rights as identity rights. Therefore, we observed possibilities for occupational therapy interventions in the process of transforming the university space so that it encompasses the cultural plurality within its walls and new cognitive perspectives of the world.

Galheigo (2003) states that everyday life varies according to the context. This means that social class, cultural ties, gender, and age are important factors in the construction

of everyday life. Added to this dimension of everyday life, there is the socio-historical construction of places of belonging and power. In this case, the university still is an elitist and white space, although much progress has been made in identity policies in recent years.

In addition to the aesthetic experiences with Afro-Brazilian culture, the daily components of African students related to social class are taken into account, which appears in the research data based on the report of situations in which the participants perceive the need for financial control compared especially to the lifestyle and daily life they led in their country of origin. However, when asked if they believe they belong to the same social class in Brazil as they did in the African country, most say they remain in the same social situation, despite having some modified habits, such as food and the need to create alternatives to keep the budget steady.

*We are students, we depend on the money of the month, so we have to do everything to stretch until the end of the month, so you can't afford to eat things you used to eat at home [referring to his home in his country of origin] [...] I can't stand to eat rice from January to January, you know, sometimes I try to have a variety like this, eat something from home like this, which is closer... it's not the same but we try to improvise (Student 2).*

*There, my parents receive a salary that allows them to live very well, but when you convert the salary here, it's as if my father earned less than the minimum wage here and my mother a little more than him, then it gets more difficult (Student 1).*

Young immigrants rely on their families for sustainability in the destination country and, even though immigration has changed the financial context and demanded greater independence from participants for their maintenance as controllers of their income in a distant country, where currency conversion is cited by them as one of the main factors for such change, these facts are not taken into account as determinants of a new social class. We observed that 3 of the 4 students reported receiving a grant that helps to supplement their income; however, these features last for up to one year.

Therefore, the students, upon arriving in Brazil, faced the challenge of changing their lifestyle, since the difference between the two currencies led them to new ways of experiencing daily life.

### **“A country of hunters?”: prejudice, discrimination, and colonial imaginary**

In the daily lives of these students, inside and outside the university, at times, we observed the perception of prejudice, racial discrimination, and racism rooted in Brazilian society. As a consequence of Eurocentrism and the epistemicide provoked by the world-modern system, the presence of African students highlights the lack of knowledge of Africa by Brazilians. Through affirmations and doubts about the African territory, an entire continent has been generalized, stigmatizing the population as primitive and homogeneous archaic, demeaning all the diversity that the continent presents.

*When you say you come from Africa, they imagine other things, you know, they ask some crazy questions, like if we go around hunting animals to eat if there are lions... some countries have them, but mine doesn't have these things, it's the same here but on another continent (Student 1).*

The stigma that the African continent and its population face – so culturally diverse in different countries – permeates the entire sphere of social life, impacting the social relationships woven into the immigrant's daily life. At the university, not only students have presented the reproduction of colonially constructed stereotypes, but also professionals and employees, including professors, contribute to the construction and reproduction of the colonial imaginary about Africa. This result is in line with the discussion carried out by Sato et al. (2007, as quoted in Barros & Galvani, 2016) based on projects in occupational therapy involving the theme of Africa: the authors highlighted the colonial imaginary historically built on Africa based on stereotypes related to misery, wars, and backwardness.

References to African students often alternate between mystification, mythification, and exoticism (Muller & Silva, 2016) – certainly a colonial heritage. The scarce Brazilian knowledge about Africa has been consolidated “on the margins” in our Western cultural imaginary and in everything that concerns it (Nascimento, 2017), with the distortions generated by the hegemony of the social thought of the elites transforming the continent into a country of misery, wars, and black enslaves (Monteiro, 2004).

*So far, I think that the only thing that hurt me in the class was the professor talking about the African continent as a misery, like that, the only thing was that. Oh, and there is also a professor who gives an example of a wrong disease only from Africa (Student 3).*

The colonial imaginary has demeaned the knowledge about a continent considered, in the Eurocentric view, devoid of civility and development. One of the fundamental axes of this behavior is due to the social classification of the world population according to the concept of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and that, since then, permeates the most important dimensions of world power, including its specific rationality, Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2005).

To face the mistaken imaginary against Africa, students perceive the need to build plural spaces at the university for the exchange of knowledge and expression of their experiences in the countries of origin, in an attempt to remedy stereotyped ideas of Brazilians.

*I wish there was space here at UFTM for us to hold a kind of knowledge fair, about the countries, because there are several other students from other countries that we don't know the customs, the culture, these things. We hold a fair and talk about countries, languages, culture, and show that Africa is not [...] it is not this vision of Africa that everyone has, that is reported in the media, only hunger and that (Student 3).*

The experience of the Metuia Project's partnership with *Casa das Áfricas* in São Paulo resulted in conversations about the intellectual production of African students and

researchers in Brazil. In these meetings, they discussed knowledge about the political situations of different African countries in the public space (Barros & Galvani, 2016). When considering the interest of occupational therapists in African issues, whether through studies or actions, Barros & Galvani (2016) state that spaces for debate on the meanings of diversity and inclusion and participation policies are necessary for the construction of a society more open to difference (Barros & Galvani, 2016).

Brazilian black people are subject to stereotypes, being mostly blamed for their skin color; the same stigma applies to African immigrants. The projection of this stigma is so strong that black people are often seen as “Slumdog” and “thieves”, and so are immigrant students (Muller & Silva, 2016).

*[...] it was when I went to catch a bus one day there a blonde girl was sitting there on the bench, and like, there was only this bench, then I got on the bus and went to sit and when she saw me coming, she looked at me in a way and so when I sat down she got up to stand, then I thought she was going to get off the bus but she stayed up until... so that's why I felt a little bad (Student 4).*

In their experience in Brazilian society, the need to face prejudice as an expression of Brazilian structural racism through acts that are often commonplace, but are unknown to the immigrant in their country of origin, becomes commonplace at various times of daily life, surprising them as an act of disrespect, with looks of estrangement and fear and subjection to distrust of their ethics and morality.

Kaly (2001), in her research on being black Africans in Brazil, states that racism and discrimination based on skin color are always present in the daily life of an African student: “[...] the university student always has to show or prove that he is not who they think he is” (Kaly, 2001, p. 105). The Senegalese researcher paraphrases Stuart Hall when he says that the migrant's gaze is the truest, and even adds, when demystifying the false racial democracy in Brazil, that the account of a migrant has much more commitment to the account of an event than the place that welcomed him (Kaly, 2001, p. 108).

In institutional daily life, when the black person is inserted amid the most elite white ethnicity of the undergraduate courses in public universities, the African has an immediate perception of the restricted number of black people, compared to white people. This fact, according to reports, makes relationships difficult, at the same time that it highlights them in the homogeneity. One of the research participants perceives at times his invisible image in front of the white university student majority.

*Sometimes I take pictures with my friends and stuff and it appears... because in my living room, I'm the only black person and African, right, and like, I stand out, especially when I'm in the middle of white people and so, they post these photos with people from my room who will edit the photo again, then I don't even appear in the photo, my eyes are white and my teeth are smiling, that's all (Student 4).*

This experience of the African student, as an analogy of the social place of black people, invisible in institutions that historically encompass a white elite, statistically expresses the data regarding the insertion of black people in public universities,

justifying the continuity of reparatory policies for the inclusion of black people such as the quota system.

In everyday experience – materially constituted on the principle of otherness and estrangement – socio-cultural “differences” are perceived in the public spaces that African students occupy. The majority white composition in Brazilian public universities – still excluding and elitist – is the result of the process of peripheralization and impoverishment of black people in the society that keeps them under control, outside the places of power and knowledge production. This is how this student's perception of the contexts of white normativity in the public space of the university encompasses, above all, his daily experience: through a critical cultural estrangement, he tries to understand the historical construction of the space that encircles. This perception of the social context in which he is inserted in Brazil is also part of his identity construction – the “edited” photo makes him disappear among white university students, a fact that, in his report, produces a constitutive subjective experience.

However, the differential in the social relations that the Africans is faced, especially when we refer to what is said and thought about the Africans, the constructed and disseminated image (Muller & Silva, 2016), tends to change in the face of information that mainly involves social ascension, based on a capitalist concept of social status, in places where they are commonly seen as refugees and marginalized. This fact eliminates the student from the category of disbelief regarding the humanitarian value of the African and makes him immediately someone of social appreciation and usefulness.

*I, when I started the medical course, I thought that people started to treat me differently, I think with more respect, with more... I don't know. Talk to me, he does medicine? Then people start to talk and I think that helped me a little bit in that sense, for people to see me differently, you know? They don't see me as just an African, now they see me as a guy who is fighting for a better future, more or less (Student 4).*

*I don't care what people think of me, I felt like this, weird looks, and like, thinking “what are you doing here, wow, you shouldn't be here” (Student 2).*

In addition to the manifestation of racial prejudice present in the interlocutor's “surprise” attitude when he learns that the black African student studies medicine – a profession that, in Brazil, is predominantly exercised by rich white people – the different treatment received demonstrates that Brazilian society, in addition to being racist, it is classist, as the elite of medical power makes it overpower its color and this makes it more “respectable”.

However, these students recognize the need for social transformation through the knowledge of their rights and bring in their repertoire the struggles on the world stage that marked democracy and freedom of black expression. In their ways of living with discrimination, their reflective and active potential as modifiers of the colonialist perspective of society demonstrates resistance and self-knowledge as fundamental pillars of their integrity.

*And I think that was always Martin Luther King's dream, that he said that he was waiting for a country, he was referring to the United States, you know, he wanted to see people judge Afro-descendants not by the color of their skin, but by the content, their character, so I think that when people know your story, where you come from, your struggle, I think he loses this prejudice, skin color doesn't matter to him anymore (Student 4).*

Both the mistaken, exotic, and stereotyped colonial imaginary about the African continent and the social experiences that lead them to perceive the white majority in the public space of the university can be understood as a manifestation of the coloniality of power at the epicenter of social and institutional relations. Brazil, in this case, is for the black African student as a small Europe that reproduces the cognitive perspective of Eurocentrism in social relations and the production of knowledge.

### **“The house belongs to the other”: institutional support/ helplessness and coping strategies**

This category describes the social demands pointed out by Africans in their reception, establishment, and stay in the country and what strategies they used or believe can be used, both personally and institutionally, to deal with the daily challenges of the migratory situation.

The vicissitudes triggered by immigration depend on a series of factors such as the person's socioeconomic situation in the country of destination, social and support networks, the migratory policies of the host country, and the personal characteristics (Girardi & Martins-Borges, 2017).

There are reports from the participants of this research that Brazil was the desired destination country for being known on the African continent, through the media, football, and, mainly, through known Africans who came to the country. We observed that this last factor becomes a relevant criterion for the choice of African students for the country of destination. One of the steps in the application process for the PEC-G program is to choose the Brazilian city where you have an acquaintance. With the help of an acquaintance or reference who resides in the same city, difficulties are reduced, facilitating the reception and installation of the immigrant. However, according to the participants, this choice is not a guarantee that the student will be allocated to a university in the chosen city, which can hamper their adaptation process considering the restriction of a social support network.

In the migratory process, UFTM does not usually intervene in the reception of the student, in the presentation of the university, and in other useful places for the immigrant, such as the federal police and assistance services for students. The educational institution does not have student accommodation or university restaurants, which even hinders the installation of students who come from other cities in the country, triggering the lack of institutional structure. The admission experience is marked by the lack of guidance, information, and preparation about the city, the university, its structure and functioning, and the basic information that subsidizes them until they are fully familiarized with the university space (Muller & Silva, 2016).

*[...] when I arrived here, as there were few foreigners, the reception of foreigners here at the university, I didn't think so... [I thought] it would be a little more receptive, you know, because we see that when we left Angola, more foreigners left for universities in Brazil, and the reception of some foreign students who left Angola to come here, in some other universities were better. Like, in the matter of helping to locate the federal police, you know, chasing documents, a house to live in, because we come here, we kind of didn't know anything, so it helps in that aspect, so we can at least settle here. So, that was a failure that I felt because I don't know if it was a failure of communication between the organization of the PEC-G program, I don't know what happens [...] but what happened before I left there, that there would be a person who would welcome me and help me in these matters at least, but when I arrived here I didn't even have a place to live I didn't know anything, I didn't even know how to handle the money, how to count [...]* (Student 3).

Some students use a social support network before immigration through siblings, family members, friends indicated by the family, or even through Africans already installed who came through the same program, to receive and assist in the process of installation in the city where they will study. However, without this previous support structure, the student is faced with a situation of helplessness. The term “the house belongs to the other” referred to in the subtitle reflects a collective vision of helplessness experienced by these African students linked to the PEC-G and the personal and subjective construction of the experience in an unknown country.

In the literature on social occupational therapy, illness is understood as a phenomenon that involves the person and the group, being simultaneously a social and individual event: it is a critical view of the dichotomies between individual-society, man-nature, man-culture that allow us to think about a subject in absolute discontinuity (Barros, 2004).

*When the result came out I didn't know I had [student 3], who is the other Cape Verdean who is here, I didn't know, I couldn't find anyone here who was from there in my country, then my brother asked for his colleague who is from here, then his colleague talked to his parents to receive me here. I stayed at their house for a while until I could find another place* (Student 1).

The university and the program lack institutional measures that provide a reception for young people leaving their countries, such as the construction of a possible social support network before their arrival. By supporting measures that aim to assist them integrally, the negative commitments resulting from a troubled migratory process could be avoided, consequently reducing failures, abstentions from classes, and the need to “remediate” difficulties in the academic performance stemming from a lack of life structure.

The Ministry of Education, through Promisaeas, aims to promote technical-scientific and cultural cooperation between Brazil and the countries with agreements in the areas of education and culture. To compete for Promisaeas, the student, in addition to being enrolled, must have good academic performance, according to the requirements of the university at which he studies (Brasil, 2021). This shows that failures are factors that

can prevent students from receiving financial aid that they can claim as immigrant students, leading to yet another commitment to their permanence at the university.

*I had a lot of difficulties, a lot of difficulties even not failing in the first years, I had some subjects to redo, then I had help from the medical course that helped me a lot, then I started doing some therapy, there at the NAE (Nucleus of Student Assistance- Núcleo de Assistência Estudantil) even with the psychologist of the NAE, I underwent therapy and follow-up with the neurologist and it improved a lot. Sometimes I have a relapse but I already know how to return (Student 2).*

Some institutional structures offer important support to African immigrant students after their installation processes, such as course coordination and the Student Assistance Center. However, in addition to these structures, good reception and institutional follow-up can preventively minimize some difficulties that impact the student's permanence.

The financial difficulty appears in the immigrants' discourse as a relevant factor in the adaptation process and, to meet this demand, most of them resort to scholarships offered through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

UFTM, through the Dean of Community and Student Affairs (PROACE), appears as an intervener in this demand only in case of an extreme need that constitutes a violation of the human right to adequate food. This assistance intervention by PROACE is characterized as an assistance improvisation sought to remedy the inefficiency of an institutional support structure.

*I had [difficulty] in the sense because I didn't even have anywhere to eat, you know? It was very difficult, but the UFTM helped me, especially the PROACE staff, they recommended me there at the hospital, there is the cafeteria there, they talked to the staff there, and thank God they helped me with food and I managed to support myself there, and I think they were giving me some basic food baskets, to be able to survive this difficult time, but after I entered the scholarship process like this, since then I can (Student 4).*

Through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, immigrant students can also apply for the Merit Scholarship, granted to students linked to the PEC-G who demonstrate “exceptional” academic achievement (Brasil, 2021). To fulfill the requirements that the public notices request for merit scholarships and grants, students need good or excellent academic performance. However, the claim for these scholarships, at times, maybe threatened, considering the lack of institutional structure for the reception and permanence of the student, impacting school performance.

*I think that a university that is receiving more foreigners every day should have someone who takes care of it because they know, it's a lot... even if they open an opportunity to some foreigner and a Brazilian is responsible for this part, because really when the foreigner arrives here he gets lost, you know? [...] Although many times they get in touch with us so we can help the person when they arrive, I think it's not enough, having the support of someone from the university is essential (Student 2).*

Therefore, it is necessary to adopt institutional strategies to reduce the disparities presented between the possibilities of receiving aid and the institutional helplessness that hinders achieving good academic performance, considering the responsibility that the university must assume to maintain the well-being of students and their stay at the university.

## **Conclusion**

The trajectory of African students goes through institutional, assistance, social, and relational needs, which intertwine with daily life, culture, and their academic experience. Universities that welcome these young people need to incorporate effective strategies for the reception and adaptation of immigrant students, based on the understanding that the demands resulting from the lack of institutional support can impact the daily life, health, and academic performance of immigrant students.

A broader institutional vision is needed that encompasses cultural diversity in a truly inclusive epistemic perspective, bringing about a satisfactory migratory experience. In migratory contexts, occupational therapy must encompass the socio-cultural dimension in its practice to think about ways of including these students, encompassing the discussion about diversity, and human and cultural rights in the perspective of social justice. Particularly, the theme of Africa, considering the country's socio-historical scenario, must mobilize occupational therapy for the creation of effective socio-cultural technologies of social participation, based on a decolonial perspective that problematizes the complex social dynamics involved in the daily lives of these young people.

Participants reveal social demands aimed at institutional reception due to migratory displacement, being of great importance that the university recognizes and helps in the restructuring of the new processes that will compose the daily life and trajectory of these students. The university must propose actions aimed at repairing the adaptive difficulties related to the lack of a social support network and strengthening spaces for the exchange of knowledge, culture, and development, building an egalitarian, anti-racist, and plural university.

The importance of actions based on the appreciation of cultural diversity at the university is considered through the promotion of events that promote the sharing of knowledge about multiple Africa. These demands can be met by occupational therapy based on sociocultural actions that cover the aspect of everyday life.

In the research results, we observed that the experience of racial discrimination is part of the daily life of the young black African student, who starts to question the Brazilian racist social structure and impacts their identity construction. A non-essentialized identity is understood here, but rather fragmented, displaced – and historically diasporic – permeable to the estrangement provoked by the Eurocentric references of Brazilian culture. When encountering aspects of the cultural heritage of Africa in Brazil, the immigrant gets emotional, evidencing some aspects of the subjective experience that allow a sense of belonging and social participation of the African subject.

The processes of identity and production of subjectivity permeate the dynamics of culture, and the immigrant subject, when crossed by two cultures in the experience of mobility, experiences alterity uninterruptedly in everyday life, building a person based

on sociocultural experiences impacted by the power relations and the historical construction of the colonial imaginary.

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Jonathan Benedito Bezerra design and development of the research project, collection, analysis, and discussion of data, writing of the article. Heliana Castro Alves research orientation, data analysis and discussion,

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