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DISEASES AND MEMORIES OF CURES AMONG SLAVES IN SOUTHWESTERN BAHIA- BRAZIL: NEUROLOGICAL AND RHEUMATOLOGIC DISEASES

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the research about diseases that attacked the slaves' health in the 19th century, in the Imperial Vila da Vitória, nowadays the city of Vitória da Conquista, located in the Southwestern Bahia, Brazil as well as memories of techniques of cures, plants and herbs in order to cure the sick body. One used is the quanti-quantitative and the methodology of documental kind, classified as exploratory and descriptive. The sources are 460 inventories, in which there are 2,159 slaves, being described as sick people. For the research, one analyzed the captive with neurological and rheumatologic illnesses, with a total of 25. Besides, this work exposes the treatment for the aforementioned diseases, relating the herbs and the plants most used in the 19th century as a form of cure; it points out that these cure practices were passed from generation to generation and are still employed to cure illnesses; and it evidences that the techniques of the cures rendered at the time of colonization make up the memory of the population that lives in Southwestern Bahia, and that continue to be used to cure contemporary illnesses.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a study in which one researches the laves' health in the Imperial Vila da Vitória in the 19th century. This region, located in Southwestern Bahia, is located between Rio Pardo and Rio das Contas and borders the North of the Captaincy of Minas Gerais e the High Sertão of Bahia. It is important to report that the first inhabitants to arrive at this place in the middle of the 18th century were responsible for the emergence of Arraial da Conquista, founded in the 18th century, that, later, according the Provincial Law n° 124, from May 19th, 1840, was elevated to the Vila and Parish, named Imperial Vila da Vitória. On December 31st, 1943, with the state Law n°141, was named Vitória da Conquista, a name that is still used. As in that time the principal activity of the place is agriculture, there was the need of workforce and, consequently, of the coming of slaves to the region (SOUZA, 1996; PIRES, 2003).

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This work is a cut of the doctorate thesis called "Memories of illnesses and cures: slavery, diseases and aging in the Sertão of Bahia in the 19th century", presented to the Post-Graduation Program in Memory: Language and Society, of the State University of Southwestern Bahia, which has digitalized inventories as a data bank. The objective is to analyze the illnesses that stroke the slaves that lived in the Imperial Vila da Vitória, because the captive were present in the region since the colonization time, they started working in agriculture, livestock and domestic chores and they were am outstanding presence in this place (TANAJURA, 1992). The cure techniques played an essential role as well, since the herbs and plants made up and started to compose the therapeutic arsenal used by many men for the re-establishment of the sick body. The research of the inventories enabled us to identify the sick captive, where one found the cited name of the illness or some manifestation that the slave presented, without any additional information concerning the signs and symptoms. In this sense, in order to understand the object of this study, which is the concept of the neurological and rheumatologic diseases in the 19th century, one used literature that approaches the used

treatment used in that time for the cure of the illnesses as well as the herbs and the plants as treatment techniques of the sick body, with the purpose of revealing that this practice of old continues to be carried out by the population in Southwestern Bahia to cure diseases in contemporary days , which survives in the memory of the population in Bahia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research one adopted the quanti- qualitative approach and the methodology of documental kind, classified as exploratory and descriptive. The approach is quantitative because it works numerical data, assessment the incidence of diseases on the slaved population, proceeding to the counting the number of sick people as well as the quantifying those who presented a certain pathology. It is considered qualitative as well, because the deepening of the study of a certain social group, with aspects of the reality lived by the population. Thus, it was possible to notice which herbs were used for the treatment of the sick person in the 19th century, and which cure techniques are conserved nowadays in the memory of the studied population. This a documental research that has as its main characteristic the data collection in documents, in the case of this work, judicial documents from public archives, such as inventories, the research object. The documents, besides making possible to investigate facts and phenomena linked to individuals, social groups, communities and civilizations that do not exist anymore, enabling the researcher to recover social, historical, cultural and political aspects related to the studied subject, since they are considered a means from which one takes abundant and solid data, besides being necessary to history (GIL, 2002; LIMA, 2004). The analyzed documents constitute a register source, where one could gather the illnesses that stroke the slaves in Southwestern Bahia in the 19th century. One may classify the research as also descriptive and exploratory. It is descriptive for describing the characteristics of a population or a phenomenon, besides studying the peculiarities of a population, such as distribution according to age, health state and illnesses that stroke the studied group (GIL, 2002). It is exploratory because it aims mainly to polish the ideas and discover of intuitions.

When one investigates the slavery time, the inventories are manuscripts of great valor. According to Silva (1789), they are the catalogue that one does of the goods that an individual leaves as inheritance for their heirs. According to Fur ado (2009), in them the goods of the deceased are registered in order to be distributed according the legal dispositions of transference and partition among the heirs. Thus, the slaves were left as inheritance in the inventories and were listed as goods of the deceased. The slave population presented in these documents had specific information - they registered their own name, the mother's name, the spouse's name, the origin, the occupation, the color, the age, the price and the health condition or disease - that they configured themselves in a fertile domain for the research. Therefore, the analysis of the catalogues contributed to the research of the slaves health of the Imperial Vila da Vitória in the 19th century, by observing digitalized notarial documents, dated from 1801 and 1888, belonging to the archive of the Fórum Desembargador João Mangabeira, in the city of Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil. One located 2,159 captive individuals, from those 230 were sick, but, in this work, one performed a cut and one presents only 25 illnesses, those of neurological and rheumatologic

origin, that are 14 and 11 respectively, because they stood out in the strike level.

RESULTS

In order to study the slaves' health in the Imperial Vila da Vitória, one located in the inventories 14 aged 12 and 55 years with neurological problems, among these 11 presented attacks, epilepsy and dementia, and three of them had had stroke. In the same way, one 11 with rheumatologic cases, four of them with some kind of rheumatism not specified in the documents and seven with gout, which is also a disease of rheumatic origin. Firstly directing to the neurological diseases, in relation to the attacks, these are the perceptions in the 18th and 19th centuries: Silva (1789) defines it as a habitual illness or a moral defect; Bluteau (1728), on the other hand, considers it as an illness that befalls after a serious disease, or that emerges due to the strong mood, but that is habitual and natural to the human body; and Pinto ((1832) says that it is a normal health indisposition. The attacks that emerged in the slaves came up accompanied by extreme irritability, they were characterized by the frequency of moments of irritability, presence of cry, convulsive phenomena and spasms. Initially, the treatment consisted in not contradicting the individual that suffered from such illness; then, telling comfort words; and at last, giving them orange leaf tea (CHERNOVIZ, 1904), which one used as tranquillizer and helping in the sleep.

Other illness of neurological cause, epilepsy, was considered in the 19th century as being of nervous origin, characterized by the sudden loss of senses, insensibility, convulsions, contortion of the lips and eyes and from in the mouth. During the epileptic attack period, it was relevant to watch over the sick people, not leaving them wind around their clothes, putting cloth in between their teeth so that the tongue is not hurt, applying on the front-head a compress of water with vinegar, giving colony or vinegar water for them to smell and extending the members of the sick one (CHERNOVIZ, 1904). Dementia, as well, had a neurological origin that manifested itself among the captive population in the 18th and 19th centuries, considered, according to Bluteau (1728), as a synonym of madness and, for Pinto (1832), as total lack of capacity of judging. In the conceptualization of Chernoviz (1904), dementia characterized itself by an intelligence disorder, of the sensations and passions, without a distinctive lesion of the nutrition functions.

The treatment consisted in exercises, manual work, baths and isolation, when necessary. Still among the neurological diseases, one located three slaves that had stroke, which according to Silva (1789) was characterized by the lack of movement or action in some member or part of the body. Similarly, Pinto (1832) defines this problem as lack of movement because of the disease, Bluteau ((1728, p. 351) on the other hand indicates that is numbness of some part of the body and the beginning of paralysis. Only in the 19th century Chernoviz (1890) explains that it is a retention of blood in the brain, in which the symptom is the total or partial loss of body movements. The greatest incidence of this illness occurred in periods of higher heat and more intense sunlight. If the stroke were severe, the individual remained with half of the body totally paralysed; if it were lighter, the stricken person could walk again and use the arm, but with some difficulties, both while walking and in the superior member, only on the affected side.

If it were more serious, it could lead to total immobility and even death (KARASCH, 2000). The curative means varied according to the nature of the illness: one gave them medicine made of mustard, applied in certain points of the skin to produce a general stimulus, one applied plasters on the legs, and cloth wet in cold water on the head (CHERNOVIZ, 1904). In relation to the rheumatologic diseases, one found seven captives with gout. Today, one knows that this is an inflammatory disease caused by the deposition of crystals inside the articulations and outside them; it is related to the excess of uric acid in the blood, which happens due to too much ingestion of some food, such as fat, meat and alcoholic drink (RADL, 2005). It was very common in the 19th century; it stroke mainly the male gender in individuals aged above 40. However, in this research one found slaves bearing this illness with different age and gender. Such fact by the way observed by Neves (2012) in the 19th century, who states that in another slave community analyzed by him, in the Sertão of Bahia, the captives ate guts or extremities, which are animal head, legs, ridge and tail. The act of ingesting excessively animal protein stimulated the increase of uric acid in the organism, having gout as a consequence. There is evidence that the slaves in the Imperial Vila da Vitória had also access to such food, such as meat and even alcoholic beverages, because the consumption of that food stimulates the emergence of the illness.

According to Santos Filho (1991), gout provoked very strong pain and the strike started at the foot hallux. To Chernoviz (1890), in the 19th century, it manifested itself by means of crises, it characterized itself by a specific inflammation of the articulations, with the presence of swelling, pain, redness, skin heat, with episodes of crises more or less regular. For the treatment, the indication was to apply plasters in the articulations in order to decrease the inflammation. At that time, one did not know yet the cause of this illness. Many authors considered it as a hereditary disease. According to Chernoviz (1890), this illness was rare in places where the climate was hot, it manifested itself more in the cold weather and in wet places and the part of the body more affected were the feet. Likewise, the rheumatisms evidenced themselves more in winter, due to the temperature fall and more incidence of rainfall, and they stroke individuals who were exposed to the cold weather, wind and rain.

One believes that the slaves in the Imperial Vila da Vitória presented the rheumatologic diseases with more intensity, because they were exposed to climate changes, for doing activities outdoors, at the farm. Tanajura (1992) states that the studied region maintained cold weather in winter and mild in summer. Besides that, there were intermittent drizzles and low temperatures that could reach until 10°C, with strong wind gusts. It is necessary to point out that the fact that the region has low temperatures contributed to the grievance of the rheumatologic illnesses among the studied captive population. It is worth pointing out that gout was very confounded with rheumatic arthritis at that time (Santos filho, 1991), and, in relation to this research, one located four slaves with some kind of rheumatism not specified. It may strike several articulations in the body, causing pain, swelling, muscle weakness, movement limitation, deformities, hindering the activities of daily life (Gallinaro *et al.*, 2005). For its treatment, one used cloth wet in brandy with camphor, linseed plasters around the articulations, besides the application of leech (Barreto; Pimenta, 2013). The use of linseed and camphor justify themselves because the first has high nutritional power

and the second is used to cure pain in the pain and hematoma. Otherwise, for the recovery of inflammation one could use the juice of the branches and leaves of an herb called *cansanção*. Besides these, one employed the bleedings in order to decrease the inflammation, one did it with the use of a leech - that is a kind of worm that dwells in sweet water and was used to suck the individual's blood in order to cure illnesses. One use from 10 to 15 leeches on the painful place to take out the blood in the stricken place (CHERNOVIZ, 1890). Therefore, upon analyzing the slaves' rheumatologic diseases, one can notice that in the 19th century the therapy based on the elimination of the symptoms. The men responsible for the art of curing used forms of available treatment that time; besides that, they applied plants and herbs of the medicine flora that helped in the re-establishment of the sick body.

DISCUSSION

The obtained information in the inventories, with the intention of studying the captives' health in the 19th century, in Southwestern Bahia, enabled the analysis of 25 sick people, 14 with neurological illnesses and 11 with rheumatologic ones. From then, one designed the concept of the disease at that time, the treatments used as cure as well as the plants and herbs most used in order to treat the sick body, by emphasizing the permanence of these cure techniques that are alive in the memory of the contemporary population. The analysis of the inventories enabled the identification of the sick ones, and by means of the literature that deals with herbs used in previous centuries in order to cure illnesses, one identified the plants used to cure or relieve the symptoms of the neurological and rheumatologic diseases. Most cited plants - mustard, linseed, camphor and *cansanção* - which were used as medicinal plants in the 19th century, are still used as a treatment way nowadays, and this shows that the civilizations are built by means of recollections of social groups, which remain in time, such as the art of curing, composing a memory that is still preserved. According to Halb wachs (2003), in order to recollect something, it is necessary that it had been seen in the past, because memory conserves the past and uses it in the present. Thus, one still uses the ways of fighting the aforementioned diseases, when people choose a more natural treatment. An example is the tea made from the orange tree leaves, used in the 19th century as a tranquillizer in people who had problems of nervous attacks and that is still widely used with the same function nowadays, especially by the population of Southwestern Bahia.

One understands here the relevance of recovering memory, since the ways of curing, the herbs and the plants used for the recovery of the sick body make up a diverse therapeutic arsenal produced in the period of colonization and that, until today, is used. Therefore, in order to indicate that the cure techniques are still present in current days, it is important to reflect upon memory, which, according to Halb wachs (2003), refers to a thought chain continuously; it conserves the past that remains alive or lives through the reminiscences of the group that cultivates it, because it guarantees the continuity of the feeling of past up to the present. In order to conserve a memory there cannot be a rupture between these times; it is necessary that there be a continuity remembrance, which is always rebuilt by the group that maintains it, making it become always current, because, if what one lives reaches past remembrances, these are adequate to the sensations of the present.

When a memory is recalled, it is at the same time recollected in the perspective of construction as social whole, necessarily; it has the function of relating to the world, as a relation of the whole. As a result, one can state that the curative properties of herbs and the treatment techniques passed from generation to generation by means of oral tradition, since memory creates a connection between the past and the present and it can restore a finalized continuity (HALBWACHS, 2003). It does not need writing to be constituted, since every society can, with orality, transmit it, because, in some communities, narrative and the people's testimony are the maximum possible register of a kind of reality.

The oral tradition is indispensable so that there are not any loss in the transmission of knowledge and values between generations, since it was by means of orality that memory became method and analysis object (SANTOS, 2003). It was like this that many herbs and cure techniques continue being used as remedies in contemporary days and the tradition of using plants as medicine comes from a memory that conserves the customs and the culture of a people (RÜSEN, 2009). Therefore, studying this theme is based on the understanding that memory is an essential element for the comprehension of how the techniques of cure maintain themselves current in the memory of the population of Southwestern Bahia, enabling to recover remembrances of what was used or even of what was transmitted, for the rehabilitation of a sick person. That enables the identification of the valuation of the experiences lived in the past, the inheritances of cultures coming from unequal people and their reflex in the present and in the future. At last, the study of the enslaved population in the Imperial Vila da Vitória provided us with a better understanding about the neurological and rheumatologic diseases in the 19th century as well as the used treatment. One evidenced that many herbs and plants are still cure practices in current days, attesting that this act continues alive in the contemporary population.

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