
Cacequi, Brazil: The Black Doctor who won Whites' Affection

29/12/2018



This is the story of a Cuban health care professional who left behind a sadness halo in her wealthy, poor, and middle-class patients.

At the reception room of the International Airport José Martí, the contagious joy of Doctor Nordalis Salas Ramírez reveals her Santiago de Cuba's roots. She is happy and she is back. She is happy while her three children and two grandchildren embrace her. But when I asked her about the things she left behind, she crumbled —despite the fact she is proud of being a Cuban woman.

She was born in the neighborhood José Martí, eastern province of Santiago de Cuba. Nordalis gets emotional when she evokes her patients and those experiences lived for two years and eight months in Cacequi, Rio Grande do Sul, a predominantly white state.

“And I am a black woman. You better get an idea! It was not easy the first days. I had to get used to everything, the language, and getting people to trust me. People are somewhat racists there.”

And did you achieve it?

Of course I achieved it! I worked hard. I persuaded them. I showed them I was professional and ready. I believe this is what they wooed the most. Then I saw the entire picture and I did not realize at first the fact that I was a black doctor caring for white people. It was hard for them.”

Are we talking about middle-class or poor people?

“There were different social classes. I cared for both wealthy and poor patients. There were no difference at all to me. As time passed by, people accepted me and they did not want me to go. But I said I had to get back home, my land, where my family is.”

You told me you worked for more than seven years in Venezuela. What have you learned now from Brazil?

A lot. I learned another language, culture and to coexist with people with different roots. I learned the power of wisdom. If you have knowledge you are a Queen. If not, you are left behind. I saw a ferocious competition between Cuban and Brazilian doctors. People did not want to getting treated by Brazilian doctors as they were not kind to them and provided sometimes the wrong treatments.

“Our doctors showed expertise and professionalism. I had a case of a young man who suffered an abdominal pain and Brazilian doctors suggested it was a gastritis, others stated he had an ulcer. When he got to my consulting room, I diagnosed him a perforated appendicitis and sent him to the hospital. He was in intensive care for one week, but he survived. Later on, he showed me a huge gratitude.

“I can say they were crying me a river until December 8th when I left Cacequi. Patients told me <the Cuban doctor, the best>. Then, how can I forget what we did for so many people in need?”

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSi Translation Staff
