

## **I myself, I alone**

Dear sisters, brothers, fellow Black people of the world.

After more than 100 years, the time has come!

Thank you! Thank you! Oh, my sisters! You are so generous. Thank you! I'm grateful!

But as I was saying: After more than 100 years, the time has come to unmask the fraud, the untruths, calumnies and so on, directed against me. The time has come to reveal the ambush set for me for what felt like an eternity. But, from 2024 and onwards, these shall not prevail!

I, Andresa do Nascimento de Pina, I, Andresa de Pina do Nascimento, me, myself, the 'I' represented here by me, long dead, but here today without proxy or delegation, me, Fernanda do Vale, me alone, just me, I find myself here to clarify once and for all that no, no, no, my sisters and brothers, the book '*A Preta Fernanda: Recordações de uma Colonial*' was not written by me.

My sisters and brothers, it's infamy! It's inadmissible! It's a lie! It's a lie! A disgrace! A trick set up by that despicable pair, Alberto Totta and Machado, two false friends who took advantage of my trust.

Only a very racist and miserly society could believe that I would describe myself like that, as a woman who pisses herself, who sniffs, who fucks anything and anyone, who abandons her children... a fool?!

I didn't write that book. That book doesn't tell the story of the woman I was.

It's a book full of clumsy insinuations. That I, in Lisbon, seduced a retired colonel. That the decrepit military man 'gave' me the role of model for the statue to be erected in tribute to Sá da Bandeira. That, in the end, the sculptor fired me because I had – can you believe it? – bunions.

What happened, what really happened, was this:

All it took was for them to find out that a Black woman would be the model for the representation of a freed slave, and they started immediately...

'Isn't that precisely what racism is?'

'Does colour have anything to do with this? But... can anyone see colour? Can anyone see colour?'

Ah... colour... Can anyone see colour here? You know as well as I, don't you, my sisters, my brothers...

I, Fernanda do Vale, I myself, right here, representing myself, dead but not defeated, I have come here to clarify the episode of the bullfight. This is, my sisters and brothers, the story of the bullfight. It's true, yes, it's real, it happened. But... yet, however, still, nevertheless, all the same, we must clarify one fact:

I did indeed dress up as a man, I faced that bull and all of a sudden I fell. It's true, my sisters and brothers, I cannot deny this, but... with courage, with grace, with love for that noble animal. Not humiliated and defeated on the ground, never!

That book is a pack of lies, my sisters and brothers.

Then it says that in my thirty-four years of life I had had as many love affairs with men, on average one a year?

I had many more! Men and women of all colours. And I'm not ashamed of that. I'm not ashamed of having done what I wanted with my body, what I could and what I felt like.

I was myself.

Today, in 2024, after more than a hundred years, my sisters, my brothers, today you know that in this city of Lisbon there was, between the late 19th and early 20th century, a Black woman who raised her voice to speak. Who dared to be something other than a slave, who dared to be something completely new: to be Fernanda do Vale, and to pay for that.

## **Carolina X**

I'm very old.

I've been here a long time. Wait... How long? I don't even know... I don't know anymore.

I was born old. I've been old since I was a little girl. But when I was old and very small, I was put on a boat. The boat was big, but it was... that boat was very big, but we were in a very small part of it

I remember a big, no, no...

It's night-time, it's raining hard.

Ah, a sound, a strange sound... It sounds like stifled moans.

I hide behind one of the wooden crates and stretch out my neck to look in the direction of the moans.

A girl is leaning against a barrel and a boy...

She's not moving. Her face is turned towards the sea. She shoves him. He turns, as though he doesn't want to face her.

Oh... I've gone far now, very far.

The crucifixes around my neck? How many are there?

No idea! Almost as many as my age.

You know... I'm very old. When I reached this country, I was passed from one owner to another. And then, to another in Brazil. And then to another.

And then I was so old that no one wanted me anymore. They said I was no longer any use for heavy housework, or looking after children.

And since then, the street has been my home. But I don't complain, and I never ask for charity.

Selling my pine nuts, these fleshy pine nuts, to passers-by. I just hope no one asks me to make a cake or a sweet out of pine nuts. I was never any good at that. What I am able to do is to know people. To know them inside. Sometimes I even see their innards through their skin, without them realising.

Then, as well as selling them my delicious pine nuts, I also give them my herbs.

And when I'm not here selling pine nuts, I'm out there, in Campo de Ourique, where I have a piece of land that was left to me by the king. The one I had to give my herbs to so that he wouldn't die.

The name of the king? I don't remember. I don't remember now. Well, it doesn't matter, it's what I have: a piece of ground with my herbs and the crucifixes I've been amassing round my neck throughout this very long life.

You know, each of these crucifixes hanging round my neck is a life: a person to whom I gave my cures. I carry crucifixes, but I also carry souls.

My cures? Sometimes they save, sometimes they kill, but they always heal.

## **Melik**

I never cry.

My eyes never spill water.

Not now, nor when I arrived in this country of uncivilised men and women, with dull clothes and the smell of sour milk.

My land, yes, that does spill water, lots of water. In my land it rains, it rains a lot, it rains for a long time.

The uncivilised women and men look at me.

My eyes are dry and my mouth is closed.

The eyes of the uncivilised want to touch me. They think they can touch me.

Eyes that don't recognise me. Eyes that examine me in search of a tail, an extra tit, a man's python between my legs. Stunned eyes that stare, wanting to determine whether my belly button is in the right place, whether my knees bend backwards like the front legs of a dog.

A glimmer of water... a glimmer of water... a glimmer of water...

Nin cotinke, nin cotinke, iagu...

A glimmer of water... a glimmer of water... a glimmer of water...

Nin cotinke, nin cotinke, iagu...

What?

Do they want to see my mouth? Do they want to see whether my tongue is forked like a snake's? Do they want to see whether my teeth are sharp and pointed, to devour them?

The words in my mouth can only be heard by those whose ears want to listen.

My skin slowly hardens. It hardens so much I feel like I'm going to crack.

My mouth widens and two large jaws break through.

My body, now outside its skin, elongates and turns green. I now have three thousand teeth.

Finally, my eyes start to spill water.

You see? Can you see? These are my tears.

Can't you see? Are you afraid?

Bite, devour, regurgitate, resuscitate.

## **SYNCOPATIONS**

- 'Being Black is in vogue'?

- Really?

- The question is...
- And there was a woman who was present, without being present, and she was Josephine Baker, or the idea of the global Black dancer. And before abolition, you know, in the late-19th and early-20th century, she managed to establish the figure of the great global artist.
- 'Being Black is in vogue? Is that a triumph against racism?'
- They work with that. Beyond us being good or desirable to them, or them finding some degree of pleasure in seeing us, in seeing Black people suffer in the final product, in works of art, they work with that. I think it's a very capitalist mindset, like, we're going to work with people's vulnerability.
- But then we realise that we're producing too, but all too often we're not the ones who benefit. And she only came to Portugal much later, she was absolutely fascinating. Then she... those contradictions that we often find... Everything about her was over-the-top, she was experiencing all this at global level. Everyone wanted a piece of Josephine Baker.
- The question is how can we trust those people or, to put it another way, recently I've been thinking a lot about how we can create a space in which we are independent of... Not so dependent on them. But a space where, if a sister needs something we are here. OK. It won't happen, she isn't being protected, for this or that reason, and we're here to protect her.
- For me, the first few times I turned down a job were very hard. Because I'm the daughter of hard work, My mother still works, she had I don't know how many shifts, my father had I don't know how many shifts. And I grew up like that.
- I still bust a gut as though I'm twenty years old. I have to prove [myself] today. I give so much, my all, always, as though I have to prove everything from the start.
- One issue, in certain contexts... I even think that, well, I don't know, I think we have to be more pragmatic. How we're going to make money.
- Let's turn the conversation back round to us! Turning the conversation inwards!
- I want to do it for others. Those others won't be my direct descendants, but I'm here and I can create these spaces because I now have another place. So for me, this really works as a kind of payback.
- Maybe I, as an Angolan, the daughter of Angolans, can and should learn kuduro, to dance kizomba...
- So leave! You want to solve the problem, so leave, instead of calling me for advice.

- Yes, they often go to the African continent... and they have the cheek to tell you that you don't know your origins?!

- So there's an alternative market... I don't know if that's the best word... 'alternative' also has lots of other associations, but... why? Because somehow, possibly, our weapons won't be the same as the ones they have. Because if we're wanting to use their weapons, we've already lost. We have no chance. The alternative is to use our own weapons.

- But I know which path was mine, I know which path was mine...