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## Black women managers: a required presence!

Letícia Godinho, Renata Souza-Seidl, Larissa Peixoto

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**BLACK WOMEN  
MANAGERS:**

**Δ REQUIRED PRESENCE!**

*Organizers*  
**Letícia Godinho  
Renata Seidl**

**BLACK WOMEN MANAGERS**

SÉRIE  
*Sempre  
-vivas 2*

**BLACK  
LIVES  
MATTER**





ONLY 12%  
of BRAZILIAN  
municipalities  
are  
COMMANDED  
WOMEN by

Out of  
these WOMEN  
ONLY 3%  
are BLACK

**BLACK WOMEN  
MANAGERS: A  
REQUIRED PRESENCE!**

**Letícia Godinho and Renata Souza-Seidl**  
*Organizers*

**Larissa Peixoto**  
*English version*

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Renata Souza-Seidl and Letícia Godinho



# OPENING NOTE 1

*Black women managers: a required presence*, is a work that makes up the Sempre-Vivas Series, a collection of collective biographies of women, carried out by the João Pinheiro Foundation State, Gender, and Diversity Research Group (EGEDI, in Portuguese).

Created in December 2014, EGEDI marks the transversality of the FJP's work by successfully bringing together researchers from the School of Government, the Directorate of Public Policies, and the Directorate of Statistics and Information.

Ana Paula Salej; Jessyka L. Martins; Letícia Godinho; Maria Clara Mendes; Maria José Nogueira; Marina Alves Amorim; Matheus Arcelo Fernandes Silva; Mônica Costa Silva; Nícia Raies Moreira de Souza; Renata Souza-Seidl; Rosânia Rodrigues de Sousa; and Sergio Luiz Felix da Silva, brought this incredible work to life. With diverse and multi-racial backgrounds, these researchers give EGEDI a mark, which is its care for diversity and difference.

The research, which gave rise to the work, was carried out with the support of a parliamentary amendment carried out within the scope of the Minas Gerais state budget, in which EGEDI was approved in public consultation among 211 initiatives by civil society and public authorities in the areas of Culture, Human Rights, Education, Environment, Mobility, Urban Policies, Housing Policy, Indigenous Policies, Policies for Quilombola Communities, Policies for Traditional Peoples and Communities, Social Policies, Food and Nutrition Security, Promotion of Gender Equality, Promotion of Equality Racial and Ethnic, Health and Citizen Security. The public consultation was carried out by *Gabinetona*, a collective with an open and popular mandate represented by city councilors Bella Gonçalves and Cida Falabella, state deputy Andréia de Jesus, and federal deputy Áurea Carolina.

Organized by Researcher and Professor Letícia Godinho and Researcher and Specialist in Public Policy and Government Management, Renata Souza Seidl, the work revolves around racial and gender equality, focusing on the work and trajectory of black women from Minas Gerais who occupy or occupied prominent positions in public administration. Through oral history, the work delves into the trajectory of black women in public management, reconstructing and analyzing their life paths, struggles, and work in public administration in Minas Gerais. Here we leave the invitation to readers for this exciting and rich experience!

*Maria Isabel Araújo Rodrigues*

**Diretora da Escola de Governo da Fundação João Pinheiro**

*Mônica Moreira Esteves Bernardi*

**Vice-Presidente da Fundação João Pinheiro**

## OPENING NOTE 2

*Black women managers: a required presence is a necessary book!* 14 women, 14 biographies full of complexities. This book brings together powerful stories that give us the opportunity to better appropriate our history: *mineira*, Brazilian. And as Deputy Andreia de Jesus suggests, it can be read in two ways: from its similarities or from its specificities. And they are two complementary forms, as the interviewees intertwine experiences, feelings, and memories to the familial, social, cultural, political, and historical context in which they lived and live.

The reflections told here are the result of personal, social, and professional trajectories associated with a time, a space, a territory. In this sense, the stories are materialized and make us follow from the particular to the general, from the micro to the macro, in a subtle movement, like that of the lenses of old cameras.

As said by Lélia Gonzalez, a black woman intellectual from Minas Gerais, quoted by some interviewees, “the emotion, subjectivity, and other attributes given to our discourse do not imply renouncing reason but, on the contrary, in a way of making it more concrete, more human and less abstract and/or metaphysical. In our case, this is another reason”.

At each interview, we are invited to remember our own trajectories and urged to think about how we want our future and what we do, today, to transform our reality from this other reason.

Through its interdisciplinary group EGEDI (Study Group on State, Gender, and Diversity), FJP is enormously proud to bring to the public the second volume of the *Sempre-Vivas* series, a collection of collective biographies about women, this time of black women who have occupied or occupy positions as public managers.

Remembering that, for the book's organizers, registering is resisting, and I would add, it is also reacting.

*Carolina Proietti Imura*

**Public Policy Director at João Pinheiro Foundation**



## PRESENTATION

There are two ways to read this book that you have in your hand: the stories of these black women in public administration can be read for their similarities, but also in their specificities. Their personal and professional trajectories, the thoughts they elaborate, they allow us to look at our common ancestry and the diversity with which we construct it. These two readings complement each other and are equally important.

We are united in facing so many barriers posed by sexism and racism, structural elements of our society. Among us, this recognition doesn't even need words: we see it in each other's eyes. But it is important that words exist, as this publication does, so that this memory is recorded and never made invisible. We are often the first. I was the first of the family to complete higher education, I arrived at the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais (ALMG) where there had never been a black woman deputy. We know the responsibility that this brings and the loneliness and permanent violence that we suffer in these spaces. The countless practices of political violence of race and gender pose barriers and aim to interrupt our trajectories. Our bodies, histories, and symbols resist in the face of racism and colonialism still present in our institutions. That is why we build networks and connect with each other. This book is also a quilombo.

The João Pinheiro Foundation (FJP) made a wonderful choice in giving visibility to the origins and family histories of each interviewee. Our strength and resistance come from our ability to sew together public and private, personal, and political, ancestry and transformation. Our performance has a body, it is situated, we oppose the supposed universals of whiteness and masculinity.

For us, being in the public administration is not just a job - although that is no less important in a country where black women still have the worst indicators in the job market. But we are talking

about a dedication to what is public, to what benefits society. From the base of the pyramid where we are, our vision is holistic. Ensuring greater participation of black women in politics is a measure of historical reparation, promotion of racial democracy, and a way of guaranteeing the plurality of bodies that historically have been distanced from spaces of power.

We have a lot in common, but we are not the same - which is a good thing! Over the next pages, you will see the life stories of 14 women. Younger and older, with different interests, training areas, and perspectives. Their stories intertwine - and mine with theirs - but they are not mixed up. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks of the dangers of a unique story, of portraying a population as one, over and over again. It reminds us that storytelling is power. When the women present here take over their narratives, they take back a piece of the power that was taken from us.

For all these reasons, it is an honor to have contributed to the execution of this book through the contribution of creating a parliamentary amendment selected in a public consultation, an "Amendment with the People", that is committed to allocating public resources to subjects that are not public policy priorities. We are also occupying symbolic spaces, repossessing history. The strength of meeting the women on these pages will certainly move even more structures!

*Andréia de Jesus*

**State Deputy / Psol - Minas Gerais**

The participation of

**BLACK WOMEN**

in Brazilian public  
administration is

**HIGHER**

**than** that of white women,  
black men and  
white men;

**BUT** their

**presence** is

concentrated

lower-

income

**POSITIONS.**



# PREFACE

This book addresses the theme of black women's lives, social advancement, and work in public administration. Based on interviews conducted in 2020 with fourteen women who occupied prominent positions in public management, the book aims to share their particular *herstories* of coping, conquering, defeats, and achievements. With these individual trajectories as jumping off points, the goal is to build, at the same time, a collective biography that portrays common issues faced by black women in their struggle for a place in Brazilian public administration and, finally, for racial equality.

Registering, remembering, making history is an act of resistance. Women, and especially black women, have systematically been denied their right to write and to be part of "History" - this allegedly universal, but in fact a history written by male, white, and Eurocentric eyes and hands. Therefore, writing about the trajectories of struggles and achievements of black women in public management, with the very protagonists of these *herstories*, also aims to discuss the traces of coloniality, sexism, and racism that structurally determine Brazilian society and state, including their forms of intervention.

The questions that mobilized the research that gave rise to this book were: Who are the black women in public administration? Where are they, what positions do they hold? What difficulties do they face in accessing, maintaining their careers, and holding important advisory and management positions? How do their personal and professional trajectories interconnect, what confrontations did they go through throughout their lives, and how is this reflected in their access to the state and the work they develop? What ideas do they mobilize to sustain actions and projects within the public administration? How do they become political subjects in a social order that is largely unfavorable to them? Answering these questions is important to highlight the common struggles fought by these women; and so that, as a society, we can produce more effective public policies to ensure their full participation in society and public life. It was also important to materialize, even in a modest way, the recognition and appreciation of the enormous impact of the life and work of these women.

Narrating the experiences lived by black women in positions of power in the public service contributes to the process of social transformation in

another important way. By placing a magnifying glass on the trajectories of black women in public management positions, the book aims not only to increase the visibility of the theme. We understand that, through role models, it is possible to set in motion the levers of motivation and recognition on the field of possibilities that frames our existences; on the utopias we have as a society.

The research that gave rise to the book was carried out in Minas Gerais, state where the women biographed come from. A state with a population exceeding 21 million inhabitants, that is multiracial, mostly black<sup>1</sup> - descendants from African victims of the slave-based policy that was the basis of its social and economic development. It was the Brazilian state that most imported enslaved African population, reaching 560,728 people at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. The history of Minas Gerais is, therefore, marked by the cycle of exploration of gold, diamond, and agriculture-based exportation economy, which was funded on the enslaved work of the black population in mines and coffee plantations. Specifically, the sexual exploitation and domestic work of women part of this population within the master's houses. But it is also a story in which the *quilombismo*<sup>3</sup> is manifested, the resistance and the strengthening of black identity and black culture, through an important performance in their movements, including black women's movements. This background is evidenced by the biographies narrated and notoriously impacts the trajectories told in this book.

Methodologically, the book constitutes a *collective biography*, based on the definition of a population, given certain criteria, to analyze common characteristics of their historical experience, through a collective study of their lives. To do this, a biographical script is constructed, which serves to investigate this group in its social dynamics, private, public, or ideological, among others<sup>4</sup>.

In the process of constructing this research, first we conducted a review of texts by Brazilian and foreign authors on the participation of black women in the public service, as well as on "black feminism" and black women's movements in Brazil. Regular study and discussion meetings, which began in August 2019, went on for 11 months. During this work of maturing hypotheses and questions for research, the contributions of Michele Alves and Débora Alcântara, whom we sincerely thank, were fundamental.

Next, we established the script for the interviews, conducted between August and September 2020. They addressed the following dimensions: 1. origins and family history; 2. school and university

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1 Black and brown people make up 53.5% of the population, according to data from the 2010 Demographic Census (IBGE, 2020).

2 MARTINS, Roberto Borges. Minas Gerais, século XIX: tráfico e apego à escravidão numa economia não-exportadora. Estudos Econômicos, Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas USP, v. 13, n. 1, 1983.

3 Name given to the Brazilian black people resistance against enslavement and racism.

4 Amorim, M; Salej, A.; Godinho, L. Projeto Editorial Sempre-Vivas. Belo Horizonte, Fundação João Pinheiro, 2016.

## PREFACE

trajectory – challenges, particularities, and forms of access; 3. professional trajectory – types of access, experiences and positions occupied, strategies, symbolic violence suffered, and resilience; 4. formation of individual and collective identity – going through the theme of public policies of racial equality and religion; 5. a free reflection on herself.

The invitation made to the women who make up this collective biography sought to express diversity in generation and in professional experiences and sectors that they belonged to. Thus, the biographies bring fourteen stories of women who have and still work in different areas of public management, such as education, social assistance, culture, heritage, public safety, prison policy, municipal government, legislative advice, women’s policy, racial equality, and sexual diversity; and from different generations and places in Minas Gerais, although, for the most part, have built their life and work trajectories in the state capital.

Each chapter was written from the narratives of their own herstories, with the titles bearing their names: Macaé Evaristo, Daniela Tiffany, Diva Moreira, Nila Rodrigues, Larissa Borges, Cleide Hilda, Patrícia Santana, Xica da Silva, Eliane Dias, Maria do Carmo Ferrreira (Cacá), Yone Gonzaga, Magda Neves, Iara Viana, and Cleide Barcelos. The texts are the result of a construction by many hands, those of the biographers and the team of women and men, white and black researchers, who were attentive in maintaining the voices of the former. We hope, with this, to highlight their protagonism and, as *living memory*, register both the richness inherent to their experiences, as well as the meaning the events narrated as ascribed by the interviewees themselves. But also, to promote the discussion of the impacts of the combination of *race, class, and gender* on black women’s ascension to instances of power and public decision, structural racism, the character and importance of racial equality policies, as well as the criticism of the myths of “racial democracy” and “meritocracy” in the state’s action.

The project was financed with parliamentary funds and selected from the public call opened by the *Gabinete*, which aimed to guide the allocation of part of the resources of the individual amendments accessed by Congresswomen Andreia de Jesus and Aurea Carolina (PSOL<sup>5</sup>).

The work is the second volume of the *Sempre-Vivas* series, a compilation of collective biographies of women designed by EGEDI – State, Gender, and Diversity Group of Studies of the João Pinheiro Foundation. The group was created in 2014 and has become increasingly multiracial over time – what has allowed it to discuss, in a much richer and democratic way, albeit more challenging, the axes of gender and race in its articulation with management and public policies.

**#BlackLivesMatter  
Belo Horizonte, February 2021.**

5 Socialism and Liberty Party.

# 1

# INTRODUCTION

**Letícia Godinho**  
**Renata Souza-Seidl**  
**Ana Paula Salej**

## 1. Introduction

To investigate who are the black women in public service, we used the literature produced in-between the theorizations of black women intellectuals and the black women’s movement. Also, we utilized methodologies that could guarantee them a central role in the elaboration of research and work. The brief recovery of this literature, of the few existing examples that reinforce the persistence of challenges and the debate surrounding the methodological choice, oriented towards strengthening the presence of biographers, are the elements that the reader finds in this introduction. It was constructed to share choices and meanings, demonstrating the construction of the work’s trajectory.

### 1.1. A brief dialogue with literature

Although the presence of black women in public service has been on the agenda for a long time in the field of black women’s political organizations, it is a theme that has seen little discussion in academia. There are few spaces found in theses, dissertations, scientific journals, and books, for reflection on the conditions in which black women can access, ascend to, and occupy decision-making positions within the interior of the public administration.



It is possible to find in “black feminism”, an important discussion on the factors and structures that determine the living conditions of black women, their insertion in the workforce and in public life, among other issues. In its origin, this literature seeks to expose broader racist and sexist social structures, which organize and frame the scenario of the daily confrontations of these women and black people in general.

It is the contributions of this practical theoretical field that also explain, effectively, the lack of centrality and the little importance attributed to the theories and discussions brought by black women intellectuals, in a poor country, with a black and female majority. It shows by what mechanisms a widely oppressive social regime promotes the systematic silencing of this population in different fields of knowledge - academia, media, society, and politics. It is the epistemicide that Sueli Carneiro (2005) talks about, a process by which her perspectives or “places of speech” are promptly dismissed, ignored, or suppressed (Djamila RIBEIRO, 2017)<sup>1</sup>.

The foundations of black feminist thought are found in the first movements of black women, brought together by the concern to conceive ways of liberating their population from captivity, poverty, degrading exploitation, and the objectification of the black body. Furthermore, in the interest of creating new theoretical and methodological references to account for the realities of black women. On the one hand, “traditional” feminism was not mindful to ways of life and particular challenges of black women, given that it was founded from the perspective of white women - which, in claiming to be comprehensive, ended up taking on forms that were indeed oppressive. On the other hand, the black movement is also constrained by a limited perspective, that of the black man, which would yield little space for the recognition of women in this population. Thus, given the invisibility of black women's activism and the erasure of their agendas, it would be up to them to “blacken” the agenda of the feminist movement and “sexualize” that of the black movement, promoting the complexification of their political conceptions and practices (Sueli CARNEIRO, 2003 apud Cristiano RODRIGUES, 2010; Ana Cláudia PEREIRA, 2016; Patrícia Hill COLINS, 2019; Michele SILVA, 2007). In their emancipatory project:

They denounce sexist violence within the Black Movement itself and other social movements, in domestic relations, in internal disputes, whether in the workplace, movements, unions, and parties. They re-educate men and women black, white, and from other ethnic-racial backgrounds, as well as themselves (Nilma Lino GOMES, 2017: 73).

The articulation of the dimensions of gender, race, and class is part of the foundations of this theoretical, practical, and political effort. Black authors and activists are not only concerned with

showing how inequalities overlap in calcified layers of vulnerability that add up and re- target their life experiences; but also, how this triple articulation takes on historical, complex, and proper forms, as with the concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2002). In Brazil, the interdependence of this three-way oppression has its origins in the colonial process, forming a dependent patriarchal-racist capitalism, according to the incredibly original and precise diagnosis of Lélia Gonzalez (1988; 1984).

It is also established, in this perspective, the crucial claim of the presence - of the lived experience, embodied, whether personally or by peers, in the constitution of the ideas and guidelines postulated in the black feminist movement and thought:

By claiming different points of analysis and affirming that one of the objectives of black feminism is to mark the place of speech of those who propose them, we realize that this differentiation is necessary to understand realities that were considered implicit within hegemonic rules. (...) Speaking is not restricted to the act of emitting words, but of being able to exist. We think of a place of speech as refuting traditional historiography and the hierarchy of knowledge resulting from the social hierarchy (RIBEIRO, 2017; 32 and 36).

In addition to the organizations linked to racial issues and representative groups of black women, black women also have a strong participation in other significant movements of Brazilian black and peripheral civil society, such as the slums movement, domestic workers movements, community associations, Afro-Brazilian religious communities, the student movement, among others. These movements are present in the background of the trajectories of the women participating in this collective biography, although some of those biographies are not actively linked to any of them.

Contrary to the scenarios determined for this population, the practices and guidelines of the black women's movement and the black feminist theory unveil the context of these women's lives and point to fundamental themes surrounding the reflection on their place and role in public administration - for example, on the topic of meritocracy or on the process of developing public policies of racial and gender equality. By gradually occupying, albeit very incipiently, training spaces, work posts, and positions to speak, black women managers emphasize, in practice and in theory, the implications of the lack of representativeness and the importance of their guarantee, whether academia, or in the process of preparing and conducting public policies.

<sup>1</sup> At the authors' choice, the first citation of each reference will be made using the author's first and last name to evidence the existence of female scientists, in a context in which it is assumed that "the author" of a scientific text is usually a man.

## 1.2. Under what conditions are black women able to access public administration, ascend to, and occupy decision-making positions?

The statistics available indicate some of the challenges faced by black women in the labor market. Below, we discuss some of the data available, which are also scarce.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2019)<sup>2</sup>, black people in Brazil constitute the majority of the workforce. In 2018, they were 57.7 million people, 25.2% more than the non-black population. On the other hand, they were about 2/3 of the unemployed (64.2%) and the underutilized (66.1%) in the workforce, in that year.

Other data inform on the greater precariousness of the labor market from the point of view of black people and its consequences. In 2018, while 34.6% of employed white people were in informal occupations, among black women this percentage reached 47.3%. Of the managerial positions, the majority were held by white people - 68.6% against 29.9% of black people.

In the case of black women, they are the largest ethnic group in the Brazilian population, at 28%, and its largest workforce. They have a lower rate of participation in the economically active population (PEA, in Portuguese), higher unemployment, and lower average weekly hours - all of these, indicators of more fragile work positions (Mariana MARCONDES et al., 2013).

In addition to the more precarious access to the labor market, the vulnerability of this population is reflected in the occupation of less prestigious and remunerated positions. They are the majority among domestic workers - almost 60% of all workers in this position. They are the majority in care work in general, including domestic, health and education functions. These are positions which reinforce the roles of black women as “to serve”. In addition, about 13% of employed black women carry out activities for their own consumption or without remuneration (idem).

In Minas Gerais, black population totaled 52.3% of the population and represented the highest unemployment rate in 2018, 12.2%. In contrast, white people had an unemployment rate of 8.3%. In 2018, the average income of the black population was equivalent to 65.7% of the average income of the white population in that state (IBGE, 2019).

Black women were the majority among domestic workers with a formal contract (63.3%, among workers with a formal contract and 67.7% without a formal contract), and among auxiliary

family workers (34.5%). In contrast, they were a minority among employers, only 9.6% (IBGE, 2019).

Regarding the trends that specifically characterize the public administration scenario, one is that women in general have a greater participation in this sector. However, in the federal public sector, the highest paid, the participation of men is greater. Black women are the group with the lowest participation in this sphere, representing only 7.5% of workers, less than half of their participation in the public service overall (Tatiana SILVA; Josenilton SILVA, 2014).

Public service income reproduces this hierarchy of occupations. In it, white men are at the top, followed by black men, white women, and black women. Among professionals with higher education, black women earn, on average, less than half of a white professional (40%). This inequality is explained not only by the discrimination of gender and race, but also by how they are inserted in the occupation. Women, especially black women, are underrepresented among civil servants linked to the administration, as well as in the most prestigious activities and positions of management (Ana Paula VOLPE et al., 2012: 338). In addition, about 65% of black women employed in the public service are in the municipal sphere, which has the worst average earnings.

In Minas Gerais’s public sector, there was an increase in the number and participation of black women and men employed between 2014 and 2019, according to data from the IBGE Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD continua, in Portuguese)<sup>3</sup>. In 2019, black women represented about 35.5% of the public sector workers, the equivalent of 420.000 people; white women constituted 25%; black men, 25% and white men, 16% of this population.

Although the representation of black women in the public sector is high, when analyzed in terms of the distribution of occupations, according to the data, black women employed in public administration were distributed as follows: the vast majority in the group of science professionals and intellectuals (37% of all black women in the public sector)<sup>4</sup>; then, in the group of technicians and mid-level professionals (21%); among administrative support workers (13.5%); and in basic occupations (11.5%). Only 3.8% of black women occupied the position of directors and managers in the public service, equivalent to the rate of black men, higher than white women (2.9%) and lower than white men (4.9%) (IBGE, 2020).

In terms of qualifications, the average number of years spent in education by black women employed in the public administration of Minas Gerais (13.6 years) was only lower than that of

<sup>2</sup> Report “Social Inequalities by Color or Race in Brazil, produced by IBGE (2019), based on PNAD (National Household Sample Survey) data collected in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank Nícia Raies, researcher at the João Pinheiro Foundation, for conducting the survey of statistics for the state of Minas Gerais, with PNADc/ IBGE.

<sup>4</sup> This group includes teachers from all levels of education (primary, secondary and higher education).



white women (14). White and black men had, on average, 13 and 12.2 years of study, respectively. Despite this, black women had the worst average income, as well as the worst per capita household income. They received 46% of the income of white men, 62.5% of black men and 75% of white women (IBGE, 2020).

In combination with these data, qualitative investigations address the conditions and experiences in the scope and in the work environment, denouncing the persistent obstacles and discrimination based on race, gender, and class. Research carried out in different geographical contexts point to many convergences in this relationship, which leads to the interpretation that, even in different environments and contexts, black women are subjected to remarkably similar and therefore structuring discriminatory factors (Sueli CARNEIRO, 2019; Carmen DIOP, 2011; Irene BROWNE, 2000; J. Camille HALL; Joyce E. EVERETT; Johnnie HAMILTON-MASON, 2012).

These surveys strongly demonstrate that black women - even when highly qualified - suffer discrimination in access to employment, in their professional status, in the forms of hiring, in addition to reporting daily constraints in labor relations. They emphasize that black women with more years of formal education are systematically discriminated against at work and do not develop the careers that they could and should. In terms of precariousness and unemployment, diplomas do not protect them: they suffer from overwork, long periods of unemployment, and are much more prone to precarious working conditions and income.

The precarious forms and conditions of work make it difficult or even deprive them of affiliation with labor groups (unions and associations), which consequently hinders access to rights (labor, social security, among others). On the other hand, they are part of the repertoire of discrimination: the failure to recognize their competence to occupy certain jobs; the “symbolic” occupation of a job - that is, without decision-making power or corresponding functions; the disreputable applicant; the “appropriation” of authorship of their ideas; function deviations; and moral and sexual harassment.

The studies’ reports indicate that their reaction to the institutional racism that permeates such contexts involves the development of strategies and practical knowledge; these often take the form of “behaving according to the rules” of which they are the victims of, to persist in organizations. At other times, they generate forms of coping and influence changes in the work environment.

### 1.3. The methodological challenges of the research

Explaining the methodology used to carry out this work, which gathers stories of black women who held or occupy positions of relevance in public management, means sharing the choice of a path to ensure the greater presence of those biographed in the work. These stories, which can take different forms (Sumaya MORAES, 2009), here took the form of biographies. Based on oral testimonies, instigated by a pre-defined script, the biographies were written using the technique of transcreation, in a dialogical process woven between researchers and those who are biographed.

The use of oral history and biography as a method of investigation and the challenges inherent in writing oneself are important aspects of the research and, therefore, will be explored below. The peculiarities inherent in the methodological choices reinforce the importance of explaining the procedures related to the development of the research and the text itself, which we cover in the following subsections. Lastly, we develop some points about a writing that is intended to be feminist and blackened, in short, decolonial. With this, we hope to show how the choices made, some of them slightly “untraditional”, seek to converge with the perspective assumed by our investigation.

#### 1.3.1. Oral history and the use of biography in social research

(...) it is possible to verify that oral history is a field of work and a methodology that (...) is characterized by interdisciplinarity and the many possibilities of employment, from political history, through the history of social movements, through the history of workers, from institutions, to the history of memory, for example; that it falls within the field of the history of the present time; which is closely linked to the notions of biography and life history; that the oral source has specificities that differentiate it from other historical sources (Verena ALBERTI, 1997, p. 18).

Alberti's explanation above indicates that the use of oral history is a convergent methodology with the objective of this book: a theme whose literature is not only very scarce but lacks alternative sources available. This book seeks to portray memories and stories of the present time, and its strong political bias is evident.

Oral history is closely related to the biographical method. Biography, autobiography, and diaries, are traditional genres of the literary field, composed of accounts of a person's life (ALBERTI, 2000), and which consolidated themselves as such from the middle of the 18th century (Yuri BATISTA, 2018, p. 1). In the social sciences, Sumaya Moraes (2009) explains that biography had its use expanded as a method of investigation throughout the 20th century when it was recognized for, among other aspects, ensuring the articulation of

an individual's history with social history. The incorporation of contemporary themes in historical research, starting in the 1970s, brought not only an interest in oral history, but also an appreciation for biography (ALBERTI, 2000). Both methods consider individual experiences to be important in understanding the past and are, therefore, powerful tools for revaluing the role of subjects in history.

The act of interpreting your own history is also that of understanding the facts as “placements and displacements in the social space” (Pierre BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 190). They do not constitute themselves and are part of the plot of many other stories. The personal report expresses “a collective experience, a worldview made possible in a given society” (MORAES, 2009, p. 2). That is why the biography represents the possibility of a theory of social and historical action, which establishes a relationship between the psychological and social dimensions. It guarantees, to those who use this approach, the recognition of singularities, without disregarding the socio-cultural dimensions (MORAES, 2009).

When considering each subject as a carrier of a life project linked to social history, the biographical method also gains relevance when it comes to building or reconstructing the identity of a group. The collective biographies concentrate characteristics of a certain group, illustrating typical forms of behavior. Even exceptional or exclusive characteristics serve to show what is structurally and statistically specific to the group, by allowing the identification of latent possibilities of a culture and deducing, “in negative”, what would be more frequent (ALBERTI, 2000, p. 3).

In the expectation of valuing the contribution of personal reports and understanding elements common to the reality of the biographed women, this work was conceived as a collective biography. This means that the reports presented are important in themselves but also as a whole.

From a collective point of view, this means that it is possible to focus on the “common characteristics of a group of actors in history through the collective study of their lives” (Lawrence STONE, 2011, p. 115). The various types of information about the biographies juxtaposed, combined, and examined (for example, in the chapter that closes the book), constitute important results of this type of investigation. From an individual point of view, in turn, each chapter is a record of the uniqueness and power of each narrated trajectory. The narrated stories express unique events, embodying a lived time. In this sense, making these biographies available is also of political and pedagogical importance, in which the expression of experiences and the concreteness of individual experiences are valued, the critical, reflective, and inventive attitude (MORAES, 2009) in the context of teaching

practices hegemonically anchored in “generic” theories and ideals, supposedly universal. The biography challenges us to face “another knowledge”, according to Bruce Albert (2015, p. 513), “at the same time close and inaccessible”. It urges us to reconcile with the other, the other, which are also the non-generic, the non-universal and, for this very reason, multiple. Also with our own lives, knowledge, and memories.

### 1.3.2. The dilemmas surrounding self-writing

In the chapters of this book, the presence of the biographed as the first co-author and of writing in the first person can create the expectation that the work will gather autobiographies. This question, in fact, refers to an important controversy, placed both in the field of literature and in the human and social sciences. They are “the backstage of the first person”, which Philippe Lejeune deals with (1980 apud ALBERT, 2015), among many other authors. In the case of a text written in the first person, but in co-authorship, who would be the “true” author of the text? What is the role of the co-authors, the biographers - are they passive transcribers of memories that are transmitted to them or do they play an active role in the process of remembering and constructing the narrative?

Written in 1983, *The writings of self*, by Michel Foucault seeks to reflect on authorship in texts such as letters, diaries and any other ways of recording actions, thoughts, or feelings. He concludes that these textual genres would work for their authors as a process of venting or purging something he wants to share. They provide a greater knowledge of the person about himself, and a possibility to reflect on his own personality and his place in society (SILVA; MOREIRA, 2016).

But the author does not deal with co-authored writing, in which authors and characters in a biography are not necessarily the one and only person. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the life story seems useful to us. Bourdieu (1996) points out that, in this method, the investigated is placed at the disposal of the researcher, who is the one who proposes a certain structure: for example, an order for the succession of events, which will not always strictly follow a chronological order of narration; the topics to be discussed and deepened, among others.

Thus, if in the “classic” life story, a privileged informant is asked to tell his or her life in order to extract material for the text; in alternative forms of research and writing, it is not intended to be absent from the writer or co-author. In fact, what would characterize classic biographical forms would be precisely “the fiction of an absence of fiction”, that is, “the illusion of a face-to-face without mediation” between the biographed and the reader,

according to Bruce Albert (2015, p. 535). In this same perspective, Alberti (1996) explains the difference between autobiography and oral history, justifying the use of co-authorship in this method. Both are exposed in the first person of the biographed, however:

(...) While in the autobiography there is only one author, in the oral history interview there are at least two authors - the interviewee and the interviewer. Thus, even if the interviewer says little, to allow the interviewee to narrate his experiences, the interview he conducts is part of his own account - scientific, academic - about past actions (Alberti, 1996, p. 4).

About the texts that make up this collective biography, we build the understanding that the author, narrator, and character are not one. Biographers and biographed establish a process of dialogical interaction that transforms the work and gives it multiple authorship. This construction was not simple, but it reveals our option for a path that, in addition to valuing the biographed as a black woman and the protagonist of the story being told, also intends to show that the approach built is the result of an interaction that produces a specific writing of the self, distinct from what could have been built by itself.

Thus, the first co-author is the biographed each one of the authors of the reports that constitute the concrete source of this biography; her voice. The biographers, whose initiative comes from the investigation, appear as co-authors - they present themselves as transcreators, whose non-existence is not intended to simulate. This encounter between the what's told and the scientific can be considered as the result of the organization of living memory and the availability and confidence of the biographed to follow a script constructed, at first, by the biographers.

However, such a construction, to be legitimate, must obey certain ethical principles. The meeting between biographed and biographers must be based on a kind of "tactical pact", defended by Albert (2015), which arises in response to the confidence placed by the former in unveiling her memories. Thus, one must not only do justice to the stories themselves, but to their political sense. In other words, in this kind of research, we, researchers, have become political allies of our interlocutors, as the foundation of this engagement.

Finally, if spreading the word - in this case, someone else's - always implies transforming it, there is a set of procedures and narrative solutions that guarantee the integrity of the writing, which we explain below.

### 1.3.3. Methodological procedures

Júlia Matos and Adriana Senna (2011) warn that, when using the method and the source of oral history, one must pay attention to the explanation of the methodological and procedural options that constituted the investigation. The fundamental procedures for carrying out this work concern the literature review, the production of the script, the selection of the women to be biographed, the conduct of interviews, the treatment of data, and the production and analysis of the text.

Of these various stages, the first was the revision of texts by Brazilian and foreign authors around the theme of the participation of black women in the world of work and public service, as well as on black feminism and the movements of black women in Brazil. The regular EGEDI study and discussion meetings, which began in August 2019, lasted 11 months and preceded the construction of the interview script. In this effort to study and mature hypotheses and questions for investigation, the contributions of Débora Menezes Alcântara<sup>5</sup> and Michele Lopes da Silva Alves<sup>6</sup> were fundamental.

The review supported the construction of the interview script, which addressed the following dimensions: 1. origins, family history; 2. school and university trajectory - challenges, differences, and forms of access; 3. professional trajectory - types of access, experiences and positions occupied, strategies, symbolic violence suffered, and resilience; 4. formation of individual and collective identity, public policies of racial equality, and religiousness; 5. a free reflection about themselves. In the process of discussing the script, there were important contributions from Merelane Emanuele Cardoso<sup>7</sup> and Camila Natália Ferreira Teófilo Alves<sup>8</sup>.

In the next stage, criteria were defined for the selection of women to be biographed. In this choice, what was sought was a diverse set when it came to generations, professional experiences, and sectors occupied by them in public administration. Thus, the book brings together biographies of women who worked and still work in different areas of public management: education, social

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7 Social worker, she was Municipal Secretary of Citizenship Development and Social Assistance of the municipality of São João Del-Rey in Minas Gerais.

8 Public Defender in the Office of Minas Gerais. Co-creator and coordinator of the Samba of Black Women project in Belo Horizonte.



assistance, culture, heritage, public security, prison policy, city hall, legislative consultancy, women's policy, racial equality, and sexual diversity. Women who belong to different generations and come from different places in Minas Gerais, although most have built their life and work paths in the state capital.

In view of the social isolation measures implemented since the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to choose to conduct oral history interviews remotely (using a video call application). The interviews were recorded in audio and video, with prior knowledge and authorization by the biographed, carried out between August and September 2020. The 11 researcher-biographers who made up the research team were divided into pairs to carry out the remote meetings with the biographed. Each pair was responsible for organizing the interview, as well as writing the biography of two to three women, taking two to four sessions, depending on each case. In total hours, around 44 hours were recorded.

The next procedure was to transcribe the reports. In the oral transcription, the recorded content was converted to textual form; the word is transported in its “raw state” (Leandro ALONSO, 2016). In this process, repetitions of words, specific expressions, and sketches were preserved. This effort resulted in almost 700 transcribed pages. In the next stage, the oral report generated from the literal transcription is reorganized. Phrases without discursive continuity are removed, or whose meaning was not strictly necessary for the report; characteristics of the oral record are softened to gain greater fluidity in the written record. However, we have chosen to preserve some styles of orality and we seek to maintain the style and voice of each one of them.

The first version of the text was consolidated with the transcreation. This is the stage in which the “extratextual elements” are incorporated: it is the moment of the “operationalization of culture”, of the conversion of speech into “resigned language” (ALONSO, 2016, p. 17-ss). In this process, from a vast and immense set of stories, the editors chose the central axes of the story to be told, in a central procedure to the oral history method, according to José Meihy and Fabíola Holanda (2013 apud ALONSO, 2016): to apprehend the visions, narrative constructions and idealizations, highlighted from the exposition of the facts. An effort of selection and composition, which combines both an aesthetic and political concern in the production of the text.

Part of this stage was the choice of what Alonso calls “vital tones” of the interview, phrases chosen to be used as epigraphs of the sections of the chapters. This is a “fundamental element in practice because it contributed to find the ‘narrative nexuses’, the central axes of the documents constructed and the thematic links presented by the interlocutors” (ALONSO, 2016, p. 16).

Finally, it is important to say that we seek to compose the narrative based on the chosen epistemological and methodological approach. The co-authors sewed the story told in each of the biographies, using the objective and subjective contents of the reported trajectories, the choices, values, and experiences during their professional life as the conducting threads. From the point of view of the set of biographies, systematic and thematic harmony between the chapters was sought, thus maintaining a certain coherence in the work, and making it capable of confronting the main intention of the book: reconstructing the itineraries of black women public managers, seeking to understand how they were covered, in a context of struggle for the rights of the black population. To this end, collective meetings were held at various times for reading and writing the texts, seeking to resolve doubts and uncertainties about the messages to be transmitted.

The first versions of the texts were sent to the biographed for validation. In all cases, this involved correcting inaccuracies and editing sensitive passages. In many, the reconstruction of complete stretches was necessary. This final stage is of fundamental importance in a research such as this, in which a collaborative method is chosen and the biographed and first author is, at the same time, deponent, social agent, and “object of study”.

With this, an inversion occurs in terms of the traditional logic of research, in which those researched are taken as the “object” of the researchers' view. Instead of simply “collecting data”, we were re-educated by those who agreed to participate and write with us. In addition, we believe that this way it was possible to avoid a complacent look at the black population, predominant in literature until very recently, avoiding the erasure of their protagonism.

#### 1.3.4. The method is personal, it is political, and it has a body: how to portray it in a feminist and blackened writing

In the research process, we learned how access to knowledge is not purely intellectual but passes through the body. In this research, we did not just reach the limits of our own reason, seeking to access those of the biographed. In meetings scheduled by a team composed in half of white people and of two men, not only intellectual interest and theoretical-political convergences marked the interpellation of the biographed. Whether confronting the hateful actions of whiteness or recognizing black sisters in the reports, the process was intensely moved and felt by our corporealities. This destabilization, however, helped to keep the attention alive on the objective of building a different point of view - and, above all, a more realistic one - of our history.

This is also why we seek to maintain the form of feminist and blackened writing. As in other social expressions, the colonizer's original language is gendered and racialized, that is, traditionally excluding. Therefore, an important feature of the writing of this book is the use of a degendered language, especially in the original Portuguese. The bibliographic references used are cited from their first names, and not just surnames, to evidence the existence (now majority) of women scientists, in a context in which it is assumed that “the author” of a scientific text is always a man. From the point of view of blackness, we avoid words that could be negatively associated with blackness, or that are exclusive because they reinforce the ideal of whiteness (such as “clarifying”).

It does not hurt to go through to the motions, already trivial, but which make feminist and anti-racist movements and theories converge: “the personal is political”, “the body is political”. “Accused” of not being able to formulate a theoretical, universal thought, women have always used the strategy of telling their personal stories to vocalize their perspectives, worldviews; in short, to give visibility to the body that materializes and conditions their unique existences. For this reason, the entire writing of the book seeks to value a personal point of view - hence, one more reason for the use of the first person, not only in the chapters containing the biographies. This also helps to explain the insertion of photos from the personal collection of the women biographed.

Finally, in making this book we discover a path in which oral history and biography meet black feminist tradition and thought. There, storytelling is the primary source of a memory and oral and written wisdom of the black people, which is also a strategy for reflection, for ancestral and political pedagogy. In short, they are the *escrevivências*<sup>9</sup>, which Conceição Evaristo talks about:

The term *escrevivências* [...] is a concept that has as its image an entire historical process that Africans and their descendants enslaved in Brazil went through. In fact, it is born from the following: when I am writing and when other black women are writing, the role of enslaved African women in the master's houses comes to mind. These women had to tell stories to put the people in the master's house to sleep. The offspring were asleep with black mothers telling stories. So, they were stories to fall asleep to. When I say that our texts try to blur this image, we do not write to make those in the master's house fall asleep; on the contrary, it's to wake them up from their unjust sleep. And this *escrevivência* takes as a motto of creation, precisely, the experience. The experience from the personal point of view or the experience from the collective point of view (EVARISTO, 2017 apud Mariana SOUSA; Maria BARBOSA, 2020).

Thus, in the chapters that follow on the individual life and work trajectories of black women in public administration, not only the professional dimension is considered. The family and social origins are presented, showing both its formative, ethical, and political role, as well as conditioning access to schooling – the main trigger for the activation of social mobility. The context of school and university education is exposed and interpreted, sometimes as a source of processes of

cognitive annihilation and trust, and sometimes as a cradle of activism and identity reconstitution. Other dimensions are reported: that of activism, which cuts across the entire adult and, above all, professional trajectory; that of sexual and romantic relations, as a deeply tortuous path; that of religion, promoting a reconnection with an erased past and inheritance, but also a collective future.

With this, we hope to contribute to the discussion about the complex plot of this racial-sexual-classist exclusion contract that strikes them head on, and potentialize ways out to build a more just and democratic society, for us all.

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# 2

## MACAÉ MARIA EVARISTO

Macaé Maria Evaristo dos Santos  
Renata Souza-Seidl  
Letícia Godinho

### 1. Origins

I was born in 1965. One year after the coup, in the countryside of Minas Gerais, in São Gonçalo do Pará – a small town, with 10,000 people, with a white and very conservative population. My family is one of the few black families in the town and they were really poor.

My grandparents had only my mother. They were farmers, worked in the fields, managed to buy a small farm. My father's family was from the Quilombo do Pimentel, which is in the region of Pedro Leopoldo and Santa Luzia. When they moved to Belo Horizonte, they lived in Pendura Saia, a slum that was in the South-Central region of the city. They went through the whole process of real estate speculation, which took the black families that lived there, to replace them with an upper middle-class neighborhood, which today is Cruzeiro. So, this is the domestic context I come from.



### **Mom: *women can't be dependent on men***

My mother, Maria Antônia Cesária Evaristo, was a teacher trained to teach high school. Getting an education came for her with many obstacles. We found a picture of her in elementary school; she was the only black girl in the class. She trained as a teacher in Para de Minas, the only place where was accepted – because at the time, even though my grandparents were paying for her studies, some schools did not accept black people.

My mother always struggled a lot, and she had a goal for her four daughters. She designed a project for us: her daughters had to study and be emancipated. "Women cannot be dependent on men", that was her biggest fear. Because for black girls, especially in the countryside, when the mother was widowed and poor, society also had rules in place: when my father died, many people asked my mom to give us away. But my mom always said: "No! I will not give away my daughters! We can live on bread and water, but we will stay together". Giving daughters away for someone to care for them was quite common. In fact, this would turn into child labor, "care" in exchange for work.

My mother persisted and we all went to school. We all have tertiary education, and two, master's degrees. We followed the script that my mother planned for us, to have our work, to own ourselves, to lead our lives.

### **Father: militant of the black movement**

In a way, we also followed my father's tradition of being engaged in the anti-racist struggle. This has always been a fundamental debate for us. My father, Osvaldo Evaristo Catarino, was self-taught, he learned several things by himself: he read a lot, painted, and sculpted. He participated in free arts classes in the Municipal Park and wrote for the newspaper Estado de Minas.

My father was a black man, who, at that time, wrote and did so many things. He was a militant in the black movement in Belo Horizonte and participated in the Cultural Association José do Patrocínio, one of the first black associations here. He went, noticeably young, as soldier to World War II, where he became deaf. He had an issue with his ear because of the explosions of bombs and there is the assumption that he might have died because of the things that happened to him there.

### **The childhood**

When my dad and my mom got married, they lived in the countryside. My first sister died really young, before she was 6 months-old – we were 5 daughters, actually. So, I was raised in the country. When my father died, I was 10 years-old and my youngest sister was one month-old. So, I usually say that from then there's a break in my childhood, because I have to take on a series of domestic responsibilities, especially looking after my younger sisters. I had a sister who was one month-old and something else, I had to work. My mother sometimes worked in the morning, in the afternoon and at night, and I was the one who took care of everything. When I was not in school, I was taking care of the house and my little sister. When I was a teenager, there were people who thought my sister was my daughter.

Despite being in poverty, of having lost my father really early, of the family having gone through a lot of difficulties, even having to help the family and work, childhood in the countryside provided us with something very cool, which is closeness and joyfulness. As an educator, it bothers me that today's children live walled-up, with no possibility to expand – which is something that I fully experienced in the country. We had a yard, a street, a square. It was an extremely poor place, with open sewers, problems with electricity, water; but there was space. I walked on the ground, climbed trees, was able to play and have a lot of fun.

Currently, I have two daughters, Mariana and Marina, two wonderful women. Mariana is 32 and Marina is 30 years old. Mariana graduated in Law and now in Languages, living up to family tradition. Marina is a Brazilian sign language interpreter and now is also in school for Languages-Libras. I am married and I was married. This is something I talk about in my biography<sup>1</sup>. If there's one thing, I never gave up on was love. I love dating. With my first boyfriend, who is a black man and the father of my daughters, I was married for 14 years. We then split up in and I fell in love again several times. I am currently married again, unofficially, but for nearly 12 years. My partner, Carlos Tibúrcio Crispim Mahaia, is a samba musician and not an intellectual in glasses. I created a rule for myself: never date an intellectual in glasses again. Date people who like music, singing, the night!

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<sup>1</sup> SILVA, Jailson de Sousa; SILVA, Eliane Sousa. Macaé Evaristo: uma força negra na cena pública. Rio de Janeiro: Eduniperiferias, 2020.

### **Religiousness: *the sacred is an important and powerful aspect, even when we want to deny and stifle it***

In my family, we were a group far from the rest of the group – the town was 120km from Belo Horizonte. And, at that time, the 1960s, because of poverty, this spatial distance was the same as if we lived in Australia. There was no phone or social media, we saw each other every two years. To my mother, a woman in the country, leaving with four daughters and traveling to the capital was a big deal! This gave a different configuration to our nuclear family and had an impact on the religious issue.

Because they were from a very conservative country town, my mother and grandmother were Catholic; therefore, it was the religious base on which we were raised. My grandmother was really religious, my mother not so much; but she went to mass, she always contributed to church events. I only found and reached out to Afro-Brazilian religions – in fact, Candomblé and Umbanda – as I left São Gonçalo. Today, I can look back and see the oppression and religious racism in the countryside. I can see how black women from Candomblé were perceived in my town. They were women you should fear, who you should not talk to, do not go to their houses. I remember a lady named Maria Baiana, who wore all white and a headwrap, a beautiful and elegant woman. I didn't know why, but people said we had to be afraid of her.

Another sad story from my town was a lady who was banned because a young girl from a rich family was ill. The girl had an attack, no one could say what it was, and then she died. So, someone accused this woman, a black woman, of casting a spell and causing the girl's death. A bunch of men gathered and went to this black lady's house. She was taken from her home and beaten through the city streets; they forced her to go to the cemetery to find the spell, which was supposedly buried, where they found a rosary. The woman was taken to the town's highway intersection, they took off her clothes and left her there, forbidding her to ever come back. I wasn't told this part; I saw it, I must have been about seven years old. So, I can understand the terror that black people and families had. They had to let go! When you are in a minority situation, you have to give up your traditions and your religion. And, of course, adhere to the religion of the oppressor. It was the only way to save themselves at that point. This happened in Minas Gerais, in the 1970s, 120 kilometers from Belo Horizonte.

When we talk about religion, there is also a lot this process of oppression in our lives. But, also, I can say that today I am closer to Candomblé. I'm not initiated, but I have a daughter who is. The new generations are reconnecting us with this spirituality, which today is strong and present. The way we connect to the sacred is strong, even if we want to deny it, stifle it. You can see the other families' environment: my first mother-in-law is Catholic and super religious; but she is a

healer, she was a midwife, and her grandchildren are now beginning to manifest this spirituality as well. A force that is undeniable. You can try to silence it, but it will emerge, and with force.

### **2. At school: *education as a watershed***

I always had good teachers; they have been my great inspiration. I remember all of them from the early years of elementary school, each with their own peculiarity. I remember the teacher who taught me how to read and write; my second-grade teacher who taught me everything I know about math. My mother, who was my teacher in third grade. The fourth-grade teacher who loved literature, who made us read Orígenes Lessa's books and then took us to meet the author – for most for us, the most elegant and wonderful thing! Also, at the Catholic University, studying Social Work, I had wonderful women as teachers. They all inspired my work, what I think about education, and the way I see it. Education is, for me, a watershed that strongly marks my path.

My school trajectory follows the expansion of the public school, because when I did my first years of elementary school, only those were public. When I went to fifth grade – the Gymnasium, as it was called at the time – public education was not yet universal. There were schools from the communities, from the Rede Cenecista<sup>2</sup>, a kind of cooperative, in which families paid for children to study. I reached fifth grade and right after it becomes public. Likewise, when I reached high school, it was not in a public school yet, but by the community; I studied for a year or two, and then it also became public. My mother, who was a teacher, was part of that story, fighting for the expansion of public education in my town. My mother thought that I should get two diplomas in high school, that learning to teach wasn't enough, since I wanted to continue studying afterwards. So, I got a technical degree in Chemistry, at a private school in Divinópolis; and the teacher's training course at night, in my town.

### **The school experience from the perspective of black women's absence and loneliness**

Like my mother, my school life was very lonely, from the point of view of the black presence in the school. Most of the children who attended school were from white families. Being a black child in school is difficult. You will be called "brillo-pad hair". Because of this, my mother had an incredibly unique way of educating us: she taught us to bully white people, as a defense mechanism. She said: "If they call you 'brillo-pad hair', you call them 'charity hospital pasta'". I cry with laughter

<sup>2</sup> The National Community Schools Campaign (CNEC), founded by Filipe Tiago Gomes, is a philanthropic education network, which appeared in 1943, to see to children and young people who did not access to public education or could not afford private schools, especially in the countryside. The model involved the community in the construction of the project.

about it to this day. “If they call you to a 'smelly n-word, you say 'white belly gecko’”. My mother taught us, in that order: first, protect ourselves; then, how to respond: "You will not take. You will respond in kind." I think I could write a book like Marcia Tiburi's: instead of "How to Talk to a Fascist", I'll write "How children can defend themselves against racism".

We need to teach our children strategies, response mechanisms for these situations of racism, because during childhood this is terrible, it affects their self-esteem. Usually, the teachers made no intervention. And when they did, they said: "Why are you thinking it's bad? You're black anyway!", legitimizing the aggressor. It is a difficult process for a child to operate in, to handle these situations.

Later, when I became a teenager, another issue hit me hard: the loneliness of the black woman. Being a black woman in a country town with mostly white people, means not be able to experience your adolescence, both from the point of view of your sexuality, or how to live romantic love. You cannot find peers to exercise this. You will not be seen as an "acceptable" person as a woman for a relationship. Romantic love, if it's good to anybody, is not meant for us, it is not framed for us. I had many friends in my teens; hung out with men, but it was a friendship. And this is what I remember. I didn't have a romantic relationship, I wasn't “dateable” to those boys. I was the cool and fun friend. So, during adolescence, black girls suffer immensely; it becomes a place of silence, of concealment, of sublimation.

The relationship ideal in Brazilian society is deeply marked by a concept of white heteronormativity. We read thousands of books in our adolescence, picked by the schools, countless are novels. Who are the characters? There is no black woman as a romance character who is loved. I was a compulsive reader; I read a lot in my teens, but I never met this woman in literature. There wasn't a single movie that had black couples. This in adolescence also contributes to making this process painful. We don't exist. And when we do, it is in a state of subalternity and constant humiliation.

What can be found in a black woman is this great attempt, in general, to have her body exploited and appropriated. She will be harassed, she will be asked to prostitute yourself, to sell her body. She will not be recognized as human. Today, part of the black youth can translate this and talk about it, mainly in social networks. Many black women bloggers are building a way to elaborate on these issues; but this did not exist for my generation.

### **3. *Out of diapers: the beginning of the professional, university, and personal trajectories, all at the same time***

In 1982, after graduating high school, there was this pressure: I wanted to keep studying, but I had a problem, to be actually able to study. My mother was in no condition to pay university fees for her four daughters. So, the following year, I did everything I could do to find a job.

In my city, the job opportunities that existed were at the diaper factory. During the selection, I folded the hell out of those diapers, more than many people who were with me. But when it comes to the selection, I was overlooked - there's no need to ask why. Later that same year, 1983, there was a public exam for teacher in Belo Horizonte and I signed up. I was approved and very well ranked. In March 1984, I was appointed and began working as a municipal teacher in Belo Horizonte, at a school in the Tupi neighborhood, in the north of the city. Until I got settled in, I lived with an aunt; afterwards, with roommates. My goal was: to work to pay for the prep course, so I could take the university entrance exam and go to university.

#### **University experience**

My mother wanted me to go to medical school, it was her big dream. I wanted to go to study Pharmacology, that was the fashion at the time. But when I arrived in Belo Horizonte, I realized that I was going to need a lot more knowledge and a more structured life to compete for a place at the Federal University, on equal footing. So, I took the entrance exam for the university, and I passed the first round, but I didn't get into Pharmacology, by a hair. So, my option was going into Social Work at PUC<sup>3</sup>. I was glad I did, very happy! It was a lot more like me.

When I started university in 1985, I studied in the morning and worked in the afternoon. Back then, there was no subway; I took a bus. I'd arrive early at PUC, study until 11:30 am, make a mad dash to Jardim Felicidade next. There was a time when, because of this, I had to work on the so-called "hunger shift". At that time, there wasn't enough space for students in public schools, so there were three shifts: from 7am to 11am, from 11am to 3pm, and from 3pm to 7pm. They named one of them the "hunger shift", because you got no lunch break: you had to work between 11am until 3pm. Usually, we worked two hours. It was a struggle for us to dismantle this system and move forward in building schools in the communities.



### *Activism as a part of my trajectory*

My first contact with the political activism took place in the country, with the church movements, the Local Ecclesial Communities (CEBS), the pastoral youth and black agents from pastoral actions. In my town, there were many groups of young people who woke me up to politics. As a teen, a friend gave me a wonderful book called *Si me permiten hablar*, about the history of leader Domitila Chungara Barros, who was a poor labor leader, and who worked in mining. She fought a huge battle in Bolivia and dedicated her whole life to fighting for the rights of people in mining poor families. The book left a deep impression on me, because it was the story of a woman of the people, about the struggle against imperialism, and the organization of women.

My trajectory begins with this group, meeting people, and reading things that gave me a broader worldview. From a familial point of view, my father was an activist, but I had little contact with him. Afterwards, I got closer to my cousin, Conceição Evaristo. She coexisted with my father when she was younger and told me many things about him that I did not know. And there was also my mother, a teacher, with her battles for school improvements in my town and for us to study.

When I came to Belo Horizonte, I became teacher in a low-income neighborhood, and began to see thousands of situations of inequality because of access. Started working in 1984 at the Sebastiana Novais School, in the Tupi neighborhood, in the North region, with one of the smallest city development indices, where many children still were left out of school. When it comes to sleeping in line, it was literally that or not getting the space. Fifth grade was the worst; there really wasn't enough for everyone, a lot of people were left out of school. It was an absurd vacancy deficit in elementary school.

Let's see this from a historical perspective. The dismantling of slavery in Brazil is done by penalizing the people who had been enslaved. Those who received reparations were the owners, the enslavers. The black population had no access to land reform, to any kind of public funding and were forbidden to study.

Decrees from the monarchy, from the end of the 19th century, prohibited the education of black people. The first Constitution of the Republic prohibited the education of black people. Black people could study only if they were over 14, at night, and if the teacher accepted them. So, this situation remained until the end of the 20th century. This is important for us to understand what structural racism is, the perversity of the way slavery was dismantled in Brazil and how the state will be, at all times, used in a patrimonial way.

But after the military dictatorship and after the 1988 Constitution, which is a milestone, governments could not be silent. The Constitution stipulates the right to education, and for children and indigenous peoples, to specific education.

A little before that, still during the military dictatorship and the struggle for re-democratization, I started to participate in a series of movements. There were several issues with the community, with the residents' associations where we were organized to fight for improvements in the community. At the time, I participated, for example, in task forces to build houses in Jardim Felicidade. Also, in groups of healthcare and education workers. We sought to expand access to education, to elect a school principal, to have a school board. The principals were appointed by politicians, and the few vacancies that were in the schools were for people who arrived with councilor's or deputy's card. So, I engaged with the popular movement, all at the same time: teaching, studying at PUC, dating, having a child; in short, everything together.

At PUC, I met not only the student movement, but also the Unified Black Movement (MNU), and the Black Unity and Awareness Group (GRUCON), of which I became a member. I also got to know the Black Pastoral Association (APN), strongly organized in Belo Horizonte. These groups were especially important early on for me, in my awakening towards something beyond my individual trajectory, in my need to engage in collective struggles. These meetings became linked to my community work in the Tupi and Jardim Felicidade neighborhoods and to the university's black movement. I also met with several Jesuit priests who did outreach, community work, in the same region where I worked.

In this context, I begin to understand the anti-racist struggle in a more organic way. As you participate, you discuss and realize that engaging in the social movement is an educating. Here, I remember Nilma Lino Gomes' book<sup>4</sup>: "Movimento Negro Educador". It is the movement that



Macaé at the Council of State Secretaries of Education, 2018.

By: Luiz Rocha

<sup>4</sup> Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and first black woman in Brazil to become dean of a federal university, the University of Lusophone Afro-Brazilian International Integration (UNILAB), in 2013. In 2015-16 she was minister of the Ministry for Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights, in the Dilma Rousseff government.

educates, as Paulo Freire would say<sup>5</sup>; it educates us and educates society, it brings these issues to the surface, to denounce them and to force the construction of public policies to overcome these situations.

At PUC, I also found politics. At the Faculty of Social Work, I met Patrus Ananias<sup>6</sup>, who was my teacher. I met several people who fought against the dictatorship, who were involved in a new political scenario, and in the construction of the Workers' Party (PT). I lived all the effervescence of the beginning of the Party, the first PT elections in Belo Horizonte and engagement with this agenda. In addition, it is from my generation of Social Work that the whole debate about the Unified Social Assistance System will emerge. I'm from the generation that lived through that debate, the fight and the construction of several social policies of contemporary Brazil, of the movement.

#### 4. Professional trajectory: woman, black, and public manager

My trajectory is deeply intertwined with my professional practice. I planned my paths according to the issues I believe in. I look back and I think I was really happy, because I always worked in schools and projects with which I had a shared identity, that I was in tune with, a progressive, emancipatory, Freirian education proposal. I believe in that education and try to take this conception wherever I go. So, increasingly, I was making the choice to involve myself in such projects, to work in schools at the outskirts of the city, be close to the communities, work with community associations, even with an agenda for the school and a militant one, after working hours, on Saturday or Sunday.

In 1984, I joined the Belo Horizonte Municipal Education Network as a teacher. I worked many years as Lead Teacher of literacy for children, youths, and adults. After that, I took on some Pedagogical Coordination posts in schools. I was elected Principal of the Edson Pisani State School, the Vila Fátima school that is in the Cafezal community, right inside the Aglomerado da Serra<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Paulo Freire, educator, philosopher, and Patron of the Brazilian Education. Author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), he is considered one of the most notable thinkers in the history of world pedagogy, having influenced the movement called critical pedagogy.

<sup>6</sup> Lawyer, retired professor from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, and Brazilian politician. Ananias was city councilor and mayor of Belo Horizonte, federal deputy for Minas Gerais, Minister of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger during President Lula da Silva's first term and Minister of Agrarian Development during President Dilma Rousseff's second term.

<sup>7</sup> The Aglomerado da Serra is the largest slum in Minas Gerais, located in the South area of its capital, Belo Horizonte.

I also worked in one of the first adult literacy programs, instituted in 1990, in Belo Horizonte. It started with the literacy of women who worked in the SLU<sup>8</sup>, street-sweeping. Most were illiterate and the city decided to establish an adult literacy program for them, which was amazing. It meant alphabetizing a woman and having her say: "People always asked me where Tupinambás Street was; for years, I have swept Tupinambás Street every day and couldn't tell them. And today I read the sign "Tupinambás Street". So, that's the thing: the right to education, to diversity is the right to understand where you are.

Other issues appear, such as the fight against racism in education. In the early 1990s, we got to create the Gender and Race Center within the Department of Education. Perhaps this was the country's first initiative, long before Law 10.639<sup>9</sup>. In 1990, Belo Horizonte formed a group with teachers Nilma Lino Gomes, Rosa Vani, and me. We sought Miguel Arroyo, who was Deputy Secretary in the municipal Department of Education, to tell him that it was not possible to manage the Plural School without considering the educational inequalities caused by racism that still existed within the schools. And we argued that within the Department of Education there were space to think about these policies. He asked us to design a project – the proposal to create a Gender and Race Center for Education. And we got to develop it, for the first time, within the Department of Education.

In 1997, because of my experience as a teacher and as Principal of the Edson Pinsani Plural State School, I was called to work on the first program to implement indigenous schools in Minas Gerais, with a teaching training course for teachers and indigenous youths, selected by their communities. It was an articulation between the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), the State Forest Institute (IEF), the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), and the State

<sup>8</sup> Urban Cleaning Superintendency of Belo Horizonte.

<sup>9</sup> Law 10.639/03 amended the Directives and Guidelines for Brazilian Education Law to mandate the inclusion in the official curriculum of "History and Afro-Brazilian Culture".



*Macaé, 2017.*

*By: Personal Archive*



Department of Education (SEE). Part of the instructors were university professors; but when they started the course, they missed people with experience in a basic education school. So, a team was created with just these teachers, coordinated by Lucinha Álvares, now a professor at the Faculty of Education at UFMG. She called me to be a part of the team that would train the first teachers.

We started the course by immediately making waves: it was a training for indigenous teachers, and the legislation said it should be a specific and diverse experience; but the teachers prepared the same course for everyone. And we arrived saying: “Look, but Xacriabá is Xacriabá, Pataxó is Pataxó, Maxakali is Maxakali, Krenak is Krenak. There may be a general base, but we need to individualize, so that the conversation makes sense for each of the ethnic groups”. Anyway, I got into indigenous education and went to work at executive branch for years. It’s been at least 20 years that I’m on this journey of indigenous education. I worked here in Minas Gerais, Bahia, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Acre. I worked with the Ticuna in Amazonas. The courses started to take place all over the country, some by initiative of some articulation of governmental institutions, others at the initiative of the indigenous movement itself.

In 2003, with the Lula government, the coordinator of this program in Minas Gerais will be called upon to set up the first coordination to think about indigenous education at the Ministry of Education. Then he recommends me to take over the coordination and articulation of the program here in Minas Gerais. It was not an easy time, because there, in the federal government, Lula was coming in; here, in the state government, Aécio. They saw our group as “a bunch of leftists”, “all from the PT”. Those early government things. Anyway, it was left to me to organize, maintain and advance the program, through the Ministry of Education and through universities in Brazil, establishing the Intercultural Indigenous Teaching degrees. I stayed on this program for at least two years, until the first class graduated.

I went to the Department of Education at the invitation of Professor Maria Pilar, in 2005, to be her aid. Then, I managed the educational policy, as Municipal Department of Education, between 2009 and 2012. When I left the Department, I was invited manage indigenous school education, education for ethno-racial relations, and rural education at the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). First, I worked as a director in this policy field; then I took over the National Diversity and Inclusion Secretariat (SECADI) and I stayed there between 2012 and 2014.

At SECADI, I occupied several positions and participated in many things. From the popular movement’s point of view, we had the March Zumbi dos Palmares<sup>10</sup> and organized the Durban Conference<sup>11</sup>; I saw Lula approve Law 10.639. SECADI was created due to pressure from teachers, students from the black movement, indigenous peoples, movements from the countryside, from all over Brazil, in which I participated, so that the Minister of Education, at the time Cristóvão Buarque, created in the MEC a Secretariat to deal with the diversity and inclusion agenda. Until then, there was only the Basic Education Secretariat (SEB) in the MEC, which took care of education in general; and as all that is universal – a bit like one size fits all clothes – it doesn’t fit anyone.

In 2013, I became Secretary of the SECADI, at a very tense moment. The secretariat was created in 2004, during that effervescence of diversity policies and new narratives. But in 2013, the SECADI was already in the firing line of the conservative agenda and because it developed policies in sexual diversity, for quilombolas, indigenous peoples, youth, and adult education, and in combating racism. It was then that Deputy Marco Feliciano was elected President of the Human Rights Committee in the Federal Chamber.

The experience of being a manager in Brasília was especially important. It is another universe to be a municipal manager and to be a national manager because they are quite different levels of conflicts, disputes, and confrontations. In 2014-2015, Dilma is re-elected President of Brazil. Cid Gomes takes over the Ministry of Education and invites me to stay on as Secretary, but I also receive an invitation from the Governor of Minas Gerais, Fernando Pimentel, to be Secretary of State for Education. My option is to go back to Minas Gerais because my family was here. At the Ministry of Education, there was a great deal of tension with Congress, with conservative groups gaining muscle; we faced the 2013 protests. But the Ministry of Education had a project and a progressive educational mindset in line from the perspective of constructing an agenda.

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10 The March Zumbi dos Palmares happened on 20 November 1995, the 300th anniversary of the death of Zumbi, symbol of the resistance to black slavery and for black awareness in Brazil. The march gathered 30 thousand people in Brasília to denounce prejudice, racism, and the lack of public policies for the Brazilian black population. At the time, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso received the march and signed the decree that established the Inter-ministerial Working Group for the Promotion of the Black Population, first step towards recognizing the historical injustices suffered by black people and insertion onto the political agenda of the Brazilian government. The march opened the way so that, in the following year, the international seminar “Multiculturalism and racism: the role of affirmative action in contemporary democratic countries” was held, a discussion that was central to the later formulation of affirmative action policies in Brazil.

11 The Durban Conference was the 3rd World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Forms of Intolerance, promoted by the UN, between 31 August and 8 September 2001, in the city of Durban, South Africa.



When I came to Minas Gerais, it was also a tense moment and a totally different situation, a bit without identity. And come in facing a mountain, the dismantling of Law 100<sup>12</sup>. I have to conduct a public exam and appoint teachers; that is, I arrived at a dissolved structure. A huge effort. I can't complain, we have to work, get a result, but it was very difficult. The state of Minas Gerais was experiencing a historic difficulty: completely bankrupt and with an immense structure. The state's Department of Education had several employees that made us think that it must have been the largest company in the world. And in an archaic, bureaucratic, slow, and conservative structure. The challenges were great: to establish a policy of participation, listening, and enabling a dialogue. So, in my administration as Secretary of State for Education, it will be the first time that there will be an indigenous person coordinating the area of indigenous education within the Department; the first time that someone from the country coordinates the area of rural education. These people faced many struggles, difficulties, and prejudices. Every day, work was done to deconstruct a historically awfully bad, aggressive relationship between the central structures of the state's bureaucracies and schools.

### ***Everywhere, I will be the first black secretary: racism and structural racism***

Black people will suffer racism; they receive a little of it every day. So, did I suffer racism? Yes. Either by invisibility, non-recognition of my place, and explicit manifestations. It is necessary to talk about racism together with sexism. We're talking and the men interrupt us. When you say something, no one listens. Two minutes passes, a man says it and: "Wow, what an original idea!". Or the person comes to tell you the idea you gave yourself, as if it were his, thinking it's great.

When I was Secretary of Education in Belo Horizonte, the chief of staff, who was a white man, one day said to me: "Macaé, it's so strange! I don't see you as a woman." I wonder why he didn't see me as a woman: because a woman couldn't be someone hierarchically superior to him? Because a black woman couldn't be hierarchically superior to him? Or did he not see me as a woman because he couldn't love a black woman? Obviously, what happens on a personal level is heavy. I try to go through these spaces and not carry this violent structure with me. I like softness, joy, and party; I don't want to lose my essence to be in those places. But when it comes to educational policy, the fight against racism is in the bureaucracy.

12 State Complementary Law 100/2007 admitted almost 100 thousand civil servants without public positions, of which about eighty thousand without the observance of a public exam. In 2014, one year before the start of the Pimentel government, it was considered partially unconstitutional by Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) in the Direct Action of Unconstitutionality (ADI) 4.876, rendering the effective position null and void.

In the bureaucracy, racism and sexism are not hitting just you; they're reaching thousands of people who are with you. For example: you create a policy to buy literature bundles to be placed in students' backpacks, each one will get new books at the beginning of the year. But the managers start taking books out of the bundle; because, in their minds, those new books were not to be given to the children of that community. This is the racism of the structure that we try to face and create mechanisms so that children are not deprived of books.

I'll give another example. When they instituted the Municipal Child Education Units (UMEI's) in Belo Horizonte, a policy that came since the Ananias administration, it was a reversal of priorities: for the first time, school units would be well-planned for childhood. But these schools were going to be built on the peripheries, inside the villages and slums. A first debate, extraordinarily strong internally, was the distribution of vacancies. The Gender and Race Center had a very strong position that 100% of the vacancies should be allocated to the poorest children. But there was uproar; including, with the argument that the middle class had to be in the UMEI's, because if it did not have diversity, there wouldn't be quality education. Now, where are the slum children in private schools? People understand how racism translates there, when you are designing the policy, that it has been disguised as academic speeches of legitimization. But what is there, in essence, is: "Are you going to build a school like this and put it inside a favela? And on top of it give 100% of the places to those slum children?"

Another example: a public exam was held for teachers in these schools. The first approved were, as usual, people with better training, who come from the public universities. So, the first UMEIs' early childhood teachers approved in this exam are white women who, for the first time, go to Municipal Early Childhood Education Units to be teachers of black children. In this context, the first major dilemma was some drama over the number of gloves that teachers needed to wear: "How will I touch this child?". It is obvious that you need gloves to change a child. But the problem was so overblown that it was necessary to provide a multitude of gloves! We were not living in a pandemic era, there was nothing. There have always been community daycare centers and there has never been such a debate in the educational setting. But it was the first time that there were no black women taking care of black children. Then, the situation gains relevance, because it was about touching a black body, the hair of black children. Our hair and skin were seen as dirty. It is this level of confrontation, that happens, when you are you making public policies. That got me. We needed to do a reprogramming to not fall into a depression. And sometimes, we did; we get sick, because it's too hard.

I will talk about one more fact. At the Ministry of Education, at SECADI, we created a strategic program to enable a Brazil / Africa connection, an articulation with several African countries. I

participated in a large meeting with several secretaries and managers from African countries, deans from African universities. At this juncture, the SECADI and popular movements were demanding the establishment of an academic development program for black students. There was an assessment and great pressure from the black movement, stating that the Science Without Borders program rules excluded a significant number of black students. So, we were struggling to establish another program of academic improvement, to facilitate student mobility for black, brown, and indigenous students, that had to be articulated with Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education (CAPES) and, to some extent, with the Department of Higher Education (SESU). And us at the SECADI were met with great resistance in other sectors of the Ministry of Education.

I participated in this agenda with the universities' deans, over a few days, in Bahia. We ensured support and bilateral agreements. The idea was to make a big umbrella for the entire Ministry of Education agenda with African countries. One of the points that we wanted was to facilitate partnerships in training and research projects, articulating universities in African countries with Brazilian universities. This was one of the axes of the program.

Going back to Brasília, on the way to the airport, all in a van, one of the high-ranking seniors tells a super racist joke. Me and the director of the rural and indigenous education area were the only two black people in this van, where all the top echelon of the government was, all white. And one of the people with whom we were "fighting" for because of the program tells a racist joke. Someone made a comment, and he said: "Looks like you're not from around here. In South Africa, there's a common joke in football stadiums. During apartheid, white people watched football in the stands and black people under the stands. So, there was a guy, who was not from South Africa, who was dying to pee. Another guy tells him: you can do it right down here. And he said: 'Well, I can see that you are not from around here. Because locals pick one black person to urinate on, and you urinated on many'". I remember that at that time, I spoke with this director who worked with me: "Look, this joke will be the price of this program". This person will sign the decree instituting the program for young black people in university. And the program was made public. There were people that went abroad funded by this program. Every time I tell this joke, I cry. This is talking about racism.

## The issue of quotas and *the place of black people in the landscape*

I lived through, during university, being the only black woman in the Social Work class. I entered university at a time when higher education was still for very few black people. And public university, an even more exclusive universe. In my morning class, there were no other black people, I was the only one. Most black girls, when they were able to enter university, were only able to study at night, for the same reason I studied at night: I had to work, morning and afternoon, and I had a child to raise. In the last two semesters, already married with children when I begin night classes, then yes, I started having black women classmates.

So, I think about my own situation. Back then, if there had been a quota system, I might have had access to the Pharmacology course. When I was in university, nobody talked about quotas. The ones who always held this agenda and ranked education highly for the emancipation of the black population was the black movement. From the Black Front to the MNU, and the BEC – Black Educator's Collective – and several groups that we participated in, the agenda of education was a priority and had always had this recognition<sup>13</sup>.

At the end of the day, when we compare the cut-off point between quota holders and non-quota holders, the difference is exceedingly small. The result at the other end, that is, from the perspective of the learning process and their competence, shows that the difference disappears. So, the entrance exam exists to create a funnel, to segregate. The idea of meritocracy is a discourse constructed in the dismantling of the slave system to legitimize institutional patrimonialism – the appropriation of the state by certain groups. People do not care about individual effort. When you compare the trajectory of a private school student and a student from a public school, from the perspective of the individual effort, isolating it, making control groups regarding the additional conditions that have, the one who has merit is the public-school student. He is the one who has merit, because he manages to subvert all the obstacles along the way.

So, for me, the quotas policies and affirmative action are a matter of social justice. When you're talking about public policies for the black population, we need to think of the systemic point of view, to intervene in the structural level: investing in and financing daycare and preschool; extending children's time in educational activities; having a decent income for families, so that they can support and keep their children out of child labor, attending schools. And we must have quotas in public higher education institutions, in federal institutes, at the João Pinheiro Foundation

13 The Brazilian Black Front (FNB) was a Brazilian black movement, founded on 16 September 1931 and recognized as a political party in 1936, until the 1937 coup. The Unified Black Movement (MNU), founded in 1978, is considered a watershed in Brazilian black activism due to it being resumed after being dismantled by the military dictatorship; it is still one of the most important institutions in the country.

– which, otherwise, would be a course for white young people, upper middle class, who would have a secured place in the State of Minas Gerais's public service.

So that debate is also about the place of black people in the "landscape". We must have the right to see ourselves in the landscape. It's not possible that people think it's natural that a country like Brazil, with 52% of black people, go into a restaurant and there is no black person. It is not possible to go in a company and, from the entrance to the boss, there are no black people. How are people not bothered? We need more actions. For 500 years, only white people went in. We're not asking for 500 years of the opposite. I defend affirmative policies because our country is structured around a planned inequality. On the exclusion and hierarchization of part of the people, so that others could accumulate wealth.

I was secretary at SECADI when the law that approved the quotas passed and was able to actively work in its implementation. In 2013, we created the Permanence Scholarship program to ensure that black, brown, indigenous, and quilombola students could remain in university, to give the basic conditions for those students to be in university. A young quilombola who starts an odontology major at a federal university has nothing to eat, nowhere to sleep, nowhere to live.

We need affirmative action, and we cannot reduce them to quotas. Quotas are especially important, but they have to come subsidized by a number of other actions, including emotional support for these young people, in and out of institutions. The first group of quota students in Brazilian universities was decimated within the institutions. If the social movement did not have self-organizational skills, to give support to black youth, racism would have emotionally destroyed these people. And bureaucracy has a great capacity to reproduce and establish mechanisms of exclusion.

### Intersectionality and feminism

All these issues are intersectional: there is no way for me to address an ethno-racial issue and not understand what a black woman's agenda is. Black women were the first to draw attention to this: in our issues we live a double process of exclusion. Because the feminist movement – we need to say, the traditional white movement – is very far from the black woman's agenda. When white feminists were fighting to go to the labor market, black women were already working for a long time, most often in horrible conditions of underemployment. It was black women who worked, and still work, on the street: she was the street vendor, the baiana who sells cocada, the one who sells angu, tropeiro, acarajé<sup>14</sup>. It has always been a form of survival and even a struggle for

emancipation because they not only worked, but often used this resource to help buy the freedom of other people who were enslaved.

In the black movement, women will bring the sexism to the black men debate, because the black movement also suffered with this issue. Black men are still sexist. So, black women said that our struggle must be intersectional. Also, it's pointless for the rights of women and not understand the genocide of black men; or not to understand that in the feminicide of black women, they are killed mainly by their partners, black men.

We can't not understand that white women often use their place of privilege to exclude black women. For example, in labor relations, they will often be privileged when occupying certain vacancies and posts. Another issue is the place of black women in domestic work. Who, for years, ensured that white women could be in the job market? Black women who stayed inside their homes, taking care of their children, often unable to raise their own. The other day, I was on an online event with the Capoeira Master Saúva, from the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte. He said his mother was a maid. "Macaé, throughout my childhood, I never spent any of my birthdays or Christmas with my mother because she was a maid. For all my birthdays, she was working. And she had to work on Christmas Day because she had to clean the house where she worked to make Christmas for that lady's children. She was never able to spend Christmas with her own children".

### The black men

One of the last things I write in my biography is this concern that I also have with black men, with the place that they have today. First, from the point of view of black youth extermination, their bodies: black men are being completely slaughtered. From the point of view of trajectories, I see that us, women have been able to make an academic journey in greater numbers: there are many more successful black women than men. Along with this, there's the discussion we've been doing on masculinities and its place, and I worry about black men in this regard. In a way, today they occupy a "non-place". There is no place for these men. This also ends up being translated into this enormous violence that black women live, because they are the ones who most attack black women. If we think from the perspective of the data on feminicide in Brazil, it decreases among white women and increases among black women. So, these places of black masculinity and places in society that black men currently occupy or don't; it is a topic that we need to look at, care for, highlight, research, and understand better.

14 Brazilian traditional street foods.



## I discovered myself as a black woman since I was born

I come from a family that identifies itself as black. I also participated in black movement meetings with another generation of black women. Like Mrs. Efigênia Pimenta and Conceição de Uberaba. There was a group of black women in Minas Gerais, from the generation of my mother, older ladies, who articulated, held meetings, pressured governments to develop policies. So, I have an origin that creates this debate. However, what I think is most difficult in our trajectory is handling the suffering racism produces.

There is a Brazilian book called *Becoming Black*. The author speaks of becoming black in the sense that you must accept yourself, recognize yourself more and more in your blackness. But also accepting the commitment of engaging in a performance, to use our body and our voice to say how hard this process is. I will not say that it was different for me.

Today, that activism is important, all this movement that says that black women can be wherever they want, that we need to open spaces, and need space for power and representation. It is a struggle in the symbolic field, which takes place in the symbolic, but wants to have repercussions on material structures. That is why we fight with the body, with the skin, and with aesthetics, because we want to deconstruct a political culture that does not see us, that does not want us in the landscape.

## The virtues and strengths of black women

I like to pay attention to what is happening in the world and the things that women say. The philosopher Jojô Todinho says: "Any attempt to deny racism here in Brazil, in front of me, it stops". She says: "Why? Because I'm a black woman, I have big boobs, I'm fat, I swear, you got me?" She lists a bunch of characteristics to show how her presence is disconcerting and, at the same time, denouncing the racism that we have here in Brazil. These days, I've been paying attention trying to speak with this woman who is from the outskirts, who had nothing, who made herself using funk. She says: "People keep talking to me as 'Jojô Todinho', a one-hit-woman. Gee, guys, I played in the Middle East. A black woman from the periphery! I had a hit; you know what that is? Where I come from, having one hit playing all around the world is unthinkable!". And then she says: "Do you know what I did with this, guys? I remodeled my grandmother's house". So, when I think of black women, I say that they revolutionized. Lélia Gonzalez said: "As one goes up, she pulls another one". And I think Angela Davis says that when a black woman moves, the entire structure of society moves. I believe that. Today, we are living in a time when social media has given an immensely powerful weapon, despite having a lot of problems, which is the ability to articulate beyond our restricted territory.

For example, today I discuss education, race relations, everywhere in Brazil. We, black women, are in different places and have made a move to add up, to strengthen each other and good projects. To reinforce practices to revert and counteract a discourse that is also extraordinarily strong. So, you need to create a movement, a force, in addition to these places, which is instituted by creating networks and by our activism, by our civil action.

## A message and a reason to be remembered

I have a brand: I say I'm genetically happy. And in my book, I explain this thing about happiness, the relationship of this with religion, with samba, Congado, Candomblé. It's the idea of the Erês, who are the Orixás as children, who achieve everything in a very happy and very joyful way. I finished my book like this: "I think I'm helping new generations to discover, to learn, and I'm learning from them. Which is beautiful, although painful. But above all I am happy. The joy of the Erês keeps me alive".

I want to be remembered as a happy woman. Not a naïve happiness; a woman who lived through a lot of pain, but who keeps the joy as an instinct to stand and face the challenges. And she made education and combating racism her priority.

I want to be remembered, too, in a very affectionate way by people. I like to say I was Secretary in different areas of management, and I am happy to be able to return to those places. Sometimes, it is really difficult to occupy



*Macaé working in the Municipal Chamber of Belo Horizonte, 2021.*

*By: Bernardo Dias / Acervo CMBH.*

a position in public administration and to be able to return to places, to be welcomed. In any of these spaces, employees are extremely fond of me, they recognize my work. This says, to me, that I tried to bring to these places of politics a look at the humanity of people and to enable the construction of collective projects.

Ah! I want to be remembered as the mother of my daughters, Mariana and Marina. As a woman who likes samba, dating, studying... A nice, ordinary woman.

# 3

## LARISSA AMORIM BORGES

Larissa Amorim Borges  
Jessyka Martins  
Matheus Arcelo Fernandes Silva

### 1. My story starts before me

My story starts before me because it has to do with my ancestors. Of my earliest origins that I know of and honor, on my mother's side Maria Oldete Amorim, I remember: my great-grandmother Lia, who was indigenous, from north of Minas, who decided to leave the village to live with a man quilombola because she was in love. Lia was the mother of Dindinha Patu (Patrocínia) and the grandmother of my grandmother Genoveva Rosa de Amorim, who lived and dreamed on the banks of the rivers Trinta and Mocambo, in Claros dos Poções<sup>1</sup>. On my father's side, José Evangelista Borges, the oldest person to what I have news of, and honor is my great-grandmother: Maria Segunda, who is of Portuguese origin. This family came from the region of São José dos Ferros<sup>2</sup> to Belo Horizonte in the late 1940s. My grandmother, Maria Trindade, was one of the first residents of Alto Vera Cruz<sup>3</sup>. There, she

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1 Municipality located in the north of Minas Gerais.

2 Municipality in the Zona da Mata region of Minas Gerais.

3 Neighborhood in the east region of Belo Horizonte.



gave birth to Zico, Marcia Regina, Marta Antônio do Espírito Santo, Roberto, Ronaldo, Paul Sérgio (Gugu), and Raquel.

My mother, Maria Odete Amorim Borges, arrived in Belo Horizonte at the age of seven. She came from an extremely poor family, who experienced drought, and my grandmother, Genoveva Rosa de Amorim, sent her daughters to work in the houses of other families. She tried to protect them from violence, from hunger. In this dynamic, my mother came first, as the eldest daughter. Then came the other sisters, Maria Livanete, Maria Arlete, Maria Margareth, Maria Elizete. The male children, João de Deus, Américo, Toni, Alexandre, left the fields to work construction.

When my mother arrived in the capital, she went to work in the home of a very wealthy family, who had many children and much of the land in Belo Horizonte; she was small and had to do all the work. While cleaning the library, she became enchanted with books and at nine years-old she taught herself to read, in that contact with books. When she started school, she already knew how to read. Continuing her studies, she went to high school, graduated as a nurse technician and worked until recently at the Emergency Room of João XXIII<sup>4</sup>. My parents studied at the Loyola school, in an education project for young adults<sup>5</sup>. They worked during the day and studied at night. They met there and then got married.

I am the first daughter of three sisters: me, Lorena and Laiara. Lorena already has three children, João, Ryan, who are teenagers and now, more recently, Luís. And I have Enzo and Elis.

I was born in Belo Horizonte on 15 July 1981. Before I was born, when my mother was seven months pregnant, she and my father went to a party. On the way back, they got a ride and were in a car crash. My mother had trauma to the pelvis and head and doctors said that if the baby were born, it would not be without issues. I was born with no problems, extremely healthy, and I'm still here. I arrived in the world exceedingly small, my grandmother Maria says that I could fit in the palm of her hand - but she has a very large palm.

I always had a remarkably close relationship with this grandmother, Maria Trindade, because she took care of me so much for my mother to work. My aunts and uncles always helping, being close. I had a childhood surrounded by uncles, aunts, and cousins, I am the first granddaughter on my father's side and the second granddaughter on my mother's side. Born before me there's one cousin who I consider a brother, Bruno Rafael Amorim, and we get along really well. I've always been the first girl on both sides, surrounded by all the attention, treats, and affection. That was my childhood a lot, playing on the patio, at my grandmother's house.

<sup>4</sup> João XXIII Hospital is a state emergency hospital located in Belo Horizonte.

<sup>5</sup> Loyola School is located in Belo Horizonte; Young Adult Education, EJA in Portuguese

## ***The street was my relief: domestic violence and approaching the black movement***

Although there was a lot of love, affection, and care around me during childhood and adolescence, silent and present, the domestic violence that accompanied my family for several generations was also there. I still do not understand the complexity of the absence of words and the explosion of feelings that materialized in aggressions. As a result of racism and sexism, several generations of our family have been deeply hurt by physical and symbolic aggressions. Heir to what happened before, my grandfather, João Borges, had a log in the middle of the house. He tied my uncles to this log to beat them. There were beatings and torture every day. We are healing from this past. Our desire is to share other experiences and leave legacies of love and emancipation for present and future generations.

My parents advanced in relation to previous generations, but domestic violence was very present in our family. We experienced severe violence for years, without talking about it. Only in adolescence, when my Aunt Elizete came to talk, she encouraged us, demonstrating that something should and could be done. It was there that we were able to talk and take action, but there were many years of aggression, silenced violence.

My father is not a drinker, so it wasn't because of alcoholism. It had to do with symbolic poverty and the inability to deal with situations, so I can't really name what it was about. But I know that it wasn't because of alcoholism, just to make it clear, because many times people will justify domestic violence due to the alcohol consumption or of some drug; but that doesn't apply in the case of my family.

After that, when my aunt said that what we were experiencing was violence, we started to think who could help and how we were going to do it. I'd participated in a project called "Black child, beautiful child", where they told me a story of capoeira, of the slaves who had used capoeira to break free and I said: "I found

*Larissa at a demonstration on 8 March, after the inauguration of the State Council on Women, 2017.*

**By:** Personal Archive





it, I found the solution, I'll join capoeira and I'll bring my sisters, that way no one will ever hit us in the face again”.

From there, I got a job distributing campaign flyers for the Workers' Party to make money and buy sneakers to join capoeira. With the salary, I bought the sneakers, and, in the first class, the teacher said: “take those off”. I was amazed, because I didn't know I didn't need it; I had already seen capoeira circles somewhere, it made my heart race, but I didn't know I didn't need sneakers. That first class taught me, that we often establish conditions that delay and/or hinder overcoming situations of violence, oppression, and lack of love.

The three of us joined capoeira and it was great. But it was challenging, because as soon as we started to spin our legs, the fight at home became more complicated. We started to not passively accept violence anymore. We started to fight back the aggressions. And he got even more aggressive. We devised strategies for when the situation got heated. And we got to the point where we thought about killing my father.

At the height of this process, we met women from the black women's movement, Graça Saboia and Denise Pacheco<sup>6</sup>, who showed us that it wasn't like this, that violence cannot be resolved with more violence. And it was Vanessa Beco<sup>7</sup> who introduced me to Hip Hop and Black Feminism. With their support, we realized we had to take other paths.

During this period, Lorena became pregnant, got married and had João, at 16 years old. Now, my nephew is already 19. One year after having João, she had Ryan, who is 17. Both were very loved and desired from the first moment. And they changed our lives a lot. Lorena moved to an apartment in the same neighborhood. Laiara and I stayed, we continued to live with my parents. I became increasingly involved with social movements I started staying out more and being at home less. The street was a relief, I went home only when I had to. It was a small way to fight against what was oppressing me at home; since I couldn't cope there, I did it where I could. We told my mother to leave him, but that didn't make sense to her. So, we decided to leave.

Violence is not the main part of my story, no. But I feel that it is important to talk about it, because we have been silent for many years and talking about heal, liberates. I want other women to know that this can happen to any of us, at any time in our lives. But violence doesn't define us. I

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<sup>6</sup> Graça Saboia was the manager of policies for women and the promotion of racial equality in Belo Horizonte. She was a JOC (Youth Catholic Workers) militant, and of the Fight against Racism Secretariat in the Workers' Party – PT. Denise Pacheco manages healthcare policy and the promotion of racial equality, acting at the municipal, state, and federal levels, and in the Workers' Party.

<sup>7</sup> Vanessa Beco is a public servant in the education, an activist in the black, feminist movement and hip hop culture in Belo Horizonte. She's a member of the collective Negras Ativas and the Youth Forum of Grande BH.

want them to know and feel that it is possible to overcome. Whatever your current condition, it is possible to change reality into a life free from violence and filled with prosperity and love.

Laiara got a job as an attendant in a pizza place, she earned 17 cents an hour work. In a month she went after, got a guarantor, rented an apartment, and took her things. Then, we took my things too, which fit inside a television box. This change happened in the beginning of November 2005; my mother couldn't handle coming with us and we went to live our lives.

When we moved in, a friend of Laiara's moved in with us. We shared the rent and the bills. All we had was 120 reais. With this money we bought a used stove, an old refrigerator, those very old ones; with ten reais in change, we bought three chairs. We bought a rug in installments, Lorena gave us some pots and pans, and my mother made some cushions.

We had three glasses, three plates, three spoons, and lots of dreams. It was very liberating for us to be able to make this change. It was a time, too, when I was studying, going to college, my degree took many years to finish. Since I had no money, I finished one semester and took another off, I lived off internships and workshops. During this time, I could dedicate myself a lot to developing the actions of the *Mulheres Negras Ativas*<sup>8</sup> and other projects within the hip hop culture, as Atitude de Mulher and HipHop Chama. It was a very cool phase, in which I was able to be a militant and develop artistically as an MC in the hip hop culture; I was also able to experience the art of clowning, Afro dance, and also visited other places in Brazil and the world, traveling with the militancy.

After we left the house, my father beat my mother, and she left the house taken by SAMU<sup>9</sup>. That time, we had to intervene and call the police. After that, she stayed with us for a while, but decided to return to the home where she lived with my father. They are still together today. Both are happy in their own way, but it was particularly challenging, to understand and accept.

At that time, I met Suely Virgínia. A floral therapist who works in the Jungian perspective, she is incredible, and cares for our family to this day. She was helping me to understand this in another way. It's my mom's story and she can make her choices. In my story, I make my choices and whatever I want. Suely's support has been very liberating, it helped me a lot to deal with it. I didn't speak to my father for many years. Now we talk, we've built another relationship.

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<sup>8</sup> In English, Active Black Women, present since 2003 in the Metropolitan Area of Belo Horizonte, empowers black women through cultural activities, debates, and training. They are more widely known for their work with women's hip hop.

<sup>9</sup> Urgent Mobile Care Service.

Beyond these issues, my youth was great, I participated in the World Social Forum, conferences, collaborated to organize national, international, local events, and I was very dedicated to the training process. This construction of black feminism was incredibly positive and liberating. From there, I thought, we had to spread the word: “everyone needs to know this”. So, I started to dedicate myself to this: to collaborate to make people know this thing that saved me, that could be useful to other women. Thinking about both the black movement and the issue of feminism. My youth was a dedication to other black women, to art, and to the fight against racism.

### Personal relationships

Whenever the situation of violence occurred at home, my relationship with people, boyfriends, hook-ups, became chaos. When I got a boyfriend, my grandmother, Mrs. Genoveva, even laughed. Because I told her: “Grandma, I even met a handsome boyfriend, but I talked to him, and I don't know if he will be back”. And I had said: “look, I don't accept physical violence at all. If you ever raise your hand to me, try to attack me in any way, I'll kill you! I'm warning you to start the game without anyone fooling anyone. So, I'll kill you if, at some point, you try to attack me”.

And it wasn't a joke, I was serious. The experience of violence creates barriers to relationships, leaves marks that we learn to heal as life goes on. So, with a lot of therapy, good friendships, and a *terreiro*<sup>10</sup>, I'm gradually healing this wound. It took me a while to understand that each person is one, the choices my father and mother made are not my choices.

My youth was great! I dated a lot of very nice people, and others not so much, but everyone, including me, at some point had attitudes which are better left untold. I thought about starting a family several times, but it didn't happen. I think that several factors influence this construction of the affection of black women, and I didn't get married. Except that, more recently, around 2010, I moved in with Daniel in Brasília. We decided to have children, but ended up breaking up, and now I'm dating Kelma.

Today, I'm very happy, super bi dyke, which was something I didn't imagine. I was sure I was straight; but one day, when I was distracted from gender norms, I fell in love with an incredible black woman who is also called Larissa. Our story wasn't very long. But it opened up another universe of possibilities and strengths in my existence. Since then, I have known myself more and experienced life in more intense, deeper, and more pleasurable ways. Love between women is transformative.

<sup>10</sup> A *terreiro* is where the ceremonies of the Candomblé or Umbanda religions, of African origins, take place.

## 2. From Popcorn Queen to PhD: the school years

My mother always thought us studying was especially important. She always says: “It's women who will change the world”. That's why she always looked for good schools, as much as possible. Before, kindergartens were all private, so she made an effort to put us in school early. I remember it was called Pequeno Príncipe<sup>11</sup> and it had a ferris wheel. Every Thursday, it was ferris wheel day. I also remember that there were a lot of fruit trees in the yard.

This school was particularly good, but that's where I experienced my first situation of racism in school. There was a Rosa Juvenil event<sup>12</sup> and I couldn't be the rose, I had to be one of dozens of daisies. I wanted to be the rose and I couldn't, because I had to be a lighter-skinned girl. Then there was the Popcorn Queen<sup>13</sup> and my family sold a lot of votes, but when they were being tallied, another girl was winning, because the principal had made more vote cards for her family. Then, my Uncle Américo, who worked in the construction industry, took all the money he had and said: “No, my niece is going to be the Popcorn Queen, make more cards and I'll buy all the votes”. He bought all the cards and then I was the Popcorn Queen! Black and Popcorn Queen! I still remember today that my mother made a red dress, a little hat all glued with popcorn and off I went.

After kindergarten, I studied at a public school, at the Getúlio Vargas State School, most of the time; in the third grade, I lived for a while with my grandmother Maria and at that time I went to Necésio Tavares State School, in Alto Vera Cruz. I went to school with tidy clothes, neat hair. My Aunt Márcia gave me pigtails or curled my hair. In the beginning, my mother had to pleat my uniform for me, because I was very skinny, and she thought I didn't look nice. And then she made a little pleat skirt, and she sewed my backpack herself with a cloth she got at the hospital. I loved that backpack she made herself.

When I was still back at Pequeno Príncipe, the school principal was black, Aunt Sônia. At Getúlio, I had Aunt Neide, who was my teacher in the first year, who is black. We always see each other. When I started the doctorate, I found her: “Aunt Neide, I got into the PhD”. And it was particularly good to be able to give this feedback, she was the teacher who taught me to read, we still have a relationship today; she's my neighbor, lives nearby. Whenever she sees my mom or dad, she asks about me.

<sup>11</sup> Little Prince.

<sup>12</sup> Children's song from the Brazilian popular canon.

<sup>13</sup> Popcorn Queen is a tradition of the June Festival. Usually, to raise fund for the event, in the months that precede it young girls sell “votes”; the one who sells the most, becomes the reigning Popcorn Queen. On occasion, there are also boys who fight to be the Peanut or Corn King.

I also had a black teacher named Luci, she lived here in the neighborhood, very special. There was a time when I started a fight in Luci's class, because there was a girl, Ana Paula, who was also black, and she tore into me. Then, one day she disturbed me so much - I won't remember the aggression specifically, but it was an aggression that hurt me a lot - so much, that I flew over her, pulled her hair out and it was a horrible thing. Everyone was very scared because I'm not one to fight. But the violence that was constantly repeated, that nobody saw or solved, made me explode.

Then, I also had Mrs. Norma, another very cool black teacher. She lived close by, now she has a health problem and no longer lives here in the neighborhood. These people were important references. They didn't talk to us about racial issues, but their presence made a difference, so we felt comfortable and belonging in those spaces.

There was a period at school too, right after we joined capoeira, that my sister Lorena and I decided to create a black awareness group. We went to ask the people at the Black Pastoral (APN) and we set up a group, Kilombo. It was during this period that we met the people of the Unified Black Movement (MNU). Angela, from the MNU, worked here in my neighborhood and was one of the first contacts we had with the black movement. It was a time when there was a lot of racism at school, and we wanted to do something. This movement lasted for a short time, but it was important to have managed to do something, "Together at school against racism", when we hadn't yet foreseen it in national guidelines.

Already in high school, I went to the Nilton Rocha, which is a state school in the neighborhood 1o de Maio. And it was wonderful because we set up a club there. There was a wonderful black teacher who taught literature. She held an incredible literary secret friend. It was in this secret friend that my first love came. Exchanging letters in the literary secret friend, I fell in love with a boy, the black friend, Fábio and he also fell in love with me. My friend Andreia Peterson who helped us. It was so beautiful!

There were also the students' association experience. It was a genuinely nice experience at school, with friends and a very good interaction. After that period, I had written an essay saying that I wanted to be a hacker. When my mother saw this, she started looking for alternatives to give me that possibility. She got another job at Odilon Behrens Hospital so she could pay for my school. It was a period when my father was unemployed, so she was responsible for the entire family income. Her salary was almost all to pay for school.

With that, I spent the last two years of high school at a private technical school with training in management informatics. And it made a huge impression on me, because in that period I experienced many situations of racism. There was a black teacher, also in literature. But besides

her, me and the doorman, there was one black student at school. I remember that I felt more relieved during break, because I was up there looking at this boy down there. We never talked, but there were no other black people at the school. In addition to this lack of black people, they had several jokes and various racist and sexist attitudes, and I didn't understand; I sensed it and felt it but couldn't name it. I asked myself: "Why was I able to talk to everyone at Nilton Rocha, relate to everyone, and at a private school I wasn't able to talk to anyone?" I only had one friend and one classmate at this school, who were also discriminated against by other markers.

During this period, I straightened my hair and it started to fall out. With that, my mom took me to get a haircut. But the person who cut it did something that made it even stranger. After the cut, I went to class. I arrived at school and the best teacher was the first to joke about my hair, and it was devastating. After the episode, I left class and shaved my head. I spent a long time wearing shaved hair. During that period, I deepened my actions within the black movement and tried to understand more about what racism really was.

Then, I got an internship at the Municipal Coordination for Affairs in the Black Community (COMACON). Already in this process of engaging with the black movement, when I passed the university entrance exam, we were organizing the Meeting for the Black Youth from Slums in Alto Vera Cruz. We had the event during the day, at night we all slept at my grandmother's house, and went together to take the entrance exam for PUC<sup>14</sup>. On the second day, each one went to their own houses, and I ended up leaving late.

When I got on the subway, I thought, "It's too late". I wasn't even going to get off the car, but then I got off the subway in the Coração Eucarístico neighborhood. I went up slowly, thinking, "What am I going to tell my mother about this test?" But when I got to the corner, the door was open and the boy said: "Run, run, there's time, run!". And then I ran, desperate and managed to get in and take the test. But I didn't even look at the result, because I thought I wasn't going to pass. And even if I had passed, I also wouldn't be able to pay.

That's when a friend of mine from the party, Wagão, called me and said: "Congratulations, Larissa!". I said, "Thanks, but you missed the date, it's not my birthday." And he said: "No, it's not that, you passed the entrance exam, didn't you see?". I was amazed: "I passed?". He saw the results in the newspaper, it was published back then. There wasn't as much internet as there is now. And I'd passed the entrance exam, for Psychology. With that, my mother borrowed money and everything she had and paid the tuition. Then, we figured it out so I could study.

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14 Pontifical Catholic University.



When I decided on Psychology, I was in the Technology field, made websites and programming - I was in that area. But with the reflections from the black movement, we are always encouraged to think: “Which area of study is fundamental and strategic?”. So, we always must study, we need to study as much as we can. And not only formal study, but also other searches for knowledge. To access the university and other spaces, thinking about where we can be useful, from the point of view of racial debate. In that sense, I thought about which places I’d like to contribute in and which areas I felt affinity with, which were Psychology and Social Sciences, and I didn't find many black references.

In this selection process, I went on campus to talk to students to find out what the courses were like and ended up opting for psychology. After I started, I got to know the black references in the area, like Neuza Souza Santos, who is the author of *Tornar-se Negro*<sup>15</sup> - I didn't know her personally, but I knew her work - and also the work of Professor José Thiago Reis Filho, who teaches at the PUC São Gabriel campus, who worked with issues of Psychoanalysis.

In addition to few black references, I decided to go into Psychology because I thought it would be particularly important to confront racism and its consequences. I felt I needed to think in that area from that thought and confront racism, from the perspective of black people, and that's why I went to Psychology.

During university, racism became tougher. Because, in fact, there is this exclusion by class and race. Because of that, I almost quit, when someone told me not to and look for Professor Márcia Mansur. So, I went to her, I told her that the relationship with colleagues, with the teachers was very difficult, that I felt I didn’t belong to that space, that I didn’t feel welcomed. After that conversation, she helped me transfer to the São Gabriel campus and organize my course schedule. There were some people I already knew from the social movement who studied there, and that made it easier. This facilitated my presence there; I managed to study and graduate. Those were years of a lot of struggles. Then, I decided to go for a master's degree.

When I graduated, I had just begun my initiation in the *terreiro*. But during my graduation, I couldn’t have my head uncovered. So, I went with my little white hat and that was it. At the time, I didn't know how to tie a headwrap properly. It was a remarkably interesting experience, because my family had never attended someone's university graduation before, because no one had graduated yet. So, we didn't know what it would be like, what we should bring, what clothes we should wear, that sort of thing. But everybody went, my grandmother, my aunts, my cousins.

Everyone who could go, went. And when people were divided by the alphabet, so they could receive a hug from their families, I ran towards my spot; everyone receiving flowers, but my family didn’t know how things worked and didn’t show up. Suddenly, I hear a buzzing, and then a gap opens, with my family holding the flower arrangement for the ceremony, which was under the stage. They took that thing and gave it to me as a gift. So, I ended up being the one who got the most flowers at my graduation.

And that was very special, because they were with me during very important moments of my formation. I remember that I couldn't find people to study with me. So had a paper to write, and I remember, I was terribly angry. It was actually about domestic work. So, me, my mother, and my grandmother did it. We sat down and worked on the paper together, because I didn’t have a group and they said: “We’ll do it with you”. And they did it and it was very special, my family supported me a lot, despite the confusion, fights, and that crap.

But in my Masters, that was the moment when in which I told myself: "I've done so much, I need to think a little about this path." And the PhD is a little challenging because of the daily routine of motherhood, pandemic, unemployment, endometriosis treatment, and depression ... So, it’s a little slow. But I’ve already agreed with my supervisor to finish in March of next year. I don't know if we’re gonna have more time because of the pandemic, but I'll end it, I want to finish and finish well! I’m studying Black Women in Spaces of Power in Latin America. There’s a lot to research on this topic.

### 3. Between militancy and management: building a professional trajectory

Like I was telling you before, I have always been very dedicated to militancy, active on youth issues, the rights of children and adolescents. Because of my actions there, I was first invited to work in the Youth Coordination. When the Youth Coordination in Belo Horizonte was created, it was my first public management experience. I’d already interned at the Racial Equality Coordination, but that had been more focused on the SOS Racism Program, which was the entry point for cases of racism that occurred in the city and this policy was very important.

As I was more involved in militancy, for a long time I was reluctant to join the administration. Because we always thought that if we entered the administration, we’d be sell-outs. But I’d already done everything I could to fight racism and sexism in the movement, and the thing I had never tried was to continue this battle within public management. I decided that it would be interesting to try to fight from this other space.

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15 In English, Becoming Black.

I realized that it's a different place from militancy, it requires technical knowledge, political knowledge, requires articulation and, also, a wit to integrate various knowledges and limits. This decision was consolidated when I thought: "How can the baggage I bring from social movements help translate our demands into public policies? Can I really help with this translation?" I feel that this path was very positive.

After the experience with municipal youth policy, I was invited to work in Brasília, for the *Juventude Viva*<sup>16</sup> plan. I went to work at the Youth Issues National Secretariat. Then, I went to SEPPPIR<sup>17</sup>, with affirmative actions. After getting pregnant, I received an invitation to work here at the Women's Policy Undersecretariat. When I left, I went to the *Gabineta*<sup>18</sup>. Now I'm at home, with the children, to finish my PhD.

Speaking a little more about my experience as undersecretary, we focused on the issue of the gender and race committee. We were unable to institutionalize it at the time, we needed a decree from the governor, which we didn't get. We received a lot of support from State Deputy Marília Campos, who was decisive in taking care of this agenda and sent funds for some important projects

and actions, such as Casa Tina Martins<sup>19</sup> and projects to promote women's autonomy. We had a project to train women as bricklayers, firefighters, electricians, plumbers. And, also, we had a training course – women in prisons learned carpentry, how to make toys, in order to have an income when they leave. The goal was to develop a distribution network for these toys and give them the tools when they left the unit.

In addition, we had some publicity campaigns, stating the state is committed to women's diversity. Not only white and straight women, but also lesbians, black women, young women, girls, rural women, urban, elderly. The



*Larissa in front of Palácio da Liberdade, after an event held by the Government of the State of Minas Gerais, while she was the Undersecretary of Policies for Women.*

*By: Personal Archive*

16 Youth Alive.

17 Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality

18 Citizen project of occupation of institutional politics, which brings together different parliamentary seats in a collective term, with actions and shared strategies; and includes dozens of activists, workers, and researchers in dialogue and cooperation.

19 Action by the Olga Benário Collective to give shelter to women victims of domestic violence.

goal was to think of the complexity of these experiences and to think that the state needs to respond to all of them. So, it was a very difficult and challenging experience.

### Moral harassment

In addition to management challenges, the issue of harassment at work permeated this experience a lot. Also, when I arrived, I had many white people working under me. Some, as soon as I arrived, left. For example, the people trained at there at the school of government<sup>20</sup> didn't want to stay. And then, we were left with only one graduate and the others went to other areas. They said it wasn't a racial issue, that they had other issues. But, to me, those people's departure was very symptomatic. At the same time, the team consisted of a undersecretary and two superintendents who didn't accept my command. And he was endorsed by the secretary, on party issues.

As a result, the arrangements we made with the team were often not respected. There was a meeting in which I called the whole team: "Guys, whoever has any appointments, I need everyone here, because it's strategic planning, it's very important". And a civil servant simply made an appointment elsewhere and went. I asked: "Where's so-and-so? So-and-so, we need you here". When I said that, she disrespected me on WhatsApp group for the secretariat. When I went to the secretary, he side-stepped it. And when I issued a warning, she wouldn't sign it. They moved her to another area and nothing else happened.

I experienced several conflicts like this, but I also had people who were comrades, who stepped up and were willing to go along with me and do the work. We did a strategic planning, designed each step, we weren't able to do everything we planned, but having this map to follow was essential. I did what was possible, because without political will, public policy doesn't move forward. And my perception is that, because the project was going well, getting so well organized, they were afraid of us being in the limelight more than the secretariat. Because our undersecretariat had strategic planning, managed to present a management report, monthly activity reports, managed to have a dialogue with society - which the secretariat itself didn't have.

Instead of joining us, they started to stifle us. For example, we couldn't use the secretariat's communication instruments, there were always impediments. Simple things that we tried to formalize throughout the whole administration, such as the Promotion of Gender and Racial Equality Committee, who was a gubernatorial decree. I, as undersecretary, couldn't go and ask the governor to sign, but the secretary could. And I'm sure that this document never left the secretariat. These are things that we go through in management, conflicts that are present in public management. But I think it was an extremely healthy and positive experience.

20 School of Government Professor Paulo Neves de Carvalho, at the João Pinheiro Foundation.



## The lessons

Over the course of my professional career, I started very young and now I'm not young anymore. I started out as Larissa in dreadlocks and got out as bald Larissa. This is an important thing, opening a parenthesis: I got the dreadlocks in 2005, as soon as I left my mother's house, it was before 20 November 2005. And I had this dreadlock until now, 15 July 2020, when I cut it. It was an especially important symbol for me, of resistance, that feminine identity, that feminist struggle, that opportunity that we must build and do what we dream, what we believe.

When I joined the public administration, I was full of dreams, with a lot of willpower and life energy. Willingness to make it work and a desire to study and know things. So, in these spaces, I always looked for alternatives and it was incredibly positive. But I got tired, we see many ugly things being on the management side. I think it's an important point in human construction, that people sometimes get a hint of power and already show themselves to be horrible monsters. We get to know people from another side. Both those that have power, and those that have no power. We have the opportunity to see the beautiful side, but also the ugly side of people, of relationships. I was very taken aback to see the ugly part, but I didn't see only the ugly part.

I've been with PSOL<sup>21</sup> since 2019, but I started attending PT at the age of 16. I know and understand that if the whiteness of the party had not been so much at play, if the toxic masculinities of the party had not been so much at play, we could have moved forward much more in the construction of many public policies. Even in the policies for promotion of racial equality, the equality of women. As much as they have advanced, now more than in any other administration, they have made little progress compared to what they could have been if they had a budget and political priority, for example.

I feel that we need to catch our breath in order to create another virtuous cycle. Because the one we are living in now is toxic, extremely harmful, but it also shows the weaknesses of the constructions that we'd made. They were very good, we took many years to make them, but it barely took six months to undo most of them.

How can we build public policies that will have continuity, a longer life than those that we built in the previous period? As impactful as any of the policies may have been, there was no difficulty in undoing them. So, this is my moment of reflection, of thinking about what direction we are going to take for this policy, for these administrations. And for our political relations and our issues because it can't be just this.

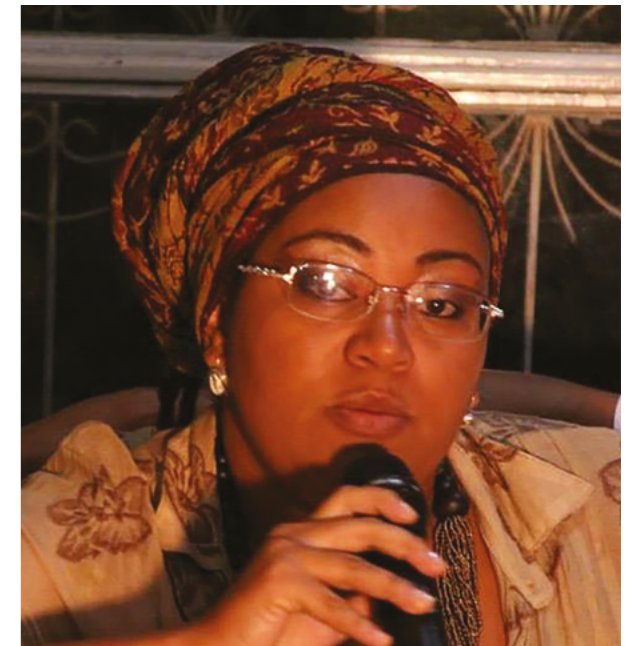
21 Socialism and Liberty Party

## 4. I'm coming with a crew: constructing individual and collective identity

When I think about building my identity, I think our sensibility is a strong point. Because we end up having to develop the ability to read environments, situations. Since you we're little, at home you're the princess of the family, but when you arrive at school there's all that violence. You need to understand what's happening and take a stand on from what you read in that situation. So, there are these urgencies of life, of being able to read the situations, the context, the reality. And with that, you also end up being forced to be strong most of the time, but we don't lose our sensibility because of it. We are extremely sensitive, we have our weaknesses, and I think that black women have a capacity to reinvent themselves. We both reinvent life and reinvent ourselves. This is immensely powerful, it's one of our greatest strengths.

We have our hair, which sometimes is in a braid, sometimes in dreadlocks, sometimes it's afro, it has many possibilities. We create many alternatives even where most people don't see power, don't see beauty. We are this beauty, create this beauty, generate this power. I think one of our strengths, too, is our ancestry. I think we're heirs to many technologies, knowledge, methodologies. We carry in our DNA the heritage of so many women who had to reinvent themselves, who reinvented life and managed to overcome oppressions. And before that, we are heirs to the legacy that predates the colonization process, we are heirs to queens, empresses, women who ruled many peoples, long before women in the West. We left to work when several empires already ruled. So, it's another relationship with the world.

The other day, I was thinking about this. If we didn't have to face racism, how better our lives would be, because we would spend our energy on other things. But before we can do anything else, we need to fight racism to survive, fight sexism to survive. In addition to all the things, we must first ensure that we survive, both materially and symbolically. Because there is a symbolic violence that tries to destroy me all the time, so you have to deal with all this and then do other things.



*Larissa in one of many moments of dialogue in defense of women and the black population.*

*By: Personal Archive*



White people move on to other things. When they arrive at the race, we're already tired. That's why there's so much inequality. If we didn't have to face so much inequality, we'd be on another level.

### *The fight against racism*

I think there are several possibilities for tackling racism. One is to kill all white people, but in doing so we would still have to deal with this cultural creation that is still in everyone. Even if we eliminated all white men, we would have, for a long time, the consequences and impacts of this experience. So, this is a possible option, but it isn't the nicest option, I think we don't want to do that. We have smarter alternatives than theirs. It's possible to create a world that fits everyone. But we have to invent things that we haven't invented and think about things that we haven't thought about.

I think the next generations will be able to think about that. The current ones are doing everything they can to end racism. In my case, for example, I gave workshops, rapped, gave lectures, worked in the public administration, had a son, several things - and even then, it wasn't enough. But they are contributions! And I think that it also needs other people to start contributing to the struggle, especially white people, because they haven't contributed. They created all these dynamics of racial and gender violence, because modern capitalism feeds on it, structures itself on it and they continue to benefit from it.

We need daily contributions from everyone, because it has to do with macro-relationships, big structures; but it also has to do with the micro-relationships, with our daily actions. It's a great combination of subjects, dreams, elements. Another thing is that we need to dream more. Spend more time of our lives imagining this world without racism, without sexism, without oppression, so we can feel in that place. Because we need to build this intellectual, cultural, affective repertoire, of a world without violence, without oppression. We need and can build this in our imagination to make it real. I think that, first, things arise in our imagination, dreams and desires. Then we materialize them in life, in the world.

We don't even have time to dream, it's so much racism, sexism, and gender violence we have to face all the time. And lesbophobic violence all the time. These days, my daughter Elis, who is two years-old, asked us to sing "happy birthday" to her. During the "who will she marry"<sup>22</sup>, she said she was going to marry our neighbor, a little girl who is her friend. That was unimaginable to me. Now, I'm in this experience, dating a woman and my daughter has been singing this possibility since she's little.

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22 Often, after singing "happy birthday", Brazilians sing a rejoinder teasing the birthday person about who their betrothed will be.

At the time I thought it was beautiful, but I also thought that, depending on the people who were there at that moment, it could be repressed. How a naive thing, which is a simple desire, can become a target, a trigger for a series of oppressions. Today, we have to protect and encourage children, and ourselves, to dream and create shields, at the same time, so that we aren't attacked because of our dreams, by the possibilities we create.

I think it's important for us to celebrate our arrival, but also to mention who came before. Often, we arrive at places thinking that we're the first, but if we go looking for the memories that have been erased, some black person passed through there before. When I entered Psychology, I met Neusa Souza Santos, Zé Tiago, Virgínia Bicudo<sup>23</sup> and other people who were already there, and then, among them, I met Lucinha from Amma Psique<sup>24</sup>. She is a beautiful, very wonderful person who fights against institutional racism. Especially during my time in Brasília, it made all the difference. I asked for help, told her what had happened, that I didn't understand. Then we tried to read it together, when something happened that bothered me, and I didn't know what it was. Together we tried to identify and name what was happening, the people involved, to exchange strategies. So, Lucinha was and is an especially important person in my career. Even before public management, we already did things together.

Sueli Virgínia as well. I met Sueli when I gave a lecture and she attended. She has this beautiful work on feelings. She works with florals from the Jungian perspective. She has a body of work, studies that she developed with her relationship with quilombola communities and other black populations. She is an important person. There is also the issue of the *terreiro*, always important. When I have a decision to make, I ask my ancestors which way to go. "Is it this way, this way, or that way?" So, many times, I feel like it doesn't arrive. And when it doesn't arrive, when I have a question, I'll ask, because even if I think that this is the path, I think it's important to have this support with those who came before.

I had many partnerships, people who hindered my path, but others who – oh my God! - they were a gift in my career, both in teaching and in partnership. Áurea Carolina<sup>25</sup> is one who always opens doors for me. Sometimes, she's invited to something, and she can't go, or she can, and she

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23 Virginia Bicudo Leone (1910-2003) pioneered the discussion of racial studies in the clinical field and was one of the most important people in the disseminating Psychoanalysis in Brazil. Her dissertation, *Racial Attitudes of Blacks and Mulattos in São Paulo, 1942*, was the first defended in the country study to debate the existence of racial prejudice, even with the decrease of the social differences.

24 Institute created in 1995 by a group of women psychologists seeking to confront racism both through political and clinical practices.

25 Áurea Carolina de Freitas e Silva is a Brazilian politician, member of PSOL, social scientist, with a Master's in Political Science. She was a councilor in Belo Horizonte / MG in 2016, and has been a federal deputy since 2018.

thinks it's cool and she asks me to go too, and if she can't, she says: "you go!". Vanessa Beco is a person who always guides me. She's an inspiration. She was the first one who spoke to me about black feminism. She showed me Lélia Gonzalez<sup>26</sup> and Luiza Bairros<sup>27</sup>. Once, I went to a workshop in Bahia, just to meet Luiza Bairros. Then, I was invited to give the workshop and I said: "I'll even do it for free". It was with her team, and it was really cool. It was the first contact I had with Luiza Bairros. We met again and worked together in Brasilia, but the first meeting with her was like that: "I'm going there because I need to meet her", and it was amazing.

I met a lot of nice people on this journey, people who support me, whom I can trust. Geíse Pinheiro Cunha is wonderful, she's now in the countryside of Bahia. We met when I started my master's degree. A person who has a reading ability, a critical ability, a generosity. And we started making partnerships. Back in Brasília, I also met Petra, a person who already worked in public administration. She had assisted several ministers and we became great friends. I found many friends and partners on the way. And that made all the difference. In the most difficult moments, I met nice people, wow! People who can reach out, you know?

That's it, we have references and we also become references, it's an exchange. We offer and we receive. Sometimes, where you least expect it, that's where it comes from. In my experience here in the state, specifically, there were two fundamental people. Eliane Dias<sup>28</sup>, we knew each other superficially from the LGBTQIA+ movement and we started to connect, at the time I wasn't even a dyke. It was a partnership, a meeting of souls. And Andrea de Socorro Luiz<sup>29</sup>, she was the person who stayed with the policy after the change in administration. Now she isn't there anymore, but she stayed and was also a very amazing partner, dedicated to the issue, to collaborate with so that we understand that she was the person who was there longer in the state government; she was already a public servant and had worked in several secretariats. She gave tips, showed the way. I also asked for help from a lot of people, when I was in the state's public administration. For

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26 Lélia Gonzalez (1935 - 1994) was an important black intellectual and activist, born in Belo Horizonte. Graduated in History and Philosophy, Master's in Communication, and PhD in Social Anthropology, she was a professor at PUC-RJ, a pioneer in studies that articulated gender, race, and class. She wrote the books *Festas Populares no Brasil* and *Lugar de negro* (with Carlos Hasenbalg), among many other essays and articles.

27 Luiza Helena de Bairros (1953-2016) was chief minister of the Secretariat of Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality in Brazil between 2011 and 2014. Graduated in Administration, Master's in Social Sciences from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and PhD in Sociology from Michigan State University, in addition to working in public administration, she worked with UNDP, Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, and UFBA. Organizer of several books and author of articles mainly on the condition of black women.

28 Biography also in this work.

29 Works in the state public service and was in charge of the State's Policy for Women Coordination, between 2018 and 2019.

example, I looked for Ana Paula Salej and Max Melquiades, at the João Pinheiro Foundation, for help.

After having all this support when I arrive and there are black people in the room, my attitude is always to try to welcome and listen to all people. I'm happy when I get somewhere for the first time, and I want everyone to be able to get there too. I want to get to places and have other black people feel comfortable there. Sometimes, black people feel like intruders. White people try to treat us in the worst possible way, with disrespect, disloyalty, intrigue, it's a horrible thing.

We need to be careful with people, they have defects, qualities, their desires, they also have their frustrations. It is up to management to try to harmonize all these elements. Because the heart of public management needs to be ensuring the rights of real people, who work in public administration and who don't. A person comes to work, and they bring technical and political knowledge, but they also carry with them problems from their home, the prejudices they inherited, the convictions they built throughout their lives. Often, the challenge is to try to harmonize, to make who you are collaborate for a construction that we bring together, agree, that we'll do together.

This is a great challenge, because people are not always willing or able to work from agreements. There are people who only know how to work under these circumstances: "So-and-so told me to, and I'll do it, but only if they tell me to," who is white, who is a man, who is rich, who is the elite. They think: "I don't obey poor people either". We need to reflect on how we build another relationship of power. And this thing of arriving in spaces and deconstructing the idea of being the only black person. It is saying: "I'm arriving with a crew". As much as other people are not physically here with me now, I know how many bundles of clothes my grandmother was washing in the Arrudas river so I could go to college, how many crowded buses my mother took so I could finish studying.

With that, whether physically, at that moment, I'm the first or I'm alone, energetically, structurally, I'm accompanied by a multitude. We know how much blood has been spilled so that we can be here breathing fully. It is never an individual construction; we need to arrive at the spaces and remain in them with dignity.

4

NILA

RODRIGUES

BARBOSA

Nila Rodrigues Barbosa  
Marina Alves Amorim  
Mônica de Cássia Costa Silva

## 1. Being a black woman

I identify as a black woman and racism is what made me one. In school, that's where they told me I wasn't white. I've had this scene very clear in my mind since the day it happened. I went to the Polivalente School, with my straightened hair, crisply ironed uniform, and all that. I was in the sixth grade. In the Polivalente, the seats were placed in groups. It was Portuguese class, the teacher was this ultra-fragile woman – physically, in posture, in her presentation as a teacher. Her name was Graça. This entitled kid named Marcílio got up from his chair and headed for my group. He touched me, my hair; lifted my hair, as if I were nothing. Then Marcílio said, "Who do you think you are? You're never going to be one of us!". And he was pointing at white people. He then continued, "You're just like her!" And he pointed at Rose, my friend. "You're black! There's no point in you straightening that

hair, no. You're just like Rose." I got scared and started bawling. But I cried a lot: I wet my whole face, my shirt, tears fell on the table. So that's when the penny dropped. Never again, in that school, was I a white girl.

The people who were sitting in my group were gobsmacked. But in general, people laughed, laughed out loud, at what Marcílio did to me. I was crying, crying, looked at the teacher, and she didn't do anything! She stood there, staring too, awkward. I thought, "Guys, is no one going to save me from this situation?" Because I didn't know how to deal with it. Then my friend Rose stood up and said, "Marcílio, get it through your head: I'm not the black you say I am, I'm black because I'm burnt by the sun's rays; and you have no color!" Then he stopped and went back to his place. It was Rose who took me to the bathroom, helped me get myself back together and told me, "Don't worry about it. It always happens to me. It happens every day."

When I arrived at university in 1984, I fell in love with a wonderful poet, a student from the Languages department who did the Introduction semesters with me. And I thought because I fell in love, I had to ignore that, visibly, he was gay. I fell in love with this beautiful person, who made poetry and romantic songs, including for me. We started talking a lot. When he said he was a poet, I said, "Oh, I want to read everything!" He was happy. I think everything he wrote, he brought for me to read. He made music and poetry for me. My infatuation just grew, obviously. He introduced me to the university restaurants. The place where I worked at that time, a pool shop on Professor Moraes Avenue, had another wide exit to the closed block of Cláudio Manuel Street. The poet was an office boy. He'd sit on the floor in front of the Cláudio Manuel door, and he'd sit there and wait for me to go out for lunch. That beauty sat there, looking at me, waiting for me to go out for lunch. Why am I talking about this guy? Soon you'll understand.

Cidinha da Silva, also a student in the History department at FAFICH<sup>1</sup>, got a research scholarship in a project at Nepem<sup>2</sup>, coordinated by Silvana Coser. Cidinha called me then, said she wanted to talk to me, if she could go where I worked. I was already working at the City Hall at the time. I asked my boss; he said ok. Talking to Cidinha, she told me that the conversation was about black women in university. Then I said, "Hey, Cidinha, I'm not black. What do I have to do with that?" She said, "Okay, Nila, you're not black, but can I do an interview with you? I need to do the interviews." I said okay then. She set me up, of course, right? Cidinha saw me as a black woman, and I didn't. At the end of the day, that was it. She asked the questions. She asked about the family, asked the color. I said, "My dad's white, my mom's white, everybody's white." Then it got to my grandfather. There's no way I could say he was white. My maternal grandfather was not white; he

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences at the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

<sup>2</sup> Women's Studies and Research Center – UFMG.



was black. Cidinha: "Ah, ok. So, are there some black people in the family?" Me: "Yes, of course there are!".

Later, Cidinha asked me, "Have you ever fallen in love with someone?" I said, "Sure, Cidinha! Of course, I have! Back in university, you know, I fell in love with the poet, from the moment I met him." Cidinha: "Do you think he's a white person?". I said, "Yes, he's a white person." Because he was really white. Cidinha: "Why do you think you never dated him?". I went, "I don't think I dated him at first because he's a little undecided." Cidinha: "But have you ever gone out with the poet to somewhere?". Me: "No." Cidinha: "Any bars, these things, have you ever been out with him?" Me: "No." We'd leave university, walk to the city center, and take our own buses. We'd walk around Savassi, after we left FAFICH, grab a burger in trailers that still existed in Savassi at the time, and we'd leave. Cidinha: "But he never asked you out? Doesn't he go out?" Me: "He's mentioned a birthday party, at a club." Cidinha: "So why do you think he never asked you out? Would you think that maybe he never invited you to go because the places where he goes are not frequented by black people?" Then came the scene of Marcílio, back in school, saying that I was not white. Of course, she saw the change in my face. I was like, "No, I never thought about it. But he's very much my friend!" Cidinha: "Friends go out, have fun." Really, he'd never been out with me anywhere, and he was talking about the outings with his friends, the parties. I said, "I can't answer that." Cidinha said: "I know. And that's the last question." Then she said, "Look, you're a black woman. You need to live with that. It's not bad to be a black person. It's simply hard." It was Cidinha who spoke in a kind, loving, supportive, and feminist way, that everything I was, the things I did, how much I studied, how hard I've worked since I was 14, all these things, were because I'm black. Because my conditions weren't the same, they were worse. It was very difficult for her too, as it must have been for Rose, my friend from school.

Of course, we had one or two conversations about it again. And I talked to her, and I realized, with no crisis, no violence, that I could look at myself in the mirror and see myself as a beautiful person. That Rose, my friend from school, always had. She wasn't a doormat, she held her head high. Even when she had nothing to say, her answer shut white people up. She knew what she was and lived what she was, but that wasn't my case – until then. From then on, I really started to face this issue of being a black woman, with its mishaps.

So I'm a black woman. But who is this black woman? It's that non-white woman, raised by her family as being white, but who's not treated as white, by white people.

## 2. Parents and sister

I was born on February 12th, 1961. I'm 59 years old. I'm the daughter of a bricklayer named Nicanor Rodrigues Barbosa, who died about four years ago, and Nilza Alves Barbosa. I consider them black, but they've never positioned themselves as such. My mom and dad, actually, didn't think they were black. Worse, they were racist. The hair, for example, I couldn't convince my mother that I didn't want to straighten it. So, I stayed quiet, the hair was straightened, and I got those bruises on my head.

That's why, when I was perceived as black at school, I didn't have the tools to assume that identity. It was racism that made me a black woman. The mother I had, the one who kept me apart from black people, preventing me from establishing more intimate relationships with black people, obviously, she was going to straighten my hair, she was going to make me the most beautiful clothes, and she was going to try to buy me expensive shoes, specifically to differentiate me from black people, by distancing me from something that identified with them at that time: poverty.

My parents lived in Belo Horizonte, but almost on the border with Contagem, in the neighborhood called Indústrias, next to Mannesmann. It was a working-class neighborhood that was starting out, on the outskirts of the city. It was a tiny little slum. Most of the people who lived there initially worked on the construction of the Mannesmann factory. They were masons, carpenters, etc. Then it became the neighborhood of the people who worked at Mannesmann: mechanics, electricians, the people who worked the dumpsters, who worked with the ovens. My dad managed to buy land in this neighborhood and build the house. When I was born, they already had the land, the house had been started, it was a three-room shed.

I always found that place a gray neighborhood. I never wanted to work there or go on living there. I always wanted to get out of that place. And I finally did, but when I was 38. My mother designed a study plan for her daughters, but she didn't plan our way out of the Indústrias, although neither me nor my sister fulfilled our destiny of staying there. Because that's my mother's place, so much that she still lives there. She doesn't want to get out of there, and she's never going to want that. After all, it's her house. She faced a line to get a loan for the construction. My father built the house, and she helped build it.

My father worked too hard, really hard. It was 14, 15 hours of work a day, Monday through Sunday. My mother worked hard as well to help him. There was a time in my father's life when he had to be everything within his abilities. So, he was a bricklayer, carpenter, worked on cisterns, plumber. He didn't like finishing jobs, but when he needed extra money, he'd take that kind of service. And my mother helped with everything. My dad was always dying to stop working for

someone else and work for himself. In the early 1980s, he did it, he became a builder. Before my sister and I started working, we lived off the money he made as a bricklayer.

In my family, I'm the firstborn and I have a younger sister. Needless to say, I'm the angry, insubordinate, selfish daughter of the family. I've always been very difficult, but it's nice to be this way. My sister's a year younger than me. She is a successful lawyer, works in the Belo Horizonte city hall. She's a very good person. Everybody likes her. She suffered a lot of prejudice, real prejudice, because she was born with a cleft palate. Living in the 60s and 70s as a girl and young woman from the periphery was difficult. We grew up very close. I'd even say: we're partners. Today, she still helps out me a lot with my kids.

### 3. Former partner and children

By the time I got out of the Indústrias neighborhood, I was already 38. I was able to move because I got pregnant within four months of dating. I managed to get away from that bond of love that held me there when I caught a glimpse of something else. I got married. I mean, actually, I usually say I didn't get married, you know? Because we lived together. A union always unstable, but eventually very loving. I have been able to count on the solidarity of my children's father many times.

I'm single today. But the marriage actually lasted a long time. This wasn't a marriage that was going to last. I orchestrated this marriage as a way to get out of the house and change my life. So, it's understandable that it didn't last long. It lasted too long, actually, because when we broke up, my son was already 18 and my daughter was 14. That's good, right? It wasn't a relationship my children's father chose to have. I'm a woman who's older than him, and more mischievous. First of all, he didn't choose to have a baby. Then he did not choose to marry, live together, whatever; and he didn't choose to leave the house.

The guy I married was an office boy and I worked at the park Lagoa do Nado. It had a board and two managers, one who worked with a focus inward towards the Lagoa do Nado and the other, outwards. This was at the time when the decentralization of culture in Belo Horizonte took place in areas outside the downtown region, areas recognized for cultural activity, in the Patrus Ananias government. It was through Lagoa do Nado, for example, that the São Bernardo Cultural Center and the Pampulha Cultural Center were born. I started working for decentralization in Lagoa do Nado at some point. So, I worked on the creation of the Pampulha Cultural Center, when it began to be an idea for Participatory Budgeting. During this construction process, we conducted workshops. Someone who was an expert in doll-making gave one of these workshops and I accompanied him. I went twice a week to this workshop at night. We left the Lagoa do Nado and went to the Urca

neighborhood, near Gate 2 of the Zoo. The workshop lasted three months and when it was over, we went out to celebrate. A neighborhood leader, who did the workshop with us, invited me and this man to have a beer and eat something. We went with this leader, his fiancée, me and the guy from the workshop. Sometime later, a person walks by with a backpack on his back. He was this beautiful black guy. I thought so. He was walking up the street, looking low when the fiancée looks and says, "It's Preto!". The leader stood up and shouted, "Preto, come here! Come and have a beer with us?" The guy was his brother. The conversation went on and a short time later, we started dating. Time passes by, I was pregnant four months later.

Then I had to bring him round. I didn't want to do it, I wanted everything to be between us, but I got pregnant, so that was my chance to get out of my family's house. My parents couldn't go against their own principles. After all, they were very Catholic. But I wasn't going to get married, was I? I never thought about getting married. I just thought about being with him, not just because he was very handsome, because he was 12 years younger and because we had a remarkably interesting sexual relationship. I know it wasn't unusual for my family, the fact that I started talking about leaving home and all that, since I was expecting a child. That was a moment when the father of my children was really helpful. I talked to him, "I need to get out of my family's house. This is a great chance! I don't want to stop working and I don't want my mom to take care of my kids. What's my idea? I'm going to tell my parents that we're moving in together, I'm going to find a place, we go and that's it. If you don't want to stay, it's okay, I'll stay alone." It was a bond of love. How was I supposed to leave my mother, this woman who prepared me to be an independent woman, but for me to be with her in that place? So, me untangling that bond of love was the greatest journey of my life. And I owe it to two people: my son and his father. This black man, who even had the nickname Preto ("Black" in Portuguese) – because he is the darkest in his family.

The only place I could get and afford rent was in Jaraguá. It was one of those weird buildings back in the neighborhood and are gone now. So, it was an ugly building; this was Jaraguá's ugliest building. There was a bar underneath the apartment, which was open until the middle of the night. He painted the floor of the apartment egg yellow. I bought the furniture and paid the rent. He stayed! Sandro was growing up and Preto was being a father. Then I wanted to move from Jaraguá, I wanted to have my own house. My sister lent me the money. Then we went to look for a house. He thought it was a drag and that the place we lived in was good enough. But I didn't like it there. I know I was lucky to find something close to where I worked, near Lagoa do Nado. So, we came to live where I still live now, but we weren't doing too well. I've always acted much like my mother in that relationship. I bossed around, decided, never asked. I never discussed things and he went with the flow. That isn't good for a long-term relationship.

But motherhood was something I had always desired. I always found mothers interesting, that motherhood was cool. So, I always had it in my head that I was going to be a mother. But it never happened until that moment. There had never been a sexual intimacy before I met the father of my children. So, the sexual relationship happened with this black guy, and four months later I got pregnant. I have two children, Sandro and Luiza. Luiza, my youngest daughter, is a woman who knows, since she was born, that she can be a boss if she wants to. And Sandro, my boy, knows since he was born too, that freedom is essential.

#### 4. School and academic trajectory

My mother never taught me how to wash, iron, cook, and she didn't teach me one thing she did very well: sew. But she always said, "You have to study!". She made it such a point, so much that she took over everything else on her own. And it was a time when studying was difficult, especially in a working-class neighborhood. So, my mother is one of those who left home at one o'clock in the morning to get in line until morning, to get a place in a good public school and enroll us. She was always looking for the best school. Then, if she couldn't, she'd look for the second best, lowering the school level. My mother always faced these things for us to study.

My father, on the other hand, never cared so much about our schooling. There was a moment when he said to my mother: "If these girls become anything, it is to your credit; but if these girls are nothing, it is your responsibility as well." My dad thought I could get married or start ironing clothes for others early. But when my sister was admitted to the Law School of the Catholic University, my father's position changed. He came to find the studies something especially important too. After all, a bricklayer with a lawyer for a daughter? He thought he was something else! He kept working and did what he could so she would graduate.

I started studying at the Dom Bosco school. It was a school run by nuns. I stayed there a short time, I'm not sure if a whole year. Then, I studied at the Diogo de Vasconcelos state school until I finished the 4th grade. Then I went to the Polivalente school, over in the Barreiro region. Then, in high school, I attended a school called AEC<sup>3</sup>, a private school on Curitiba Street. We paid something, but there was a scholarship. Finally, already working in Lojas Americanas, I finished high school at Colégio Brasileiro, on Paraná Avenue. It was also a private school, and we also didn't pay full tuition because of a scholarship.

With the intention of entering higher education, I went to a prep course at Promove, on São Paulo Street. When my sister and I did this, some people said, "Look, this isn't for people like us,

<sup>3</sup> School by the Association of Commerce Employees.

who were born in this neighborhood. We have to work. That person earns very well, at the bakery. I stopped studying. You're going to take the university entrance exam?" When they said that to my mother, I don't think she even listened, actually. But I thought, "Why isn't it for us? What are you talking about? I'm not like these people, and I'm getting out of here." We got a scholarship. My mom heard about this prep course. There was a test and we took it. We got a 60% discount. We had to work to pay the other 40%.

I did not know which major to pick and went to talk with Rubinho, who was, at the time, the director of Promove. Seeing my discomfort in the face of people's resistance towards my project to go to university, he told me about the History and Sociology majors. I chose History. When I talked to my parents that I was going to take the entrance exam for this, they made such a face! They said, "But History? What's that major? Are you going to tell stories to other people?" And concluded, "Nila is hopeless!". I'm the angry, evil daughter who has no respect for her parents and her elders, right? Recently, when I released the book on quilombolas, my mom said, "Cool". But my father died thinking, "She got a History degree, she works in culture". When they asked him, he said, "She works at the Culture Secretariat, she has a History degree." The important one has always been the daughter who is a lawyer. My mother has some pride. She has my two books over at her house: "I'm going to read your book! It's very interesting!" She says she's going to read it, but it's been a long time since they've been there.

I took the entrance exam for History at UFMG<sup>4</sup> and got in the second group. I passed the first exam I did, after having done a year of prep school. I looked at the approval list posted there in the Dean's Building about ten times, to see if I had passed, and I had really done it. And I wasn't going to pay anything. So I was going to get my degree. I was already working in the pool shop. I was going to give notice, I was about to become unemployed, but I didn't care because I really wanted to go to university.

I need to say that my first degree is the bachelor's degree. Guys, it was a mess for me and Marcelina, my colleague and friend, to get this bachelor's degree. A disgusting fight! We wanted to do the bachelor's degree and we went to enroll. Then they said, "You can't do it." I said, "What do you mean, we can't do it?" And they said, "You can't do it because you entered in second group. The ones who enter the second entry will be teachers; the ones who enter the first entry will be researchers". I asked again, "Where is it written that whoever enters in the second group cannot get a bachelor's degree?". And they said, "It's not written, but it's like that." Marcelina then said, "If it's not written, it's not like that! You'll register us now or I'll call the police!" Result: they registered, but the teachers asked, "Why are you attending this discipline? Aren't you in the evening class?"

<sup>4</sup> Federal University of Minas Gerais.



We would say, "Yes, we are, but we want to be researchers." There were people who said to me, for example: "Oh, but you can't be a researcher. Because you didn't have a science initiation scholarship, you weren't teaching." I'm from a time when universities were still populated by elites, and these people were the ones who got tutoring positions, scholarships, etc. So much that when I started working at the city hall, I asked to be in the afternoon shift in order to be able to study in the morning and join that system. But still, I tried, I tried, and I got nothing.

After completing undergrad, I didn't study for a time, working in the area of heritage and history. Then, I got a postgraduate degree in African and Afro-Brazilian studies at PUC Minas<sup>5</sup>, where I received a scholarship. Then I tried the master's degree at UFBA<sup>6</sup>, I got second place and did it. Now, it's just the doctorate left!

My master's degree was done in a difficult context. I was married, with small children, I was approved by UFBA and said, "Oh, I'm going to do it!". My kids' father said, "No, it's okay, you can go." But I didn't ask if I could go, did I? I just told him I was going, and that my mom was going to help. From then on, our relationship was no longer the same. I was there in Salvador, alone, coming here when I could. So, it was very difficult to stay there without the kids, and it was so difficult for him to stay here with the kids too. My mother helped a lot during my master's degree. She'd leave the house every day and come to my house to be with the kids. And she wouldn't leave here until the kids' father was back from work. He worked eight hours a day, Tuesday through Sunday. He was a doorman at the Zoo at the time. Over the weekend, my sister and my friend picked up the kids too. So, the children were getting tossed around. To this day, they speak as if they had been abandoned by their mother. They seem to have been traumatized, even though they're fine now.

## 5. Ethnic-Racial Formation

I didn't learn anything about Africa in school, not even in high school. I don't remember Africa being even mentioned, not even Egypt. So, I started building my knowledge about Africa only at university.

First came the Ancient History discipline, I do not remember whether in the first or second semester. I was Daniel Vale Ribeiro's student. That's when I first heard about Egypt. I think that in Contemporary History 2, already at the end of the History degree, with Professor Vera<sup>7</sup>, I resumed the study of Africa. This professor also had an elective class focused on Africa and Asia. In this case,

<sup>5</sup> Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais.

<sup>6</sup> Federal University of Bahia.

<sup>7</sup> Nila does not remember this professor's last name.

the class was on Saturday and had very few students, from 8 to 12 people. Because the content was too large, part of it was working on a research activity. She directed us to choose between Africa and Asia. I obviously chose Africa because I wanted to study the issue of slave trafficking. When this subject appeared in the course, it was in Economic History, and I did not like the theoretical perspective used. It was the late 1980s, an exceptionally large theoretical-methodological change was underway. We were beginning to talk here about the History of the Vanquished, History of Mentalities, and I was very interested in these new perspectives. I had also attended the History of Minas discipline, with Professor Maria Auxiliadora de Faria. So, I weighted that I had to take that elective course, because there was a piece missing from my puzzle. The question of the Congados and the Reinados, which permeate the history of Minas Gerais and Belo Horizonte, speaks of the protagonism of enslaved people. I needed to examine it; I had seen it only in passing.

I remember that there wasn't anything very interesting about Africa in FAFICH's library at the time. Professor Vera suggested that I interview an African who was studying at the Instituto Santo Ignácio. It was in Pampulha, I lived in Indústrias and studied in Santo Antônio, both very far from there, but I went. This person introduced me to several books. But they were books in English, in French; they weren't even translated to Spanish yet. Since I could read something of French, I wrote the paper making use of part of what he introduced me to. It was in this discipline, writing this paper, that I understood the connection between Africa and Brazil overall, and with Minas Gerais specifically. That's when I realized there was a possible way of research that wasn't the issue of trafficking humans as goods. I could understand that these Africans did something coming here, but I still couldn't systematize what these people actually did, at that time.

Some people and some authors were especially important in my ethnic-racial background. I didn't work directly with Professor Lígia Estanislau, but she was the first person in my life who wrote to a wider audience, from her place as a black woman. When Lígia faced the culture of Belo Horizonte from a black perspective, she opened my eyes to my own questions, throughout my education, throughout my life. It was with her that I understood that I could work with that. She's a sociologist, professor at UFMG, who went to work at The City Hall, in Belo Horizonte. And she exposes the black Belo Horizonte cultural heritage to everyone. Belo Horizonte was founded by black people. When the state says to do anything, black people come to build it. Then city planning imploded. The black people who built Belo Horizonte went to live in the outskirts, but came to build the city, sell vegetables, do various jobs, visit. And they did not come to build the city for white people and leave; they left marks in the city, and they stayed here. I read the reports that Lygia wrote about it.

I remember speeches and conversations by Marcos Cardoso, within the Municipal Culture Secretariat itself, when he went to work there in the 1990s. Jorge dos Anjos is an artist I first saw through the eyes of Marcos Cardoso. Congado I think it's very important to cite. I feel a very great affection for Dona Isabel Casemira. She said some remarkably interesting things when we organized the Tricentenary of Zumbi. She highlighted the importance of Our Lady of the Rosary, and I realized how much the Saint was ours, of the Reinado, of Congado. "That's our saint, of black people!" How can a white virgin be spoken of like that?

Another person who was very important: Erisvaldo Santos. In the postgraduate degree I got at PUC, I began to systematically read black authors, and also found black authors. Erisvaldo was my teacher. He's babalorixá. He was the one who told me that the presence of black people in the history of Brazil should be seen from the perspective of reinvention. What do you mean, reinvention?! They came here with nothing. They came here and had to reinvent themselves. And they keep reinventing themselves every time one is born. Then I started reading Erisvaldo Santos.

I found Joseph Ki-Zerbo in that project I did in university, through the African person who was at ISI<sup>8</sup> and I had interviewed in the 1980s. But after completing the paper, I put that author aside. In this course, I found him again as well as other very interesting authors. There is a text from Ki-Zerbo that works on what History of Africa should be told, and by whom this story should be told. When you elaborate the black history of Belo Horizonte or give a black perspective to the history of Belo Horizonte, which is what I do, as much as you work with Western and white authors, you begin from of your perspective, that is, from your reinvention as a black person.

I was raised as a white girl. My dolls were blonde. At the time, there weren't any black dolls, and if there were, my parents wouldn't have bought them. When I faced racism, I began to distrust all of it. When I stopped straightening my hair, it was because I had enough self-esteem to face racism. What I understood from what Erisvaldo stands for is that if you don't reinvent yourself as a black person, you're not going to leave the place of subalternity, you're always going to be a sad little thing to yourself. So we shouldn't just stand around, racism is meant to be fought. "And how will you (in this case, I) face racism?" Erisvaldo made me understand this from myself, from my experience, from my reinvention and from my production. I'm not one of those people who lived in Africa. I am from this place of violence, of devaluing the humanity of black people, which is racism.



*Lori Figueiró's book release in Belo Horizonte, in the auditorium of the Design School of the State University of Minas Gerais.*

*By: Lori Figueiró*

Another thing I discovered in that course: Conceição Evaristo. *Becos da Memória* is the history of Belo Horizonte in the 1960s, 1970s. She talks about white women who didn't wash their dirty sanitary towels. No wonder my mother never taught me how to do laundry, even though she was a racist. When I read this book, I think, "Wow, I'm so glad my mom didn't teach me how to wash and iron!". They are the minutiae of racism, something that is ingrained in our lives, in our veins.

And I discovered Conceição Evaristo at the time I was working at the Abílio Barreto Museum, discussing cultural heritage with José Neves Bittencourt. That is, at the moment that I was discussing the truth in cultural heritage, which is what José Neves represented. He was open to dialogue. Is it possible that I was the only person who saw that Abílio Barreto was a racist? Nobody mentions that, anyways.

8 Instituto Santo Inácio.



## 6. Professional trajectory in Belo Horizonte

I worked for 30 years in Belo Horizonte's city hall. When I was hired, I was already at university – and I knew full well I was going to be a historian.

I started working at the Planning Secretariat in 1987, thanking God that I did not end up in the Administration or in the Finance Secretariats. The Planning Secretariat was tiny at the time with many leadership positions. I worked with the municipal budget, which was under the responsibility of an even tinier department. I was the only person who didn't have a senior position there. Before the probationary internship was over, I had already left the Planning Secretariat. I stayed for less than two years.

I put things in motion and managed to be placed by the city hall in the Tancredo Neves Foundation, where I was already an intern. In my position in the city administration, I had to work for six hours. So, I worked part-time. On the counter-shift, I interned at the Tancredo Neves Foundation. In fact, I had been selected for an internship position at the João Pinheiro Foundation, but the FJP let me work for the Tancredo Neves Foundation, under a state government agreement. As the Tancredo Neves Foundation also had an agreement with the city hall for personnel assignment, getting authorization from the City hall meant I could work there all day, part time as an intern and part-time as a transferee. This ended up happening. I worked there for about two years. Even after I completed the internship, I continued working there, under the city hall's payroll.

At the Tancredo Neves Foundation, in reality, I was a research assistant. I worked with the newspaper collection, the fax and telex collection, I organized a lot. At that time, the Tancredo Neves Memorial was created in São João del Rey. I also worked on sorting the collection for the inauguration of this memorial. With the end of the agreement between the Foundation and the City Hall, I returned there.

Because I'd worked with the municipal budget, I looked for the person who worked with the budget of the Culture Secretariat, in an attempt to work there. That's how I found out they were creating the Belo Horizonte City Archive and looking for people to work there. I spoke with Norma de Góes Monteiro, who was heading the initiative. It was the beginning of the Public Archive of the City of Belo Horizonte (APCBH): the archive occupied a room, barely had desks for everyone; it was just two computers, one for the director and one for everyone else. When Norma read my résumé and saw my training, she noticed my training and that I had worked at the Tancredo Neves Foundation. She said: "It's a shame you got here just now. If not, I would've given you the Head of Research and Information Service position. Because the person who held the position doesn't have the training you have. So, you're going to take over the Head of the Research Section". I went back

to the City Hall as Section Chief. Above me, was the Head of Service, and after them, the Archive Director.

In 1997, Belo Horizonte had no systematized history, other than the one written by Abílio Barreto. It was the city's centenary. At the Federal University of Minas Gerais, they were developing several studies about Belo Horizonte. At the archive, we were trying to get the documentation to reconstruct the city's history.

At the same time, it was the Patrus Ananias government. In terms of preserving cultural heritage, until then, even if something was preserved, what wasn't taken over by businesspeople, was occupied by people oriented to do no harm to businesses. That's changed. This is the time when Cultural Heritage was directed by Lígia Estanislau and the Culture Secretariat was under the management of Antonieta Cunha. Marcos Cardoso, a person who is a reference for the black movement in Belo Horizonte, worked at the Culture Secretariat, at that time, with the Cultural Action Department. It was the Cultural Action Department, from the Culture Secretariat, together with the Lagoa do Nado Cultural Center, that promoted cultural decentralization. That's when a perspective of the city that included black people emerged.

In the newly created City Archive, initially, the idea was to make an administrative archive in a larger conception, covering the entire history of the city, but from the point of view of the official administration. For this, it was necessary to build a timeline from the perspective of the city's historical-administrative process. I was in charge of thinking about a project for the archive that tried to build this timeline for Belo Horizonte.

When Norma assembled the first APCBH team, she brought people from the National Archive to teach us. Theoretically, this place was of importance to me. We worked with the most up-to-date archive theory. From the point of view of training, it was remarkably interesting. I even took a graduate course in archive organization. This course took place at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora. It was every weekend, Friday to Saturday. It was a course paid by the City Hall.

I left the Archive because I didn't get along with a person Norma brought over to work there. When that happened, Lígia Estanislau was already ill and outside Municipal Heritage. It then was occupied by Leonardo Castriota, who was working on the dossiers for some regions of the city, and we were doing that. The Lagoinha Dossier, for example, is from that time. And who are those people from Lagoinha? What are those carnival blocks? What is the culture of that place? When the Lagoinha Dossier was under development was around the same time I left the Archive.

When I decided to leave, a geographer who worked with me told me about a vacancy in Lagoa do Nado park. He put me in touch with the director at the time, Abilde Carneiro. And I ended up



going to work there, occupying a position at the same level as the one I occupied in the Archive: Section Head for Cultural Training. I took care of the Lagoa do Nado's cultural activity – concerts, workshops, exhibitions. I was responsible for all of it. The Lagoa do Nado parties lasted three days and were delicious. There was an Association that represented the place's preservation movement, the people who oversaw the City Hall's performance. I also took care of this relationship with the community. Then, when the person who was Head of Service left, that is, when the person who was my direct boss left, I became Head of Service. Then I started working for the cultural decentralization of the city, in the creation of the Pampulha Cultural Center. The São Bernardo Cultural Center had already been created at that time. Let's face it, it's one thing to talk to the people and listen to what people's demands are for municipal management. It's another thing to theoretically build this path, because you have to subsidize public policy.

What is Lagoa do Nado? It arose from a middle-class youth movement who wanted to preserve an old farm that belonged to one of the mayors of Belo Horizonte, Américo Renné Gianetti. These young people had an extraordinarily strong movement. So much so that they made the park happen; a municipal space in the Northern Region of Belo Horizonte, with 300,000 square meters. When the Lagoa do Nado was turned into a municipal park, it had to be opened up to the community. Administratively, alongside the park, the Lagoa do Nado Interregional Cultural Center is created. I arrived when this happened. The two are situated in the North Zone but have exchanges with other regions of the city. With Alto Vera Cruz and Barreiro, for example. With São Bernardo, which had been a policing unit. People were tortured there; they made people confess. When São Bernardo ceased to be this, it was singers and storytellers who occupied the space. The overwhelming majority of whom were black people.

There was an Administrative Reform in the City Hall in the year 2000. This closed several positions; one of them was mine. That's when I left Lagoa do Nado and I felt terrible. In fact, there was a change in government. It meant, on the one hand, an ideological change and on the other, a structural change. During this process, in my assessment, it was not only the staff that was negotiated, it was also the policy. The city's cultural decentralization policy, for example, was drastically negotiated. Lagoa do Nado continued to work, with difficulty, and the Cultural Action Department in the Culture Secretariat, which worked together with Lagoa do Nado, lost status and survived by the skin of the teeth of those who worked there. Sustaining cultural decentralization after 2000 was tough. I left Lagoa do Nado then, in a very sad moment, really depressive.

I went to the Pampulha Regional Administration without a commissioned position, as an administrative assistant, which was the position that I held in the City Hall originally. I was working

in the newly created Regional Culture Secretariat, which came about with this administrative reform that I mentioned. This secretariat was short-lived.

At that time, a person with whom I had worked with at the Tancredo Neves Foundation and the Belo Horizonte City Archive was a teacher at the municipal level at Belo Horizonte and had been transferred to the Abílio Barreto Historical Museum. She referred me to Thaís Pimentel, who ran the museum. I went to work at Abílio Barreto and I stayed there for a long time. It was at the museum that I met Marina Amorim, José Neves Bittencourt, Thiago Costa, a lot of people. There was a movement of formation, much like the one I had experienced at the City Archive.

José Neves provided a lot of reading and discussion. It was fundamental for me to be the historian that I am. Who's José? He's a museologist from the National History Museum, who was working at the Abílio Barreto Museum. He wrote and published. He is a reference in the field. I owe him the training in museology and an improvement of my training in the area of history and heritage. It was from this encounter that I started publishing theoretical texts. I understand that this learning process, from my time at Abílio, crowned my public policy training, which occurred within the City Hall as well. So, in fact, the meeting with José Neves was very important to me. He made me read and argue a lot. Of each fight of ours, and we fought a lot, I left with at least two books. He gave books from his library to me. It was this process that made me a person with a good theoretical ability. And I started writing and I haven't stopped since. We wrote a lot within the museum and for certain magazines, such as the National History Museum Annals.

I got José Neves' attention because I disagreed with him. He was placed there to bring the best of museum theory to Abílio Barreto. But once he said, "These things you say have no meaning. Belo Horizonte is a republican city, and this black issue does not exist here." I said, "Of course there's this black issue in Belo Horizonte! Leave the Museum and walk around downtown. What you'll see are black women coming out of their bosses' homes to go home. I see them all, some talk to me like I'm also someone who had worked in one of these houses, in one of those apartments. Of course, there's the black question in this city! Of course, there's this black question!" That happened and a little later he was able to give me support in setting up the exhibition *A Matter of Race: black people in the City Museum*. So, I got José's attention because I disagreed with him. And I convinced him that what I was thinking was right or, at least, that it deserved theoretical investigation.

My exhibition fostered a lot of discussion, including inside the museum itself. There was a lot of trouble, as a matter of fact. Nowadays, some people are starting to digest what I presented to them. This was when Thaís Pimentel was still the director. But I was the one who was different, you know? I was aware that I was a black woman. And I was aware that I was a black woman

historian. The museum hadn't brought up the issue of representation of black people in the city. The exhibition I did exposed that. And it was a black woman who did that.

I left Abílio Barreto because I was approved for the master's degree. Well, actually, at the time, I was coordinating the group responsible for designing a new permanent exhibition for the museum's main house. The idea was to work on the advent of the new capital of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, bringing the narratives of the place during the time of construction and the founding of the city, but also the contradictions of these narratives. I had problems with the institution's director back then, serious conflicts that I don't even like to remember. That way, I left because I had been approved for the master's degree in Bahia. I had premium vacations and accumulated annual vacations, plus I had a surplus of hours banked. I put it all together and went to Salvador to do my master's degree. But I was going through a very difficult situation at that moment, professionally. I even lost a 25-year friendship because of what happened. It was tragic. When I was approved for the master's degree, I was really lucky. If not, I think I'd have been out of the City Hall. Returning from Bahia, this director of the Abílio Barreto Museum, with whom I had become ill-disposed with, had become President of the Municipal Culture Foundation. So, I went back to the museum, but I couldn't stay there. In fact, it was not possible to stay anywhere within the Foundation. I ended up in the Human Resources Department of Pampulha Regional. Leaving culture was horrible, I cried a lot.

When I worked at Pampulha Regional Administration, the Coordination of Racial Equality was created at the Secretariat of Social Policies. And this coordination created the Racial Equality Management Group in each regional. Each regional had a person responsible for that. In the Pampulha Regional, each department had to have one person in this group, coordinated by Rosane Pires. I was appointed to be the Human Resources Department representative. This Racial Equality Management Group of Regional Pampulha, that I participated in, was particularly good. We were able to have discussions and do interesting things. It was terrible to work with human resources, I didn't like it – I took care of the transportation vouchers for public servants, etc. But the meetings and activities of the Management Group were great.

The Pampulha Regional Director of Human Resources told me about a selection of the Municipal Culture Foundation for the Venda Nova Cultural Center: "There are some management meetings in the City Hall, and there is a person from the Culture Foundation that I like very much. This person knows you, and she said that she's having a selection process for cultural center management and that it would be interesting for you to apply. Looks like they're looking for someone for the Venda Nova Cultural Center now. They're receiving CVs." By then, the Foundation was already under new

management, that guy I didn't get along with had already left. And they were looking for someone to work in Venda Nova. The story of Venda Nova is very dear to me!

Sílvia Esteves, Lena's<sup>9</sup> partner, was the director of cultural centers. And Edilaine Carneiro, who I met as a researcher in the collection of the Minas Gerais Public Archive, also had a position in Planning at the Municipal Culture Foundation. I applied for the position of manager of the Cultural Center of Venda Nova, and they were the ones who interviewed me. They did an interview, a tough one, about my career at the City Hall, the issue of history and planning. A week later, they said I had been selected, that it rested on my boss allowing me to take over. She did and I went to work as a manager in Venda Nova in January 2012. And it was awesome, super interesting!

Of course, I had a lot of problems. With the team, for starters. There was one person who thought she had to be the coordinator, because had a tenured position with the Foundation, art educator, and played capoeira. With her, I faced very serious problems. There was also a theft. They took a lot of equipment from the Arena of Culture Project. I had to file a police report, had depositions at the City Hall, all that stuff. But still, it was remarkably interesting. When that former director of the Abílio Barreto Museum came back to the Municipal Culture Foundation, I lost my position and left the Venda Nova Cultural Center.

Back at the City Hall, as administrative assistant in Human Resources, now in the central area of the municipal administration, I did general service for public servants, opened claims and processes. All the city officials passed through there at some point. That service was my job, over my six hours. I went to this place thinking it was the worst in the world. And it wasn't, because you could do a lot for the people, people who didn't have anything, no access to anything. Most of them were black people who worked as a service assistant, administrative assistant, that is, in the worst positions at the City Hall, and needed to improve their salary a little, but didn't have the slightest information about their rights as a civil servant. It was very interesting after all.

Then I went to the Coordination of Racial Equality Promotion as an administrative assistant. Someone from the Department of Education's Management of Ethnic-Racial Relations heard about me when I was still working at the Abílio Barreto Museum. She knew about my degree in African and Afro-Brazilian Studies because she knew Erisvaldo, and he had been my supervisor. He's the one who told to her that I worked at the City Hall. Then, this person referred me to the coordination, considering that, being in education, I would be someone with whom she could have a dialogue there, in addition to the coordinator herself.

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<sup>9</sup> Regina Helena Alves da Silva, retired professor from FAFICH/UFMG's Department of History.

Coincidentally, that's when my book *Quilombolas* was ready. The publishers said, “we can hand you the book downtown”. So, they delivered it to the Coordination for Promotion of Racial Equality, and I eventually took it home. When the director saw the book, she was interested in me. The deputy, who was also from the Municipal Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality, had a health problem. I took over. First, the position was management, Manager 2; then, the position became advisor, Advisor 1, also due to an administrative reform.

This woman I worked with, when I went to the coordination, suffered with explicit racism, in the secretariat that housed the coordination, to begin with. And, obviously, when it came to budget cuts, they always cut into her portfolio. She had to play politics with the Education Secretariat, with the others. She had to support this policy, often without any budget, being present at events, lectures, discussions. In addition, she was placed in the post by Márcio Lacerda, after having passed through the Government Secretariat of his administration. On the one hand, she had to face the Kick Lacerda Out movement and, on the other, deal with the distancing of the black movement itself. Because the movement did not participate in this administration and few dialogued with it. The people who were there, managing the coordination, actually had the respect of the movement, but didn't have its support. So much so that the Municipal Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality, during this period, was its fierce combatant.

Then, despite the change in government, I continued in the Coordination for Promotion of Racial Equality without an official position, until I became a civil servant in the council. At the City Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality, I stayed until I retired. At that time, it was in bad shape. I kept it going by the skin of my teeth, to be honest. There was an election, and I was the one who welcomed and maintained direct contact with the new councilors so that they would support the policy, when there was no policy at the coordination level, because it took time for the new manager to be appointed. So, activities, seminars, everything this council promoted, I backed with the support of the new advisors, because the policy had to keep going.

## 7. A reading of the history of municipal administration in Belo Horizonte

When the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, in Portuguese) takes over the presidency, the party had the support of black people in the country as a whole. There was, then, a commitment from Lula, since the election campaign and he could not fail to fulfill that commitment. When he created the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPPIR), it was incredibly important. But all this was already happening in Belo Horizonte, since 1998. It was in the Célio de Castro government, after Patrus Ananias, that the Special Secretariat Black Community Affairs was put in place. Diva Moreira ran that office. Marcos Cardoso went to work there, other black militants in the city too. When Lula assumes the commitment and honors it, what he does in the federal sphere was already happening in Belo Horizonte. BH is a pioneer in a policy of promoting racial equality. This Secretariat, in fact, became more like an idea. Because after the mayor's death, it became a section; then it became a coordination; and now it's back to being a section. So, the secretariat dropped in importance, but in addition to black people, it also came to include indigenous people and gypsy<sup>10</sup> communities.

I didn't get to work in this office when I arrived at the secretariat because, in my view, it had to do with the black movement that acted in the city. And I was never in the movement. My profile has always been different. I never leaned towards political action. And I didn't have the political background that these people had in the daily struggle. Because I'm not a black person. So, for example, I didn't go through much of what I saw Marcos Cardoso go through, in the Philosophy major, when I was studying at FAFICH. The marginalization he suffered was certainly much greater than the one I suffered. He was a poor black man. When I went to work at Lagoa do Nado, the policy of promoting racial equality was on the agenda, but the focus was the construction of a cultural public policy. The truth is that when the promotion of racial equality happens, you have to create the conditions for it to take effect at all levels of government. And that's what we did too, at Lagoa do Nado.

Similarly, when Law 10.639/2003 and Law 11.645/2008 took place at the federal level, the Municipal Education Secretariat already had some experience. That is why Belo Horizonte is one of the cities in which this law disseminated well, even with all the problems. What I mean is that this city already had a policy of racial equality, long before the federal policy existed. It was pioneering and incentivized the Workers' Party administration in Brasília, on the one hand; and on the other, that's why federal initiatives have been successful here.

<sup>10</sup> Gypsy (cigano) is an accepted umbrella term including peoples such as the Rom, Calon, and Sinti ethnicities.



In education, specifically, did it have to be heroic? It did. Did it have to rely a lot on the municipal racial equality agency? It did. Because when managers are at low ranking, it is not easy to afford a policy for all levels of government. That was the reality at the Municipal Education Secretariat. To get there at the ground-level, that is, the black student in the municipal public school, it was a heroic act and that happened with institutional articulation. I arrived at the Coordination for Promotion of Racial Equality, in the Márcio Lacerda government. I worked with a black woman who suffered explicit racism – there was nothing implied. And the coordinator acted in a very articulate manner with the person in the ethnic-racial nucleus of the Education Secretariat. I also followed that motion then.



I did not have an education that allowed me to understand that it was the struggle of the black movement that ensured that I could be able to take over without being lynched, without being cursed and belittled. I had a hard time understanding that. Because if I had enough self-esteem to face racism, it is thanks to the struggle of the black movement, including of this city, which I did not participate in. So, I enjoy some of the victories of this militancy. Similarly, if, when the laws 10.639/03 and 11645/08 were passed, Belo Horizonte had the framework for it, it's because of the black movement. The black movement was formed in the city and occupied the government. The Diva's secretariat, for example, it's true, had its problems, critiques can always be made. But it happened and implemented the policy, that's undeniable. Even with all the issues that this policy has suffered from and suffers still, it persisted and persists. That's central. Another point: the laws I mentioned came late for me,

*Nila Rodrigues's book release in Araçuaí/MG.*

*By: Lori Figueiró*

but they were not late for my children nor for the other children I saw by the bunch in the cultural centers of Belo Horizonte.

In conclusion, cultural centers, in a way, need to be seen as the support of this policy, because that is what they are. The kids who attended these centers back then were public school students. When the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture becomes mandatory in schools, they were already, at least, completing elementary school. So, the new legislation came late for them too, but they lived the cultural centers, they could strengthen their ethnic-racial identity there. The cultural centers' boom started in 1999 and, before that, there was already cultural action in the city, promoted by the City Hall, to value black culture. Cultural policy in Belo Horizonte, in this way, can be considered as the origin of racial equality policy in the city. Because here, the popular culture of the black city is very black. And popular culture is the focus of cultural policy, which was built in Belo Horizonte in the 1990s.

# 5

Daniela Tiffany do Prado de Carvalho  
Leticia Godinho  
Renata Souza Seidl

## DANIELA TIFFANY

### 1. Origins

I was born in Belo Horizonte. But I was just born. My mother lived in Ouro Preto; my father was born there. My mother taught at the Polivalente school in Ouro Preto and came to BH to give birth. So, I lived in Ouro Preto until I was seven years old. From Ouro Preto I moved to Conselheiro Lafaiete, my mother and I went to live with my grandmother. After that, we lived in Juiz de Fora; twelve years later, I returned to Belo Horizonte, where I have been ever since.

I'm an only child. Until I was three, my father lived with us. Ouro Preto was a particularly good place to grow, I was very free. It was a protected environment, everyone knew me, and knew my mother. She says that, at the age of six, I was a "tour guide". I went to the square to talk to tourists; I listened to the guides talking about tales and stories and learned. I lived in the Antônio Dias neighborhood, near the Chico Rei mine; so, I took the people from the square to the mine, to tell the story of Chico Rei. The owner of the mine liked my initiative and gave me some change to encourage me.

I am the only child of a black woman and a white man. This is an important part of my trajectory, because the place of miscegenation confused me a lot about the salience of the racial agenda in my life.

### **The grandmother: *contradictory and fascinating!***

My maternal grandmother was married three times, twice to black men and once to a white man, and it was this white man who raised my mother and her brothers, out of a total of eight children. She had exceedingly difficult life experiences with her first two husbands and when she married this white man, he became an especially important reference for social ascension and a life without violence. So, the issue of whitening is very present in my family: it is linked both to an improvement in life and to living without violence. My grandmother advised her daughters to marry white men, stressing that black men would be absolutely harmful.

My grandmother was a contradictory and fascinating person! Because while she was super conservative, sometimes sexist and racist, in other aspects of life, she had very advanced ways. My grandmother went to law school at the age of 54. My uncle dared her to; but even then, she took the entrance exam and passed, along with him and my older aunt. The first place where she practiced was the Leprosarium, as she was very moved by these claims at the time. So, she had some remarkably interesting ways, beginning with being a woman who questioned all her life the fact that she couldn't study, she couldn't be in public spaces. It was something she really wanted. And she did have some resentment, that she was forced to marry so young. So, she also taught her daughters to be independent, taught the value of taking public exams, having their own money, and not depending on men. I was raised with this perspective: that they were the protagonists, and men, supporting actors.

### **My mother and father: *reference and loss***

My mother separated from my father when I was really young, I was three years old. Due to my grandmother's encouragement, my mother went to college for Literature, was a teacher, and later, she also studied Law. So, for me, studying has always been very emphasized. During my childhood, I remember having many books. My mother said that she started reading to me, then she got tired; she didn't want to read stories, so she encouraged me to learn how to read really early. Reading and studying have always been a very natural thing for me, and I think it made all the difference, as I never had any doubt that I was going to university.

As much as I identify with the trajectory of the women in my family, I always wanted to have my own trajectory. For example, my mother repeatedly refused to take on leadership roles at school, as she said she was going to lose her freedom. She wanted to be able to question – and



she was considered too quarrelsome. So, she had many difficulties. When she went to teach at the Central State School, she suffered various forms of racial discrimination, and although she was a woman of many confrontations, she always refused to be in a managerial space – more formal, on the front line. This created friction and, at the same time, a lot of financial losses.

I, on the other hand, said: “No. I want to be in the space that decides”. I’ve always had that profile. At school, for example, I was a class leader almost every year; I was chairman of the graduation committee; a lot in that sense. When it came to university, I got into UFMG, at a time when there weren’t racial quotas yet. I was admitted during the 1999 entrance exam, my class had 32 students, and only 4 were black (one of whom was from Cabo Verde). And they were very well-off students, in general, very high-income. When we started organizing graduation, they wanted to have an exceedingly expensive party, which would exclude everyone who was unable to pay. I was very outraged by that and created a movement! We changed the composition of the commission, so that everyone could participate, at a fair price. I became president of the graduation committee. A friend said: “This is the best configuration: a president who is poor and the people who organize, rich”. So, I was always very stirred by that kind of thing. And I think it is the result of this accumulation of things.

My mother's family is an extraordinarily strong reference for me, because I lost my father very early. My father was murdered. When I was still eight months old, he was arrested for a few years, and it left a lasting impression on me. I even think that some professional choices are related. And when I was sixteen, he was assassinated; got involved in a fight. It is interesting, but also contradictory, that on the one hand, a white man with light-color eyes was valuable to my mother's family. As to my father's family, marrying a black woman was practically a contamination. So, despite my mother being a person who worked and had a highly organized life, the fact that she had no money, had no status, in short, was frowned upon by my father's family. I was in this strange place.



*Daniela and her mother, Graça. Ouro Preto, 1981.*

*By: Personal Archive*

## 2. Schooling

The reason we left Ouro Preto was that, since I learned to read early, I joined the school group and thought it was all too easy and did not want to stay in school. And ran away. My mother started getting worried, she said I talked back too much. So, she decided to move me into my grandmother's house, in a way she could discipline me. But it was an incredibly good childhood! Flying kites, playing a lot. Being a kid! It was really good... but until that moment, when it became a problem, a conflict. But being a smart child helped me to have confidence. For example, I changed schools a lot, but that confidence helped me when I arrived at new schools. I was never scared, inhibited kid, I knew I was going to handle everything! Knowing that I was a good student, that I could handle the exercises, was always a tool that helped upon arrival.

Despite all the difficulties in schooling, my mother tried to get me into private school whenever possible. But then it happened that there was no way to pay, that whole thing... So, I changed schools a lot during my student life, but always with this perspective that I was going to go to university. I think that made all the difference. I keep reminiscing about the people with whom I lived, who had the goal of graduating from high school, at best. And for me, it was not enough.

### **At university: *Beyond Freud, Skinner, and Lacan***

When my father died, it was the first time that I thought about going into Psychology. At the time, I wanted to work with drug addicts, the whole “saving others” thing. I remember that at my father's Seventh Day mass, I heard in the church a testimony from a woman who had lost her father, also murdered. She decided to visit a man arrested in Nelson Hungria<sup>1</sup>, introduced herself to him and said those things... it was like a movie. I remember I cried a lot with this story. She said that after she left, she received a letter from him apologizing; talking about what he had done and how much her visit made him rethink. He had already killed some people but, with her visit, he thought about what he had done for the first time. A while later, he died. And she read this letter, which made a huge impression. I had this “jail” thing in my head, it was something that interested me a lot.

The first university entrance exam I took, as soon as I finished high school in a public school, was for Law School – because many people in my family went to Law School. But, after a year in a prep course, at the last minute, I decided to go for Psychology. Everyone was a little disappointed, thought it was wasted potential: “Why would you wanna be a psychologist? You are a lawyer!”. That status thing and all.

<sup>1</sup> Prison unit located in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, capital of the state of Minas Gerais.



I went to the university. I questioned the clinical perspective of Psychology for me – of being with a person inside an office, discussing life issues. As significant as it was, I wanted to think about how people got to certain spaces, such as constructing policies that reached a lot of people. I've always thought a lot about context. Even the internships I did had to do with it. One was in Morro das Pedras<sup>2</sup>; another was assisting people who had social issues and not “the neurosis of the neuroses”. It was about thinking how we could change the logic, a system that produces certain types of suffering. I think this is somewhat the reason for this journey, this large restlessness. The course itself, served me little; so, I got an internship, a scientific initiation, several extension projects, to try and understand how Psychology could help me beyond what was being presented to me, beyond Freud, Skinner, and Lacan. And it was quite good, I think it made a big difference, a training that went a little beyond the curriculum.

I was the first of my family to attend a public university and I was so lucky. At the time, it had to be a public university. FIES<sup>3</sup> didn't exist; the private university was not accessible to me. I joined UFMG in 1999 and there were no quotas yet. In fact, I took part in that debate at UFMG, the first real talks on the subject. In my classroom, there were four black students, and there was no racial debate throughout my course, quite different from what it is today: the university did not have this debate; psychology was basically clinical.

In this context of the university, everything was very unequal. My class had a lot of people with a lot of money, a lot of money. I remember that, in the first semester, some students in my class were outraged by the FAFICH bathroom: “I should go to a private university, because this one is disgusting”. And I thought even the stink of the university was great! It was a very intriguing thing to live that reality. Sometimes, when going to a party at a colleague's house, the person's apartment was an entire floor in Mangabeiras<sup>4</sup>. I used to say: “Guys, where are these people from?”. But, on the other hand, it was also particularly good to put myself in that context.

The university was a watershed in my life. Of course, I was sometimes bothered by some of the precariousness, but being in a public college was the most phenomenal thing in the world. I didn't want any luxury! I was a scholarship holder; was considered “level two needs” - that's awful, isn't it? But I had all the benefits at the economy restaurant and received a living allowance.

<sup>2</sup> Belo Horizonte slum with high levels of social vulnerability.

<sup>3</sup> Student Financing Fund. Federal government fund to finance private university access for lower-income students.

<sup>4</sup> High-income neighborhood in the city of Belo Horizonte.

### *In a whitened environment*

Even during university, I mainly coexisted with white people. I lived with a classmate who was white. I reproduced all that logic, without knowing that it had to do with several issues regarding miscegenation and internalized racism. The perspective was that I was a woman in university, that my peers were men who were also in higher education and were predominantly white. I was in a very, very white environment. But I also didn't see black men the way I do today. I currently live with my partner, who is black. And it has to do with me learning more and growing.

The university improved a lot, but I did not attribute anything that I went through to the intersection of race, as I am now aware of it. I went to therapy for years. All my self-confidence, which I had until I was seven, was lost in adolescence, especially in early adulthood. I was very insecure about my appearance. “Being a good student” became a problem in adolescence: I was no longer a smart student; I was a nerd. It was the ugly student who got good grades. This severely damaged my self-esteem. I didn't know how to get dressed; I didn't have an appreciation for black beauty.

The hair was a problem; so, I straightened it. Body shape was a problem. Everything was a problem. And I remained, longing to be chosen by someone. Not me choosing, not me actively participating. After a lot of therapy, even with many therapists engaged in social issues, until I was 28, I had never given importance to race in my life. Several questions that I felt that I lived through, could be pointed out as effects of racism. I thought it was my personality, my low self-esteem.

I had a friend at university, Cristiano Rodrigues, who said he wanted to be a PhD. I didn't understand what it was like to be a PhD. When I started university, I didn't know that there were masters and doctorates. My goal was to graduate quickly and start working, because I was always very aware that what I had was already a lot, in terms of power. I only started working after graduating, and that in the world I lived in was a privilege. I couldn't say: “I'm leaving, graduating, getting a master's degree”. And Cris impressed me, because he was the first black person that I heard in my life saying he wanted to be a PhD.

When I went to take a postgraduate course at the João Pinheiro Foundation, in Public Security and Criminal Justice, with all those police officers, it was particularly good. And professor Eduardo Batittuci was really important, because he was my advisor and the first person who said to me: “I think you should get a master's degree”. And I said: “But how? What is it? What for?”. But I'm really focused on teaching, I want to teach, so I decided I was going to get a master's degree. After this degree, I went back and took a class with Professor Sandra Azeredo. But I wanted another

framework, I didn't want a course with Foucault alone; I wanted black women to be my theoretical reference.

### 3. Professional trajectory

I graduated and remained for a while not knowing where I was going to work, what I was going to do. I tried to have a practice for a while, but I didn't adapt. There was a selection process at Instituto Elo<sup>5</sup>, to work with a policy aimed at people who had left the prison system. Nobody was happier during a selection process! I loved it; I was in love with jails – such a crazy thing! I went through the selection process, but I didn't get in at first.

It took me a long time to get a job, but after I did, I earned three promotions in three years. I was with crime prevention policy for the state government at the end of 2005. I went to work with the former prisoners in Ribeirão das Neves. My mother was desperate: “My daughter is hopeless! She got a Psychology degree and then goes to work with prisoners!”. But I was always insisted, that was what I really wanted. Since it was a really important accomplishment, I dedicated myself far beyond what was required. I was a passionate technician: I went, I knew the jail, I read a lot... I was always like that, eager to nail down the problem and solve it at the source. In a short time, I became a reference as a technician.

Then I moved to the Prevention Center<sup>6</sup>, became the supervisor for the program – all very quickly, in three years. But I was very uneasy about not having experience within the prison system. For me, it wasn't good enough to be on the outside, trying to get an inmate an ID for when they were released; I wanted to help from the inside. So, how could I?

It was at that moment that I took the postgraduate course at the João Pinheiro Foundation. When I finished, in 2008, I applied for a job at the Estêvão Pinto Women's Penitentiary Complex, for Director of Assistance and Resocialization. I was 28 years-old and I had a huge desire to work there, but I had no idea what the day-to-day of a prison unit was like. But I was so passionate about it, that people believed alongside me that it would be possible.

I remember that I started in October and the director who was there at the time was terrified: “Who sent this girl? People are going crazy”. The unit was undergoing an intervention, a change in management, the situation was really tense. One day the director called me and said: “Look, I want to give you some guidance, so you don't walk alone in the unit, because the prisoners are very

5 Non-profit civil society organization, which at the time was responsible for implementing the crime prevention policy at the state level.

6 Crime Prevention Center - operational reference unit for the execution of the prevention policy at the state level.

unhappy with the employee change. The person you replaced was beloved, so be careful”. I replied: “I will not be intimidated here, no. I came to fulfill my (pretentious) dream of transforming your unit”. Then, at the end of the year, we had a Christmas party, and I went down to the patio, alone with the inmates, and I didn't want security to come with me. The director almost freaked out. I said: “Either I stay inside with them, or there's no way. There is no way of not having respect”.

This was very important to me. I worked 14 hours a day. But time passed and I realized that it was no longer possible. First, I realized that I was in an overly complicated context, in which the reality was far beyond being able to make a good policy for those women. So, I started to become depressed, but very restless too. I got a proposal for another job; I was going to stay away from jails. I was also a little overwhelmed with something that became a universal goal in my life. And I went to do something else.

I took on managing the Human Resources of a public interest civil society organization, while simultaneously being very restless, wanting to go back to school, but also needing to further develop on the prison issue. The feeling I had was that I was too immersed in it. I wanted to leave, but I just couldn't not do something with everything I experienced. Working at Piep<sup>7</sup> was also something that gave me a sense of privilege: few people had the opportunity to be there, experiencing the daily life of a prison unit. It was something that I really wanted, and it brought me a different experience about a little-known reality.

So, I got my master's degree at UFMG, with Claudia Mayorga, a person who had been my teacher in undergrad, who I thought of as good. At the time, I had already left the Oscip and returned to the state government, working as manager of the alternative sentences policy, within the prevention policy.

### Professional growth and racism: *Becoming black*

In my professional career, I had three promotions in three years. I started as technical staff, then I became a supervisor and later, director. It was all extremely fast. And I started, in this climb, to experience many conflicts. People said that I was very angry, that I was very irritated, too much this, too much that. Basically: “You are competent, but ...” and I didn't understand what that was. So, I started reading a management book, how to avoid conflicts, those self-help things. And I still didn't understand. That was when I took over the HR position at the Oscip, after I left the Board of Estevão Pinto.

7 Name by which the Estevão Pinto Female Penitentiary Complex is known, in Belo Horizonte.

When I got the job, I took over for a white woman. When they went to give the news to her, in front of me, to give me the job, she looked at me in a way... like: "I can't believe you're the one who will replace me". I think she was offended. The way this woman looked gave me a very literal sense of this issue: that many of the conflicts and uneasiness that I experienced had to do with occupying places that I was not expected in. That people didn't want to be subordinate to me. Some said it was because I looked young, this and that. But the racial issue started to get to me.

I was feeling awful, broken, when my partner at the time, who was taking a class at UFMG, read a book by Neusa Santos Souza, *Becoming Black*. He said, "Dani, you have to read it!" I read the book in one sitting, and I felt terrible. I cried so much, so much, so much... Because I thought: how could I not have realized this ideal of whiteness? Because what was happening, was that in each position that I held, I was making an effort to straighten my hair more, to go in high heels, to dress as "almost an executive". I was trying to use these devices in order to be someone respectable. And the more I did it, the more I understood that I was becoming a caricature, an imitation of something I was not.

When I understood that, it made all the difference, but it was painful. I wanted to go back to all my therapists and ask: "Why did we never reach this point?" This completely changed my trajectory. I quit that job after a while and went back to university to take this professor's class. I went voraciously to read all the black women writers I could and that changed my perception on several things.

In fact, a critique of those who are mixed-race, like me, is: "I never had to become black. I never had the privilege of becoming black because I have always faced racism". I experienced several intersectional issues through racism. And I can say I really had to create this awareness of what it meant to be black. As much as I understood that it was an issue in my life, naming the racism that went through me, that I needed to confront, that was a late construction for me. It caused me a lot of suffering not to name these things, because I brought them into myself, doubted myself, thought that I had to overcome myself and so on.

I had a boss, I like him a lot, he is my friend today; but he made me so angry. For example, when I was director of the Inclusion Program for Former Inmates, there was a manager, lily-white, lawyer, who wore pumps, one of those girls that people think she's beautiful to be working on a social project, because she decided to work in the poor neighborhoods. People thought that she was doing enough already. I, on the other hand, worked hard to coordinate a complicated program with few resources. And, sometimes, I had these conflicts! I had these struggles, because I had the feeling that I was doing a huge content exercise, which was what I had. All the spaces I occupied, no false modesty, that was because I studied, pursued it, dedicated myself. But I saw a lot of people

being promoted with far fewer criteria and requirements. Mainly white people and not always so committed to the complexities of the work.

I wanted them to go into a jail, to smell the fetid scent of the cells; understand where people are coming from, so they wouldn't come up with simplistic solutions. For example: when someone in the program died, I stopped it: "Why did they die? Who is this person? Where did we fail?". And people said: "Oh, he died because he was involved". Of course, he was involved! Otherwise, he wouldn't have come to us. But I was talking about mine, and they were speaking of others. I was enraged at that time, then I became more strategic, mainly understanding how to pick my battles.

When I became the supervisor of the program and the possibility of becoming director came up, the superintendent told me: "Dani, I think you have all the technical skills to take on this position, but you have a very difficult temperament". Here comes that conversation that I hate about "form and content": "What you say is great, but the way you say it isn't". So, I waited five years, more or less, to come back and take over the program's director position. I needed to know how to manage my strength, otherwise I could very easily be stigmatized. Especially because, many times, I was the only black woman. When the directors, coordinators, and everyone else sat at the table, I was the only one.

### ***Devastation***

In the middle of the selection process for the master's program, between writing the project and the exams, I discovered I had breast cancer. And my partner and I were splitting up. "My God, how am I going to do this?". I found out in October, I went to talk to Cláudia, my advisor, and she said: "Don't give up; go to the interview, then we'll figure it out". I remember that I went to the doctor and had to start chemotherapy: "The only condition I have is that I want to go to the interview with hair". So, he calculated it was roughly fourteen days for the hair to start falling off.

I went to the interview and got in. At the same time, I was invited to be Director of the Program for Former Inmates (PRESP), the one I had already supervised. So, I had a cancer diagnosis, a master's approval, and the directorship of a Program that I really wanted to work for. It was a crazy time, but really interesting too. Because I was already, along with all this, full of readings by black women, transitioning my hair. So: I will make a gradual change in my life. And it came all at once. It devastated everything. I separated, moved houses, changed jobs, went to get my master's degree. And since I had no hair, I started wearing a headwrap. I like to say that I died and came back during this. And the master's degree was very much this healing process, meeting with me and the women with whom I was speaking with to write the thesis. The feeling I had was "I want to live". And live a quite different life, with other issues. It was a strengthening process. And the result, the



writing, the interviews... it was a way for me to reframe myself; to understand what my language was, what was the story I wanted to tell, what was my process. I think it was a moment to demand my authorship, a leading role in my life. "I want to have a narrative of my story, even the worst that happens to me. I want to be a narrative!". This perspective of knowing how I was going to tell my story helped me to be very respectful of the way women told their stories. I was interested in what they said, in silences – how they revealed or omitted things to me.

#### 4. Identity and ancestry

##### *Rip everything up and start again!*

What made a huge difference was being able to broaden my framework to name things in a political way and not internalize them. I always thought it was a question of either suitability or personality. Cancer was the ultimate example of this: "Sweetheart, stop trying to fit into the world. It is wrong! You will die trying and will not work. Rip everything up and start again!". It wasn't for nothing. This metaphor, to know that a good part of the cells in your body were killed and that it made new blood – that was it. Kill this ghost, exorcize it.

Along with that came religion too. While I went to the doctor, I went to the macumba. And the macumba said: "No, my daughter, that's right. It is an ancestral issue, let's review it all". I went to the doctor, and he said: "I don't believe it; the effect of chemotherapy lasts four days on people. Why is it only two for you?". I answered: "Because I went to the *terreiro* and made a macumba".

I searched for my paths and the answers. And this search for religions of African origin, for ancestry, for healing and to understand this pain were also a political response. I had cancer in my left breast, and I understood that this pain was ancestral, it came from women in my family who had problems in the womb. The reproductive system always dances when there is violence manifold.

During this time, I had many conversations with my mother, difficult conversations. When I became ill, my mother felt guilty. Because during my pre-university course, I studied there in the morning and in the afternoon, and I didn't have the money to have lunch every day on the street. So, I took things, and my mom made a lot of hamburgers for me to eat during break – and she felt enormous guilt. She thought I had cancer because I ate too much hamburger. One day she said it in a pained voice. "No, mom, it wasn't that. It's other issues!". And then we had a moment to talk about our pain, about her talking about her pain. Deep down, it had to do with the feeling that she couldn't provide everything she wanted. She tried to give me the best, but if she could, it would make it even easier for me. It was a deep moment between us, in several aspects.

My family has several stories of denying the racial issue. My grandmother was married three times and was extraordinarily strong spiritually. She belonged to Umbanda. She was in Umbanda for many years, but she also attributed all prejudices to African religions. Wanting to have a certain social ascension, she denied it. I remember, since I was very young, that in her house there was always a Preto Velho, Menina de Angola. But it became a bit of a taboo. A resource that we use, but don't talk about. A bit ambiguous really.

I was always very in tune, my grandmother always said. When I was a little girl, I used to read other people's fates, and people said I was right. So, this mystical something has always been present. But I did the whole rite of the Catholic religion: baptized, first communion, and confirmation. And in university, my restlessness included spirituality. So, I went to everything: from Ayahuasca to the Evangelical Church. Buddhism. Seicho-no-ie. I was hunting for religions, until I found it.

In 2005, I had a strong spiritual mentorship, a person who helped me a lot, and she saw to me while embodied by a spirit I stayed with her for about five years, and she was a very important figure in my life. After she died, I went to find a house, having this experience in the umbanda houses, until I found the house of Pai Ricardo de Moura at CCPJO<sup>8</sup>. I baptized and formally joined religion.

When I baptized, I had to spend some time wearing only white, Ojá on my head, keep the Guia on, with a Contraegum<sup>9</sup>, a lot of things. And there I go to the Legislative Assembly, where I work, all covered in stuff. It didn't get any better for me, but if it were a while ago, maybe I would have been embarrassed. Today it gives me satisfaction and pride to say: "I can be in this space. I deserve to be in this space, and I don't want to hide anything". But I also understand that it is a privilege, because if I had another occupation, if I were a bank teller, I could not do this. I can express myself in certain ways today because I occupy privileged places otherwise, I could not. And could not even go with a bead from my guias to work.

8 Pai Ricardo de Moura coordinates the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Resistance Association "Casa de Caridade Pai Jacob do Oriente" (CCPJO), which has been in operation since 1966 at the Pedreira Prado Lopes urban complex in Belo Horizonte.

9 Ojá, Guia, and Contregum: items that are part of the Candomblé baptism ritual.

## *Religion as strength, commitment to a community, to something that is beyond me*



*Daniela and her partner, Caio. Pretos Velhos Party. Belo Horizonte, 2019.*

*By: Personal Archive*

On the other hand, I also start to use it. I want to be in that space as a black woman in Umbanda. And then I realize that it is a movement quite the opposite of the one I had before, wanting to be ordinary, thinking: "What is the outfit that the HR chief wears? I'm going to buy this outfit, so I can say that I belong". Today, it is much more how I want to present myself. So, religion is an especially important resource, which has re-signified several things. It means strength, commitment to a community, to something that is beyond me.

Once we decided to go after the people who had the surname Prado, because we only have registration up to my mother's grandmother. She found out that her great-grandmother had been raised in a certain farm, so the whole family went there, in São Paulo, to understand where these people came from. We entered the local museum, where there was a reference to the Prado family. My grandmother was very satisfied and happy: "I will find out who my ancestors were, my forebearers". But there were only white people on the record. The museum guide explained: "No, ma'am, when the slaves were freed, many ended up with the surname of the farms they came from, to reference the farm. But here, you will not find their records, their names. There are only the family that owned the farm". My grandmother started to feel sick, she wanted to leave.

So, you don't know where it came from, because how it came is the erasure of a story. For this reason, religion is also something, in this sense, beyond a faith. It's something that connects me with a dimension of what I don't know, but I'm sure it's mine.

## **5. Feminism and black feminism**

I struggled to call myself a feminist.

At university, I read classic feminists, because I had an internship at the Women's Police Station, working with violence against women, for a year. So, we used this feminist framework a lot, which broached the theme of violence against women. But I didn't identify with them at all. "What are these women talking about?". This theory of the sexual division of the labor market, I did not know how to make the counterpoint, but I did not identify with it. So, I don't think I'm a feminist in general, no. What they are bringing, theorizing about violence, did not help me at all when I entered the room to meet women who were being beaten, in overly complicated situations. I even had a certain dislike. I remember a teacher, Karin Ellen Von Smigay, one of the great references in feminism even outside of Brazil; I had many discussions with her in the classroom, because it didn't make much sense to me.

I started identifying myself initially with literature. When I read Conceição Evaristo, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison ... I remember when I read *The Bluest Eye*, I said: "people, she is like me!". I started reading women that spoke of a complexity, of the intersectionality between gender and race, and the relationship with black men as well. It's like I was discovering my community. Then I found bell hooks, it feels like I am a friend of bell hooks! And she writes in an unacademic way and is very criticized for speaking about her experience all the time. But when she speaks, I think: "that's it!". The concept of being not submissive is so interesting, it gave me several resources that then made me come closer to a feminism, Black feminism. But I also don't think Black feminism is universal. There must be Black feminism and everything else!

This has to do with the issue of collectives. My journey has always been very lonely, and when I looked at myself, I tried to join groups. But it is exceedingly difficult for me to stay. I began to realize that my official participation in some collectives forced me into commitments that I was not willing take on. A certain obligation to be a certain way, to fight about certain things, or to make blind defenses of things that I didn't want to do. For example, we cannot accuse the men in our collective who are being sexist, "because the police already criminalize these men, the world already criminalizes these men, so we Black women cannot criminalize". But the guys are riding the wave of doing what they want when they want it! No, I don't buy it. So, there is the use that is

made of these militancy spaces, and the call for group cohesion, which often does not allow you to battle what you need to.

Another example: black candidacies. I want to support candidacies, especially for black women, but it cannot be a natural, automatic assumption. Sometimes, you don't identify with the stances or proposals.

### ***Co-opted by a white woman?***

Today I advise a deputy who is not black, but I managed to establish a good working relationship with her. On the other hand, I do not always get that with a black woman, whom I want to support, to consider what I am suggesting or speaking, relevant. I consider this unhelpful when we could be even stronger.

Today, in the Legislative, I am happy with the possibility of having doors opened, having met several women from different places and collectives, having broadened my perspective of feminism a little. To participate in the humanized childbirth movement, and at the same time, to be discussing the occupation of women, women in mining. Different agendas, different views, places – it is one of the richest things in parliamentary advisory work.

I came from a logic of the Executive Branch, where I specialized a lot in one topic. And in parliamentary work, I understood that there are several feminisms, different ways of thinking. That the women organized in Santa Maria do Suaçuí, from a local issue, related to the hospital, created a collective of women to run for office; and now they have a candidate for city councilor in an extremely men-dominated city. They have scholarly background, knowledge of what is white feminism, Black feminism; they are unaware of elaborate concepts and the violences described in the Maria da Penha Law. But these women are fighting a real life battle which is extremely important! And we need to acknowledge that. Because often, we are very arrogant; centralized and in a place where we feel entitled to name people's experiences for them and qualify them.

I had never seen Marília Campos before; she didn't know me either. I was looking for something different, I had just finished my master's degree, so I went to speak with her. It was a very honest conversation: "I never worked in the Legislature, but this is my proposal. If you want, I want to learn, I want to change my field".

At first, it was awful. I was unknown in the political-party context and many people did not understand why Marília had chosen me. I was an outsider. I have a lot of respect for Marília in this regard, because I did not arrive with the force of my last name, with protection, but because of the recommendation of a colleague who knew my work. It was a particularly good opportunity, to

participate in the most organized movements, but not to be in any at the same time. Going through them did me a lot of good, even though I was representing a mandate. I am an advisor to Marília, but people recognize me by my name. It's Daniela Tiffany. I managed to move through different groups, both in the black movement and in the women's movement. And beyond them too.

### ***The meaning of the job is to serve and to make a difference in people's lives***

I don't think I've done anything in my life yet. I have a feeling that I'm in training. I have this great internal demand to do more. For example, where I am today is a place that I like, I learn, but it is not my space of protagonism. I am not in that space of power. I am satisfied with the things I have done, the ability to contribute and influence, but I long for what I can still do. I want to learn more and use all my experience to do something that I can't even imagine. I want to be ready for something that will make a difference in the lives of people, anonymous people. When I was younger, I thought they would be big things. Not today, maybe they are smaller, but I have the feeling that it has impacted someone's life. In public administration even, because I wanted to do something, at some point, that made my work bigger than myself. This is the impact of what it is to serve, of public service.

At some point, being a reference – this is a vanity that I have. But if somewhere, someone says: "Here a work was done that helped someone and such", and no one even knows that I was the one who did it; but if the work is there, I will be content.

## ***6. Black woman: Resistance and immortality***

The discovery of racism is very painful. When I said that the name of this is racism, it was such a deep pain that it seemed like I would not stop hurting. My whole body ached. This damned, unnamed pain is a pain that cuts through you, leaves you powerless. You try to communicate it and you can't say what it is. While it was the most difficult thing, it also gave me a feeling of great strength, as if I had gone through an electrical charge: if I can survive this, I can survive a lot. It is such a strong pain that it makes you less afraid of pain. And it gives you a feeling that you must move on. You have no choice.

"What do you have to do from now on?". I think of my daughter. And that I will not be able to spare her some pain. So, how to tell her that it will hurt? And how to give her these resources?

So, I see the women in my *terreiro*, for example. You talk to them, and they are bleeding, they have lost someone, life is difficult. But can something be done? Then, let's do it. And do it well, for others. So, a strong point of black women is to understand that what doesn't kill you, what doesn't



destroy you, strengthens you. It is not with all black women, it is not a universal thing, but it is the spirit, it is beyond us. My mother tells me something truly beautiful: "Come on, my daughter, it hurts, but get up, you will do it. I don't even want to know; it will work out".

Despite being cautious in what is practical in life, my mother is tough, she was never much for coddling. But it was interesting when she found out I was pregnant. One day he turned to me and said: "Being a grandmother is the best thing that exists. Because when you are a mother, you are afraid. And when you are a grandmother, you have the feeling that you are immortal". That we make immortal! She is talking about this thing, this sense of ancestry due to her granddaughter's arrival.

If my daughter experiences a less oppressive world; with more chance than I had to make choices; to have access to certain things that I'm sorry I didn't find out earlier.. If Joana has broader horizons, my grandmother's struggle was worth it, my mother's struggle was worth it. So, the perspective is that it does not end with me; that what I'm doing for another will only be reaped two generations from now. I think this is a strength of black women.

I am able to take aspects that could have been elements of great defeat in my life, of great weakness and say: "No! I will do something with it, and it will bear some fruit". I learned this from the women at home, watching the life story of my mother and grandmother. They are women who could have folded long before but continued. It is up to me to go further..



*Lecture on women and power. Barbacena, 2018. (Personal Archive).*

*By: Personal Archive*

# 6

## PATRÍCIA MARIA DE SOUZA SANTANA

Patrícia Maria de Souza Santana

Mônica de Cássia Costa Silva

Marina Alves Amorim

### 1. Family and personal history

#### Parents and siblings

I was born in Belo Horizonte, on December 17, 1964. It was at Hospital São Francisco, in the Concórdia neighborhood, where I lived for part of my life. My mother says it rained a lot on the day I was born, there was no electricity, and Atlético (soccer team) was playing. There wasn't a doctor there, a midwife delivered me – they still had this practice of having a midwife in the hospital. My parents are still alive today, thank God. My mother was born in 1938. Her father was a migrant from the Northeast, who came from the countryside of Pernambuco on a pau-de-arara<sup>1</sup>. Back then, during the

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<sup>1</sup> Typical in the Northeast, these are trucks that carry people standing up, in the back. The name references how people look like macaws in a cage.

great droughts of the Northeast, families would give their children to other families, in an attempt to ensure their survival. My grandfather didn't accept that and ended up running away, as a very young man. He traveled through several places until he arrived here in Minas Gerais. First, he arrived in Nova Lima and went to work at the Morro Velho Mine. Then he came to Belo Horizonte. He worked as a jailer and the inmates taught him how to read. Then he joined the Firefighters Corp and stayed there until he retired. My mother spent little time with my grandmother, who died when she was 7 years old.

My mother, now retired, attended school until the fourth year of Elementary School. She was a housewife, had four children. For a long time, to supplement the income, she washed other people's clothes and cleaned houses. After a while, my mother saw that we couldn't survive like this and decided to get a job. At that time, it was taboo. My father didn't like it, he even said that it was humiliating. But she faced him and went to work. From that moment on, something changed in our lives. Not that she made a lot of money, but it created a different mindset. My mother really encouraged us to not depend on anyone. She would say: "Don't depend on anyone, much less on men to survive, to buy shampoo, a tampon. Study, apply for civil servant jobs". Her presence, in this sense, is very strong, for me and my brothers as well. My mother has her own way of living: she doesn't like to read much, but she has this great wisdom about life which she has been building. She used to say she wanted to be a singer when we were children, and we would rehearse for theater and sing her childhood songs.

My father was born in 1937. He was orphaned at a very early age, when he was just two years old. At the age of 11, he was already a worker and helped my grandmother support the house. He worked as a locksmith and retired very late, over 70 years old. My father also only studied until the fourth year of Elementary School, but he loved to read. He read books and newspapers every day, including Sundays. At that time, there was the newspaper *Diário da Tarde* and, on weekends, the *Estado de Minas* one, which we would read together. He is one of the people who encouraged my reading habit. He said something that I will never forget that if he had the chance, he would've studied Geography. To this day, he reads a lot and has a ton of knowledge about the world, and a political view he has built for himself.

We are four siblings: three women and one man. And two more sisters outside my parents' marriage. I'm the third daughter. After me, there's our little brother.

My eldest sister has a degree in Languages. She was responsible for several things in our life because she was the first to start working, in a public position. She was a typist, she was approved in a public exam and worked at the now no longer existent Regional Police Station of the Ministry of Education and contributed a lot financially to the household expenses. Life was very difficult.

We didn't go hungry, but we were a very poor family. She introduced cultural things into our lives, like theater and concerts.

My other sister, we say she is the smartest in the house, because she is a professor at PUC<sup>2</sup>. She is very dedicated to her studies, she studied at CEFET<sup>3</sup>, a school that was built to serve the children of factory workers, but the admission process became so difficult that people had to pay for preparatory courses. My grandmother paid for this course for her, and it was a huge victory for our family when she got in.

My brother had a different school career. He was an intelligent boy, but he played too much and, for reasons we didn't then understand, he took a long time to finish elementary school. He started working very early as an office boy and got married very early as well. Later, he went to college, majored in Geography and is currently a public-school teacher.

My father had a relationship with a woman from Montes Claros and had two daughters. She died when the girls were small. My mother kept the youngest, who was 5 years-old back then. My paternal grandmother kept the oldest, aged 8. It was a difficult time, because they didn't adapt, they didn't study. The youngest disappeared for a while and only recently reappeared.

## Husband and children

I'm married and I met my husband at a meeting of the Black Awareness Movement, a somewhat unusual story. He was a Franciscan friar and was part of the group of black pastoral agents. He was still at the convent when we started dating. Because of an internal political divergence, he and the other novices left the convent. After a couple of years of dating, we decided to live together. I was 24 and he was 27. Our civil and religious wedding happened. He is a teacher and a black man. He studied Philosophy and History at PUC and teaches in public schools. We had two children: a boy and a girl.

My son Victor was born in 1992. He lives in Franca, São Paulo. When he was finishing High School and trade school, he said he didn't want to go on with that and went to medical school. He was approved in 2015 at a municipal university in São Paulo - Uni Facef. He was going to graduate this year, 2020, but with the pandemic he'll only graduate next year. He is one of the few black students in his class. Four started and only three remain, in a class of many students. He's following his dream, persisting, and next year, I'm going to have a son who is a doctor. Victor isn't much of a militant. His involvement outside the university has to do with being a spiritist. He has always

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Catholic University.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Center for Technological Education of Minas Gerais.



participated in the activities of the Spiritist House, the choir, the youth group, and, even in Franca, he continues to follow his religion. He has a very grand social view; he knows the importance and the meaning of being a future black doctor.

My daughter Maíra was born in 1999. Always very smart, intelligent, curious about things. She also got the major she wanted. She always liked the international area and did International Relations at UFMG<sup>4</sup>. But in the third semester, she found that it wasn't what she wanted. So, she studied for another entrance exam. Today, she is studying Graphic Design at UEMG<sup>5</sup>. She was a militant in the students' movement, she's in the feminist black movement. Currently, Maíra is doing a different kind of militancy, not so engaged, in a specific group.

### **Constructing identity from the territory: Concórdia neighborhood**

My parents are from Concórdia, a working-class neighborhood with a strong presence of black culture. It's basically the story of my paternal grandmother, born in 1912, who left the Barroquinha favela, in Barroca, around Contorno Avenue. During Belo Horizonte's construction processes, slums were not allowed to exist around Contorno Avenue. So, when she was a young girl, my grandmother was transferred to Concórdia with her family. At that time, it was considered a far, distant place, but today it's very close to downtown. She told me those were rough times. Everything was difficult, people had to walk long distances to get to work. But it was there that they stayed, built, and organized themselves. My mother is also from Concórdia, but from the other side, because it's a very large region.

Since it was a black neighborhood, our presence and coexistence with the culture were very strong. We participated in Afro culture festivities, in the congado<sup>6</sup>. The guards always left in May, and we followed them from the gate, we participated, we went up the street to see. We loved to play! At the same time, we ran in fear. We followed all the celebrations in the Dona Cassimira yard, before being Dona Isabel<sup>7</sup>. It was on a street right after ours.

4 Federal University of Minas Gerais.

5 Minas Gerais State University.

6 Congado is a mixture of the parties brought by enslaved Africans with colonial Christian religiosity. Its origins go back to an African rite, in which the subjects walked in procession to the Kings Congos, in order to thank their rulers.

7 The May Thirteen Reign is one of the traditional representatives of the Reinado tradition in Belo Horizonte and Minas Gerais. Its history dates back to 1944, in Concórdia, with the founding of the Guarda de Moçambique Treze de Maio de Nossa Senhora do Rosário by Preta Véia Maria Cassimira das Dôres or Vovó Cassimira. Her daughter, Isabel Casimiro das Dores Gasparino, was Rainha Conga of Minas Gerais and vice-president of the guard. Source: < <https://santaterezetem.com.br/2018/05/11/festa-do-reinado-13-de-maio-de-n-s-do-rosario/>>.

On my street, we could count the number of white people on our fingers. The solidarity between families was especially important in our lives. In the past, people went through a lot of hardship, there was a lack of water, food, a lot, but families helped each other, there was a very large network of solidarity, a daily struggle to survive. I remember a lot of my mother, my grandmother, my godmother, who was a healer, on the Day of Saints Cosmas and Damian, she made little bags of candy to give out. It was a very strong solidarity network, which has a lot to do with the neighborhood culture as well.

In Concórdia, there is a kind of popular Catholicism, of cultivating popular saints. But on the religious side, we didn't have Afro-Brazilian influence in the neighborhood. We were all raised in the Catholic tradition. We had our first communion, then confirmation, all of that. My mother was "daughter of Mary", my father was an altar boy<sup>8</sup>. But there was prejudice. Even though we were a black family, there was that ignorance keeping us away from the religion of African origin, which would be Candomblé. We guessed that we had family members who were part of Umbanda, but it was all a big secret. I grew up without that influence and, as an adult, I resented not having had a lot of contact, in a neighborhood with such a strong tradition. I resent it a little, because I think a piece was missing. If I had a little of that upbringing from Candomblé, or even Umbanda itself, than what I had in the neighborhood, maybe I would feel more complete. But that didn't happen, the path was all Catholic.

### **Constructing identity based on references: influenced by family and black artists**

The development of my black identity comes dates back to my childhood. I always had a lot of encouragement at home, lots of praise for me, for my hair. My mother did hairstyles, braids, curls. My aunt, now deceased, was a big reference. A very beautiful black woman always very well dressed. My godmother listened to a lot of black music, Tim Maia, Martinho da Vila, Jorge Ben, and singers from the United States. Whenever there was a party at her house, those black women who looked like they were in the movies, with afros, with those typical 70's dresses. They influenced us, although we're not very aware of that influence. That beautiful, affirmative aesthetic and the songs remained in my memory.

As a child, we would cut and straighten our hair. We couldn't have long hair in a braid, because it was frowned upon. We'd put on smoothing products, rollers, hot iron, henê<sup>9</sup>, everything you can imagine, for the hair to be neat - and neat hair was straight hair. As a teenager, my older sister

8 Rites and activities of the Catholic Church.

9 Cosmetic product capable of coloring and straightening hair using a chemical process.



decided to stick with the curly hair. When all those chemicals came out, I remember her talking about how she liked to bathe, wash her hair, and go outdoors, feeling the wind hit it wet. Wet hair? Back then it wasn't a thing! It had to be stretched, smoothed. I also decided to stop straightening my hair. At the age 15, I started braiding it myself. At 16 years-old, it was already changing. At 17, I had managed to get all the chemicals out and get bring it back to natural. That was the first move. And, interestingly, the people who most talked about it and made fun about our curly hair were the people in our family, not our schoolmates. We arrived at my grandmother's house and the neighbors said: "Wow, aren't you going to fix up your hair anymore? Your hair was so beautiful". And I replied: "Hey, but it is fixed up!"

My sisters and I stopped straightening and went to a black beauty parlor to make get different styles. We started to like it and we no longer saw ourselves with straightened hair. A little later, I started to participate in the black movement and found a space to reaffirm everything we were already going through alone. They had the braids, the buns up and I had the chance to be like that too. In the workshops, we talked a lot about self-esteem and the importance of being who you are.

In the early 1980s, campaigns for the demographic census began. In it, the black population didn't show up, because they didn't declare themselves. We did a campaign, the National Movement: "Declare your color, don't hide your race for the IBGE census". And the process started for people to assert themselves as black or brown - it took years for this self-declaration to begin.

Clara Nunes had a fundamental role in my life and in the construction of my black identity, especially when she returned from Africa, all aesthetically different. She let her hair go frizzy and started singing songs and making more references to religions of African origin. Zézé Motta was also an inspiration when she was in that soap opera as Marcos Paulo's romantic partner, and there was so much rejection. We would hear on the bus "how can Marcos Paulo kiss that monkey?". We didn't interfere, but we felt that weight and the indignation. There was Sandra de Sá, who was classified in a festival with songs that spoke about racial issues. We started to see how beautiful those women were. We started to be inspired by people from within the militancy, who were leaders, artists. They were references in terms of aesthetics and we started to dress and style ourselves in a different way. More colorful, with African fabrics, earrings, and necklaces - which I always liked a lot. Aesthetics is also political. I was not aware of aesthetics as political, but it was about presenting oneself, with pride, without shame. It was a political movement. Someone who contributed a lot in the beginning was my own sister and the black movement itself. My older sister started to live with some colleagues who had this racial debate going. The movies, the books. The school contributed nothing, very little, had little participation in this process.

## 2. School trajectory

My parents always encouraged us to study. They said that they couldn't give us anything, but that they would ensure that we'd continue studying. My father bought school supplies and God knows how he paid for them. At that time, in the early 1970s, I had to buy everything: books and notebooks. There were no programs distributing school supplies, as there are today. My mother enrolled us in kindergarten, in a small school in the neighborhood that operated within a Methodist church. There was a kind of patio, two small rooms, some toys. They paid a monthly fee, but it was next to nothing. The teacher lived in the neighborhood, she was very caring and attentive. There was no concern with literacy like today, when children are taught to read very early. It was socializing, playing, drawing, all very nice.

As I was very independent, I went to school alone. Class started at 1:05 P.M and at 12 P.M I was already at the school door. My mother didn't interfere and say: "It's too early for you to go". I thought I had to leave home early because I didn't like being late. You can get an idea of how much I liked to study.

In the early years of Elementary School, I studied at the Benjamin Guimarães State School, which also was also in the neighborhood. It was a little further, but I also went alone and arrived early. I loved to study, I never skipped it. I don't remember starting to miss it until the third grade, because I would go to school even when I was sick. I learned to read early on, I was one of the first in the class to learn, I liked to read stories. I wrote an essay for a competition by the Education



*First year at the Concordia neighborhood school.*

*By: Personal Archive*

Secretariat that was published in a magazine. We didn't have access to the magazine, but I never forgot that fact. I loved my first-grade teacher. She was a white teacher, who welcomed all the children at the classroom door with a kiss and a hug. But, in the fourth grade, I had a teacher which I didn't like, there was a lot of conflict with her. Not externalized, because at that time I didn't open my mouth, I was very quiet, silent, I was afraid of drawing attention, but I thought she was angry, very mean, cursing the children and tugging their ears.

In 1976, at the age of 11, I went to the Olegário Maciel State School, in the city center. My mom asked my older sister to take me one day. She took me, but she didn't pick me up and said, "You walked the path and now you're going to come back alone." I think that was the way my mother found for us to grow independently. I remember that I was a little lost, I took a long time to get home.

It was during the military dictatorship, so the school was run by the military. But it was a good experience. I remember teacher Isabel, in Industrial Practices, who was very attentive. Students used to be invisible in the classroom, especially black students. It was practically impossible to have any closer interaction with a teacher, but this teacher, Isabel, had a very affectionate relationship with me. I also remember another teacher who I had a great admiration for, the Portuguese teacher, who was black and married to a school interventionist<sup>10</sup>. She is responsible for my love for reading, she encouraged me to read.

When I turned 13, I was mistakenly transferred to the school's night shift. I wasn't supposed to go to school at night school at the age of 13, it was supposed to be in the morning. I arrived at school and didn't see my name on the morning shift list. My mom went to the school, but they didn't give her much of an explanation. Then, I found out that my name was on the night shift. Class ended at 11 P.M. A 13-year-old girl walking in the grittier areas of downtown<sup>11</sup> was dangerous, but I kept going. My mother worked, my brother was very small, and I decided to stay at night to help take care of him and do chores at home, even though I was very young.

Students in the night shift were the ones who had repeatedly been held back, which was not my case. I coexisted with older students, with another culture, all completely different from what was common in the daytime. Most of them smoked, skipped class and I was that same quiet, silent girl. I ended up standing out in the classroom, because the students didn't care, and I always liked to study. I got the best grades and did everything. I became the reference. I think that, because of that, I didn't suffer so much from the racial discrimination of my colleagues during that period.

10 An interventionist was appointed by the military dictatorship and had full powers over the teaching institution.

11 Known as Baixo Centro.

They respected me, because I was quiet, shy, got good grades and, whenever they needed it, I was there to help.

We were only a few black students, even at night. Despite having a few more black students, most were white. Education was still far from democratic and not everybody had access to public education. You had to take a selection test to be admitted, so most of the students accepted were not black. I had a couple of black teachers at that school. In Elementary School as a whole, there were four black teachers. And to this day I remember them all, because they end up being a reference for me.

In high school, I took the admission test at Estadual Central State School and the Institute of Education, thinking of training to be a teacher. I passed at Estadual Central and went back to the day shift. It was an extraordinarily rich and cool experience, because Estadual Central was the so called "school of freedom". A different culture circulated there, a more politically engaged, despite the dictatorship. There was culture, there was an auditorium, they brought in plays, concerts, lectures, a very rich library, classmates from different places, because people from the countryside came to study in Belo Horizonte. Everything was quite different.

In High School, the bottleneck of black students got worse. To give you an idea, in the first year there were a maximum of six black students. In the second, about there were about three. And in the third, three as well. Today, we reflect on black youth and how it's a reflection from back then. They started to work very early and didn't reach High School. The racism that existed there, expelling black students, interrupting their schooling.

This phase was rich, of strengthening, of wanting to get into college. When I was in my third year, there was the possibility of taking a vocational test. There were several meetings with psychology interns, until a profile my academic profile was finally built. And for me it pretty much reflected Humanities: Social Work, Languages, Law, and History.

I decided to major in History. I took the entrance exam and passed at UFMG. I studied in the old FAFICH building<sup>12</sup>, in the Santo Antônio neighborhood. It was a whole another world that opened up, another completely different reality, other minds, experiences, other things. At that time, I already lived in the São Gabriel neighborhood. My family had already moved there when I was eight, but I stayed with my grandmother in the Concórdia neighborhood until I was 11, when I moved to São Gabriel, a neighborhood that is difficult to access; and I was already in college, at night, which was very tough and difficult. I had to work during the day to pay to afford to pay for photocopies and bus fare.

12 Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences.

Attending university was a game changer for me, because of all that it provided and the fact that I took advantage of everything: debates, courses, and I was a Sociology tutor for 1st year students, a good academic opportunity. Then, I got involved in an adult education project at the Faculty of Engineering, with scholarships too, all to supplement my income. Although several classmates said they wanted to do research, I had everything very clear to me. I wanted to get a teaching license, be a Public-School teacher. This was the way to make a contribution and to have stronger social engagement. I identified a lot with the area of pedagogy, education, I participated with great vigor, I liked everything.

### 3. Political engagement and militancy

My political engagement began in 1981, at Estadual Central. I was already involved with pastorals within the Catholic Church, which had a different way of acting. It was the time of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, of the Theology of Liberation. I was inclined towards this more politicized version of pastoral care; I was part of the Youth Pastoral and later the University Pastoral. Groups of young people had this coexistence character to them. And as I discovered that, through these groups, I could be part of more political movements, I set the religious issue aside and moved closer to political issues. I owe much of my political training to these church groups. When I was 16, I took a course on unemployment with Eduardo Suplicy<sup>13</sup>, at the São José Church. I went to the discussions on Politics and Church, Faith and Politics, a movement that still exists today, in which all political trends in Brazil were discussed and the importance of linking the church with politics. I participated in seminars, courses, and started doing reading on politics.

I joined university in 1984; in 1987, I started engaging with the black movement. I was part of the Center for Historical Studies, a kind of Academic Directory. The centenary of abolition was a year away and we started talking about what we could do to organize for the celebrations. We did, together with a professor of Anthropology, a seminar called “The Black Person in History, Racism, and Teaching”. This teacher helped us invite people who were references in Brazil. So, I started going to the Grupo de União e Consciência Negra (GRUCON)<sup>14</sup>. I went to invite them to the seminar, and I never left again, and that is where I started my activism in the black movement.

It was fundamental in my life, I started to have another view of History, of myself, of the importance of this discussion. Another engagement portal opened. It was there that I had contact

13 Brazilian politician, co-founding member of the Workers’ Party (PT); economist and university professor. Previously a senator, he is currently a city councilor in the São Paulo Municipal Chamber.

14 Black Union and Awareness Group.

with several leaders who are references for me and are my friends up to this day. I was 22 years old, I was a history student, and it was very important.

I was part of some organizations in the black movement. As a teacher, I started a very strong engagement in education for race relations. In the 90s, we started a group of black educators and the establishment of the Black Culture Reference Center, an organization that no longer exists. Parallel to this, I was part of the N’zinga Collective of Black Women, which is over 30 years old. It still exists today, but I ended up leaving it after a while. And today, I’m part of the Black Women Network of Minas Gerais, which is a movement that has been here, since 2015, with the National March of Black Women. In 2018, there was a re-articulation of this network here in Minas Gerais, starting in Belo Horizonte, with several gatherings and meetings, and in September we were able to hold the State Meeting of Black Women of Minas Gerais. In the year of 2020, with the pandemic, the network meets more virtually. It’s a network that integrates other black women’s organizations in the state.

Within the university, I’m part of the Affirmative Action Programs at UFMG. My academic trajectory, including my master’s and PhD, was made at UFMG, at the Faculty of Education, where the Affirmative Action Programs are located. It isn’t an organization of the black movement, but it’s a very strong and powerful organization within the university.

### 4. Professional trajectory

In 1986, I went through a federal public exam and started working at the now-extinct Inamps<sup>15</sup>. It was a low-paid position, but I had health insurance, childcare assistance, benefits that made me stay there for 10 years. I worked 6 hours at Inamps and started teaching at night, in 1989, the year after my graduation. It was a municipal school in Betim. It was very difficult, because it was far away, at night, it took me a long time to get home. I did try to get my bachelor’s degree as soon as I got my teaching degree, but I couldn’t make it all work out, because I was already married, teaching, and working.

It was a first experience in that sense, because I had already worked for three years with adult education and it was very different. I taught teenagers who had had a very difficult school background. I felt an impact. But I created a framework to be a teacher for teenagers, which isn’t easy to do without help. I was trying. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t. I think there should be another way of welcoming teachers who are at the beginning of their careers.

15 Social Security National Institute of Medical Assistance (INAMPS).



In 1990, I joined the Belo Horizonte City Hall. I applied to a public exam as soon as I graduated from college and was called up. I started at one at the Municipal School located in the Céu Azul neighborhood. This was also at night, and the process of the first direct election for the school board was taking place. That was when I managed to strongly engage with one of the people who was going to apply. She had a very cool project for the school. I started to engage politically with public education. There were many discussions about pedagogical projects and policies. But it was not an easy phase, because when we're in the beginning, we teach the subjects which nobody else wanted at school. At that time, there still existed subjects such as Moral and Civics and OSPB (Social Organization and Brazilian Politics)<sup>16</sup>. And I was teacher of Moral and Civics, OSPB, and History at the Elementary and High School levels, including teacher training. It was too complex for a teacher who was beginning. I was 25, you know?

But I learned, talked a lot with the students themselves, sometimes they sat and talked amongst themselves, and criticized me, saying things such as: "Look, you have to improve this and change that". I suffered a lot, I even thought about giving up, but I moved on and managed to do some important things.



When my son was born, in 1992, I had to leave this school and go to another one during the day, also in the Venda Nova region. There I was able to do my job more effectively, perhaps because it was one of the best professional experiences as a teacher that I had in my life. I realized there was a group of students from 5th to 8th grade who were more active. We maintain a bond up to this day; it was an especially important experience. [Now] they're already in their late thirties. At this school, I was a History teacher and managed to work a little on the issues of racism, black awareness, and all of these discussions. I worked with the coordination of the Geography and History fields, which was a very good experience as well.

*Workshop on race relations. Belo Horizonte, 2005.*

*By: Personal Archive*

<sup>16</sup> Moral and Civics and OSPB were used as propaganda and indoctrination tools by the military dictatorship, replacing Philosophy and Sociology in the curriculum for basic education (Decree-Law 869/68).

I decided to apply for the school board, along with another colleague, a black woman teacher. It was a very tough process, we suffered racism and all forms of prejudice and discrimination. This colleague, who ran for office with me, even the fact that she had five children was brought up in the debates: "How would a mother of five manage to be the head of a school?" We lost and it was a very traumatic process, but it taught me many things.

On the winning ticket, the new director who was going to take over ended up giving up. They needed to restructure and appoint someone to take over as vice-principal. And I was nominated. I already had a proposal to have a school more focused on social issues, on the conditions of the students, which were very rough, the attempt to implement some institutional projects to discuss black identity and racism.

After two years as vice-principal, I ran for principal, was elected and stayed for two more years. Between being a vice-principal and principal, I spend four years managing that school. A public school, with little financial resources. It was a difficult time, but we managed to achieve very important projects. We welcomed students more, we thought about inclusion, democratizing the possibilities of participation. For example, at that time, even for field trips, we had to pay for those students who had no financial means. Today, that has changed. But back then, we had to find a way. The administration had this characteristic, this goal to reach as many students as possible, to try not to exclude anyone.

In 2001, when I went to get my Master's, I asked to resign one of my job positions and, in the other, I went to work at the Belo Horizonte Municipal Education Secretariat. It was a project to train teachers who worked in daycare centers, to ensure that they had certification in Early Childhood Education. I stayed for three years and then, at the invitation of the Secretariat team, I went to coordinate the Center for Ethnic-Racial and Gender Relations. That was in 2004, a year after Law 10.639 / 2003<sup>17</sup> had been promulgated by the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

There was a national movement to put this law into effect. I spent four years in the coordination of the Center. It had a wide scope, many jobs, many actions and, mainly, a lot of investment in the training of teachers in the theme; assuring the distribution of pedagogical material in schools; organization of discussion and training spaces, both for students and teachers; attempt to make permanent the discussion and the racial theme within the pedagogical policy of the Education Secretariat; to confront institutional racism itself present there, in that space; broader discussions with the black population and city movements.

<sup>17</sup> This law makes teaching Afro-Brazilian History and Culture in Basic Education mandatory.

Right after this experience in the Education Secretariat, at the end of 2007, I received an invitation from Regional North<sup>18</sup> to take over, together with another colleague, the head of the Florestan Fernandes Municipal School. The school had undergone an intervention process and the board was removed. I was in charge of this school for four years. It was also not easy; it was a place marked by management problems. There was a group of very unstable teachers who didn't stay at the school. Most of the students were black, with families headed by women, the majority benefiting from the Bolsa-Família<sup>19</sup> and the environment was strongly marked by violence. It was complex. There were many confrontations and several challenges. During this administration, we implemented, starting in 2008, an institutional project on the ethnic-racial issue and promotion of racial equality. This project received national recognition and received several awards.

After that experience ended, I didn't want to run for the job again. I went back to the classroom and I'm still there today. I retired from one position and I'm currently a Coordinator of the Integrated School Program, which started in 2018 and will end this year in 2020. I returned to the classroom between 2012 and 2017. This is my career at Belo Horizonte City Hall.

### **Confronting prejudice, racism, and sexism in the professional environment**

In my professional career, the first contact was with sexism. I started teaching at a relatively young age. And when I started teaching at night, my students were very close to my age. I had to learn how to deal with the whole harassment issue. Racism, I dealt with when I started teaching at the second municipal school in Venda Nova. Because I made a lot of suggestions and did everything to carry out some projects, I noticed an atmosphere that had to do with my insistence on conducting projects on racial issues. But nothing too explicit, something we read between the lines. Which I consider to be a particular feature of our racism. But when I went to the Education Secretariat with a proposal to think about a project to implement Law 10.639/2003, then I felt racism more strongly and present. Which isn't just about people, but about the institution itself. Because institutional racism is installed, boycotts of the activities we held were frequent.

One of the first wider actions, open, focused on the cities, with school teachers, was the First Exhibition of Afro-Brazilian Literature, in 2004. This exhibition was built by many, and we managed to organize a beautiful program, bringing together teachers and students. We invited writers from all over Brazil, illustrators, with debates, lectures, films, workshops, and everything

18 Sub-administration level of Belo Horizonte.

19 Cash transfer program created by the Lula administration that requires, among other things, that families who receive the benefit send their children to school regularly.

you could imagine. But I noticed, in the days that followed, an exceptionally large discrepancy in the number of participants. When we met to conduct the evaluation, we found that there was a boycott in the advertising by people and teams that were responsible for publicity, for encouraging schools to participate. We started to notice that people left advertising to the last minute, and many of the people who should be there, present, weren't there. We understood that the work was going to be much bigger than what we were doing.

At this point, we started to delve deeper into institutional racism. We started training managers within the Education Secretariat, focusing on racial issues. We made a plan, a well-organized training, to raise awareness among the managers who were in the Education Secretariat, in the nine regionals that were in charge of the pedagogical boards of education, teams of trainers who were in the teacher training centers. We set up a plan to train, raise awareness with content, with theory and with practical possibilities to be able to face racism. We signed an agreement with the Secretariat to carry out the training in a course format, with a whole proposal to confront institutional racism. We continued, but we faced many situations in which racism was revealed in a veiled way.

Another situation was in relation to a project that I developed, because at that time there were a lot of resources coming from MEC, FNDE<sup>20</sup>, destined to the Secretariats to promote more consistent courses, with a higher workload. I developed a training project for teachers and librarians in the municipal network, a training with a workload of more than 120 hours. Everything was fine, it went through all the procedures. At MEC, it was practically approved and a person responsible for the project called me insistently saying: "look, you're having problems with the budget, you have to ask the person responsible for this to review it". I answered: "But we already asked". Then they said: "You have one day to solve this, otherwise you will lose the project". Then I found out that the person responsible for this had not paid any attention to it. Several other projects from other areas and other themes had passed and ours was there, stuck. I had to put a lot of internal pressure, contact people to be able to get it unstuck, let's say, this project, solve the problem that had been pointed out by MEC and be able to have the course.

Racism isn't explicit. I would have even preferred it to be, because we would face it more directly. But it's these intricacies, details, things that lie between the lines and that harm us a lot. And it was very recurrent on the part of some managers, at a higher hierarchical level, to say: "Ah, you all only talk about this, you only talk about racism, you want to see racism in everything. Everything that you do is about this matter".

20 Ministry of Education and National Education Development Fund.

Then, I faced a very emblematic situation, because one of the things we conducted as a public policy was the development of a set of theoretical and literary works called the Kit of African and Afro-Brazilian Literature, starting in 2004. It started with some 20 titles, it grew, until in one of the last that I participated in more than 120 titles, sent to all schools in the network. There are two interesting questions about this kit: the first is that they arrived at many schools and the principals said they wanted to return them, because their teachers wouldn't read such type of material. Or they'd gather dust in a corner at the principal's office, when their place was in the libraries, with all the guidance so that the librarians would give visibility to the kits. We found that many were kept in boxes. And the other question was in relation to the book "Manual for the survival of black people in Brazil", by a cartoonist and writer from São Paulo named Maurício Pestana. It was full of comics, drawings and on one of the pages, he addressed police violence. A teacher at one of the schools denounced the book as disrespectful to the Military Police.

A whole process of confrontation with the Military Police began, and nobody wanted to take that discussion on. As it was Education Secretariat policy, the one who should have a conversation would be whoever was at a higher level. In the end, I was the one who had to discuss it. First, we held an internal meeting with a group that discussed violence in schools and had a closer relationship with the police. It was a policy of the Education Secretariat. They said: "Yeah, the issue with this book is getting in the way of the relationship we are building with the police, which was going very well, a friendly relationship". I replied: "regardless of whether you are close, it's a real fact. The police are responsible for racial violence as well. We have historically proven cases of racially motivated police violence".

We had this internal discussion, it was very tense, and I realized that, with that group, I wouldn't have support. So, together with a representative from the Education Secretariat, we went to have a conversation with a lieutenant-colonel in the Military Police, at Praça da Liberdade<sup>21</sup>. I knew that the person who accompanied me wouldn't say anything and the discussion would be up to me. It was this whole thing! I don't know where I got my strength from. But at no time did I give up on my position, despite facing a high-ranking police officer. This is very intimidating. He was all dressed up, with those medals, in an environment that is all that police disciplinary thing, and I laid out my entire position. I said that the book addressed the issue of police violence and that they should agree that, historically, the police had a very strong contribution to this process of racism, by reproducing and producing this violence, targeting mainly black people, black youth. At that time, 15 years ago, this discussion was taking place.

21 One of the main squares in Belo Horizonte and where the Integrated Operations Center of the Military Police resides.

It was very intense, because there was even a position to remove the books from the schools. But, at the same time, in addition to having had that conversation, I articulated nationally. Sent emails to everyone, to the Ministry of Justice, to all organizations in the black movement, exposing the situation. The author, Pestana, was very worried, very upset and there was an extra-municipal articulation that made the governor say at the time: "No, we will not introduce censorship here in our state, so the book stays. We are not going to mess with that". But it was all very tense, because it was as if the whole project around what the book represented, what was behind a whole policy of implementing Law 10.639/2003, was my position. It wasn't the Education Secretariat taking an institutional stance. Me, Patrícia, I had to face it practically alone at that moment.

This is what we call racism, first in a structural instance; but there is this other instance, which is institutional racism. And it's very strong, emblematic, and recurring. When defining pedagogical policies, we wanted to deepen the literacy issue, and in the Secretariat there was an entire investment in this sector. We said: "If we look at surveys, the majority who are illiterate are black boys, so this has to be discussed". And then they put it aside: "Ah! You see racism in everything, everything has to be discussed".

I was trying out strategies to face institutional racism. One of them was to win over key people within other groups, such as Literacy, Youth, Environment etc. And these people became somewhat defenders of this discussion, within their groups. But I dare make an assessment that if this institutional racism had been dealt with more deeply, today, in Belo Horizonte, we would have advanced much more. Because it seems to be a situation that comes and goes. And recurring problems, mainly on the issue of equality, which are very difficult to face. There is a huge educational inequality, which affects black and white students differently. But it was a challenging, almost pioneering process. A previous group already had an experience, an opportunity to move forward. And when this project of the Center for Ethnic-Racial and Gender Relations started, we had a large team, willing, and investing a lot, but institutional racism prevented further progress. Black boys continue to be the most affected, racism in interpersonal relationships continues to be recurrent, including in the teacher and student relationship, and the difficulties of some schools in taking on an institutional project as required by law.

### **Implementing a reference-project in the promotion of racial equality in schools of Belo Horizonte: the legacy**

At the second school where I was a principal, the vice-principal was also black. When we walked in to introduce ourselves, we heard: "Look, two black principals", in a derogatory tone. And that was also what ended up encouraging us to create the institutional project at the school, in 2008, to promote racial equality, which is currently a reference not only in Belo Horizonte, but in Brazil.



But, also, I saw the strangeness of our presence in there. Having two black women principals is still uncommon, unfortunately. Despite being jobs that don't have high salaries or prestige, they are still occupied by white people. We managed to institutionalize, at school, a project aimed at racial relations and the promotion of racial equality. I left the position of principal in 2011. We are in 2020 and this project continues, even though it has gone through three different administrations.

I'm very proud to have managed to improve this project, which is done throughout the year, not on a specific date. That all students participate, all teachers take part, the community engages. The project received awards. During my tenure alone, it received two awards: one in the Teacher category, in 2010, and another in the Management category. In addition, it received a seal from the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality, in 2011, as a school that promotes racial equality. It was the only school that received this seal in Minas Gerais. It also won the BH Without Racism seal, from the city of Belo Horizonte, several times. It's a project that has several films produced about it. There was coverage by Canal Futura, TV Minas, radio stations, magazine publications and an article published in the electronic magazine of the Brazilian Association of Black Researchers (ABPN).

And there's a positive feedback from students. From time to time, we have contact with the current students. They tell me how important it was, how it impacted them. I think that is my greatest joy. Not the prizes, but the recognition from the students, who began to discover their racial identity and to position themselves based on the experiences they had during that period. It's no small thing! I have a testimonial from a former student who graduated in Nutrition recently and she said how the school's projects influenced her defining her career, the process of seeing herself as black, taking on black aesthetics, and taking a stand on racial issues. We also instituted a curly and black hair contest, five years ago. Several students give testimonials about the process of using their natural hair, starting with the contest. The teachers also talk about how it was remarkable in their professional and life experience, how the project influenced them to do this work in other where they work. Despite all the challenges, because when we tell it it's beautiful, but the process was very challenging. So, I think the coolest thing about this is to make a mark on people's lives.

### **The role and strength of black women in education**

Research is revealing that racial issues reach schools through the work of black people. And, even if it becomes an institutional project, they are originated by black people. Black colleagues have similar stories to mine and that makes a huge difference. In fact, my master's degree was about the trajectory of black teachers and how these trajectories encourage teachers to have a position in the face of racial debates, both in personal and professional relationships. To be the first to provoke this debate and these actions in their schools. I believe in that strength, yes! And I believe that if

I do this same research again today, the one I did in the schools in Belo Horizonte, about twenty years ago, I think the result will be the same. Just from seeing the seminars, people telling their experiences, how the protagonism of black women teachers is strong. It's a legacy that they leave, a mark. And that has to become knowledge, so that these experiences can be transformed into content for training projects, which are in universities, in postgraduate education. Which leads us to have a successful policy or action, that addresses racial issues within schools. And that these projects have broad political meanings, that are not restricted to the individual, that have social repercussions. We shouldn't give up. We have to fight for these fairer, better, and less unequal world projects. And that they are put into practice.

### **5. Being a black woman: a life dedicated to the anti-racist struggle**

How do black women deal with their challenges? The first one is recognizing oneself as capable, as empowered to accomplish and produce things. Even if our family doesn't say it, the world around us tells us otherwise. I think that, even today, this mentality persists, although with some progress. But my generation had to face it, even though I had a little more opportunity than my mother's generation, for example. I'm not even talking about dreams, but about the projects we have in mind, about life and professional career. It's about meeting ourselves, discovering ourselves. And it's a process that doesn't happen overnight. To this day, I'm in this process, I have difficulty recognizing myself in some places, I have difficulty recognizing myself as a black intellectual, a black writer. And this is being built on an internal, intimate dialogue, and in the relationship with other women, who have been bringing up these issues. Thinkers that are only now being translated in Brazil, such as bell hooks<sup>22</sup>, who says that black women are intellectuals in their own right, even if not in academic knowledge, but in the very knowledge of survival and maintenance of life. It's an intellectual thought, too. It took a long time to reach us. I think that the next generations will be able to benefit a lot.

Second, opportunities aren't given. My family was an exception within my neighborhood, because my brothers and I were able to go to college. It isn't just because we struggled, but because the opportunities are very unequal. And for other classmates, friends from the neighborhood, and from other walks of life, in my trajectory, life was very different. Social and racial barriers are diverse. And that goes for both men and women - but I think for women they're tougher. I

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<sup>22</sup> bell hooks was born in 1952 in Hopkinsville, a rural town in the state of Kentucky, in the southern United States. She graduated in English literature from Stanford University, got a Master's degree at the University of Wisconsin and a PhD at the University of California. Her main studies discuss race, gender, and class and oppressive social relations, with an emphasis on topics such as art, history, feminism, education, and mass media. She is the author of more than thirty books in various genres, such as cultural criticism, theory, memories, poetry and children. Source: <<https://editoraedefante.com.br/quem-e-bell-hooks>>.

discovered ways and strategies to circumvent the accumulation of labor. If I were to think about it, I wouldn't have gotten a master's or a PhD or anything. When I got those degrees, I was older. I finished my master's degree at 39 years-old and my PhD at 50. When I got my master's degree, my children were small, I only had time off from one job. I continued working for the other one, it was very difficult, I didn't have a scholarship. For women, it's very difficult. And for black women, even more so. Having to reconcile tasks and this accumulation of labor, it's a huge challenge. Only when you really want it, can you finish it.

Affirmative actions are benefiting some generations. The generations after mine have already guaranteed vacancies and scholarships, and I hope that this policy will continue for some time. It will be reassessed soon, but it's essential to have affirmative action policies for the most discriminated groups in Brazil, especially the black and indigenous population. Another very challenging thing for me and for many black women of my generation is the fact that the academic world is very masculine. Especially in the History major, you saw few women following the trajectory of getting a master's degree. It took me a long time to get one, because I thought I couldn't afford it, that I didn't have the skills, that this thing wasn't for me. When I saw a person getting a master's degree, I thought it was something out of this world. Of course, the area of education is predominantly female, but the greater the academic requirements, the more masculine it becomes. I think this is a huge challenge.

And the matter of us making peace with ourselves. To become yourself in the process. As a black, intelligent woman, who can, who has the ability, capacity, repertoire, content, and reasoning. And, to complement, I think what has helped us is this thing of the collective. You can't stay in the individual field. When you can discuss collectively, it becomes less difficult. It's not that it's no longer difficult, it's just less difficult. This joining and movements of women, the ways to get together, talk and even vent, to qualify this whole context with reflections from experiences and theoretical reflections too, makes a lot of difference and must be expanded. Increasingly, groups of women of all ages are emerging and organizing. Before, in Belo Horizonte, you could count on your fingers how many movements there were.

Today, there are a multitude of them, led by young black women who organize themselves into study and discussion groups, in political movements, not only in the academic world, but in the neighborhoods, in the communities. There are quilombol<sup>23</sup> women and indigenous women, who are organizing themselves to bring these discussions into the agenda. And the inspirations, which, as I said, when we were teenagers, we were inspired by artists, nowadays we are inspired too by these women who arrived before and who are there, representing very well all this effort and these

23 Quilombolas are black individuals who are descendants from enslaved black people and live in communities.

legacies, who make us think: "It's possible to get there and have a position". Not in the sense of economic position, but an important position within the society in which we live, bringing a contribution to the group that we're a part of, to our population. I really like the example of a teacher from Rio de Janeiro, Giovana Xavier, from UFRJ<sup>24</sup>. She says that we always treat black women thinkers as an exception. And each time they reveal themselves, we come to the conclusion that there is a constellation of these thinkers, it isn't one or two. The more you research, the more you discover these prominent black women. Over the centuries, very important women have appeared who have made enormous contributions. This is also very comforting. Being part of this constellation of women who are making a difference, who are putting things in motion, even if it's a little. We say: "It doesn't move the structure, but it rocks it a little". And I would like to be remembered as a black teacher who dedicated her life to the racial debate and for my entire trajectory, which started very early. For a lifetime of dedication and also a lot of involvement. I want to be remembered as the black teacher who got involved and dedicated her life to issues of racial justice and anti-racist struggle.



*As Principal of Florestan Fernandes Municipal School. Belo Horizonte, 2008.*

*By: Wanderson Carlos da Silva Ferreira Oliveira*

24 Professor at the Faculty of Education at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro - UFRJ. Bachelor's degree in History, Master's (UFF), PhD (Unicamp), and post-doc (New York University).



## 7

Iara Felix Pires Viana  
 Matheus Arcelo Fernandes Silva  
 Jessyka Martins

# IARA FELIX PIRES VIANA

## 1. Iara, queen of the waters: family origin

I'm the youngest of eight and I come from a very poor family. We lived in the Perrella slum, in the Santa Tereza neighborhood, in Belo Horizonte, which has a very peculiar geography and where, somehow, we managed to deal with that precariousness and extreme vulnerability. My family, especially my father, but my mother as well, emphasized knowledge a lot, reinforcing the need to study. And, very markedly, verbalized it in relation to skin color. My dad didn't spell it out regarding racism, or structural racism, but he'd said, "You need to think you're beautiful and you need to study. Because you need to be better than everyone. The competition is fierce, and people will demand a lot from you." He was trying to tell me I was going to face a lot of racism in my life, but he couldn't conceptualize it. My father was a fourth-year school drop-out but was an engineer in practice. He dealt with

construction sites and with the engineers, even making calculations for them. Today, I'm aware that racism and whiteness, when operating together, throw deadly poisons on the construction of black identity and try to limit, immobilize black individuals, especially children and women.

When I was about nine years-old, with the huge floods that Belo Horizonte had, our house, with our things, it all went away. We didn't lose anyone in the family, but we lost everything. We went to a shelter and, from there, we were taken to live in the Morro Alto housing complex, in Vespasiano, North Region of Belo Horizonte. This process was a very drastic change because the flood happened in December 1982 and, in January 1983, we were already living in Morro Alto. We had to adapt to this new reality, starting from scratch. But my father never dealt with us this question of loss and or giving up, I think that accompanied me throughout my whole life.

When remembering the choice of my name, my father always spoke of it as a very powerful one. He thought that, as a girl - and, in that sense, looking at him and his and masculinities: "she is a girl, she needs to have a strong and warrior name: queen of the waters". And water is something that nobody stops, so he didn't want anything or anyone to stop me in this world. He wanted me to pass, even if it was through, to make several leaps over the barriers of life.

### *My mother's story could be a book*

My mother is a woman who suffered a lot, she never knew her parents. She is an orphan and came from Baixo Guandu, in Espírito Santo, to Belo Horizonte, at the age of six. Donated, by a priest, to a family of the Belo Horizonte elite, who lived on Augusto de Lima Avenue and were one of the owners of the Yacht Club. Before then, she lived at the back of a church, in a male orphanage. She remembers that she lived in the back of that church with a lady, who she called her mother, and it was that lady who cleaned the church, that is, she was the cleaner. She also remembers that the priest went to that little room every night and blessed her, kissed that mother she had and went to sleep.

In Belo Horizonte, they put my mother in a boarding school. They believed that they brought the girl from the country and that she needed to be educated. My mother leaves this boarding school at the age of 15, already with an offer of marriage. It was her first marriage; it wasn't my father yet. She suffers a lot with her first husband: 15 years-old, just out of boarding school, with a suitor she didn't even date - it couldn't have worked. However, before breaking up, she had four children. When they separated, her husband and mother-in-law demanded that she leave the children with them, on the grounds that she had nowhere to stay. My mother always says that her mistake was leaving the house that night, to go and live at a mistress's house, where she repeated the cycle - she was a housekeeper, a cleaner, just like her supposed mother at the shelter. In the



comings and goings to visit her children, with all the conflicts and strategies to avoid seeing her ex-husband, she meets her second husband, Mr. Bené, who still isn't my father.

In this second marriage, the cycle of violence intensifies, and she again suffers a lot of domestic violence, especially after the third child in this relationship. At this moment, when she was already threatened with death, amid several police reports; a partner who is always drunk, sometimes in jail, sometimes at home; she decides to run away. She leaves the house with her children and the clothes on her back, in the middle of the night, while he slept, and no place to stay. She stayed in front of the Santa Casa Hospital, as if she was making an appointment in the queue; people would arrive to make an appointment and she would sell her place in line and thus had a little money for coffee and bread for my siblings.

During this time, my father, Mr. José Viana, who was married and lived in the Serra neighborhood, when going to work, walked past the Santa Casa Hospital every day; my mother, very beautiful, by the way, caught his eye, I think for several reasons. Seeing her with the children there, every day, he decided to stop and ask: "Is everything okay with you, do you need anything?". And my mother, very serious, replies: "No, I don't need anything. I'm here to make an appointment. Do you need an appointment? I can sell you my place". Then he asked if she was living on the street with the children, and my mother was already afraid, afraid of losing her children a second time;

*Iara with her mother, Elizabeth, at her wedding to Rosane Pires.*

*By: Personal Archive*



but he calmed her down and said he just wanted to help, he just needed to know how. And out of that five-minute encounter, a great love was born.

From then on, my father separated from an already compromised marriage and completely embraced my mother. It took 24 hours to organize a shed that would hold my mother with the three children who were with her on the street. My mother says that she hadn't caught the scent of anything new for many days, when he arrived with a stove, four sets of cutleries, four plates, four glasses, and a Basic Food Basket<sup>1</sup>, to minimally organize their lives in this new home. They fall in love and get married. With her, my father had me and my brother, Edson Viana, now deceased. And thus, it was a marriage that lasted for life. Today, we no longer have my father, their age difference was very large, but it didn't seem like it when they were together. I remember like it was today: constant romance at home; on Sundays, making lunch for us, some music always in the background, love in the air all the time. And with that, my mother never again experienced this scenario of loss, pain, and violence, and she began to realize that it was possible to be a person, to be a woman, and how a woman should be treated.

We tried for a while to identify her family. My father traveled with her a few times to Baixo Guandu and they found out that the priest was her father. And the mother was in fact that lady who cleaned the church; but since Father Alonso was a truly relevant person in Baixo Guandu, revered for his religiousness, he asked a lot, when my mother arrived, that we not follow it up. But that he did know what was the relationship that united them and what was the relationship that separated them.

I almost always have my father into the foreground when I tell my story. Precisely because he arrives in a scenario for my mother's life as if he were a great prince charming, armed with a protective shield against all the ailments and violence that she had suffered until his arrival. And that was noticeably clear in our family. We talked about it: hiding problems wasn't allowed. It was necessary to narrate the difficulties, precisely to be able to heal them. This my father set out plainly, on Sunday lunches or in the seances he held at our house.

I think that's why he always comes to the fore. However, the relationship of strength and struggle established I bring from this woman, my mother, our matriarch, now 76 years old. My need to jump, to leap over the obstacles that life imposes on us, whether because I'm a woman, a black woman, from the periphery, comes from my mother. Especially because, considering all the privilege scenarios in the male world, like it or not, my father was also in this place. However careful and always very loving he may have been, he nevertheless spoke from that place that constituted him as a man, black.

<sup>1</sup> Cestas básicas, or basic food baskets, are the essential food items for every Brazilian household for a month.



## Building personal relationships

My initiation, my learning was with my peers - my siblings at home. And since freedom had always been a given to all of us, we could be anything we wanted, from a very young age. In this context, there comes a stage in my life, still very young, when I identified myself as a lesbian. I was 12 and I treated it in the family with naturality, I remember it as if it were today. My brothers brought their girlfriends home, and I already had a girlfriend at school; one lovely day, close to my birthday, I said: "Look, I want to bring my girlfriend here at home". It was a jolt, my mother had an astonished look on her face and my father, visibly very calm, naturalizing that process, says: "Then bring your friend round".

I replied strategically: "I'm going to bring my friend ". And I introduced her to my mother as my friend, since my father said she was my friend. But I had already said that she wasn't. And that phase was marked, that age when I formally declared myself. I have never had relationships with men; my gender identity was being formed and my friends, school, family members were learning to no longer question who Iara was. This relationship, still immature, of course, did not move forward, and in fact we became friends.

At the end of elementary school, starting high school, I fell in love with my physical education teacher, and it is my first relationship, in fact, with a woman. And that relationship lasted about six years, and with all the ritual, she went to my house, I went to her parents' house, just like my brothers did and were guided by my father. After a while, my father said to my mother: "Woman, we don't have to be fret over this. Hating is sin; loving isn't a sin, in any situation." But my mother was very worried with the external violence present, issues that my father couldn't see - or believed that he'd shield me from my whole life.

I lived my adolescence intensely and grew up, I met other people. But it was recently, about seven years ago, that I met Rosane Pires – my partner – at a work meeting in the Administrative City<sup>2</sup>. I was at the end of the table with the Secretary of Education Department, at the time, Macaé Evaristo<sup>3</sup>, advising her. It was a meeting with the Black Social Movement of Minas Gerais, of which Rosane Pires was a part. It was a large table, with almost forty people, me at one end and she at the other end. Our eyes met there at that moment. But I don't think I paid much attention to that. Perhaps, with my "masculine" gaze, I didn't pay attention to the meaning of those looks. The sensitivity came from Rosane, who, at the end of the meeting, asked about me to my secretary, Flávia Tambor.

<sup>2</sup> Buildings that house the administration of the state of Minas Gerais.

<sup>3</sup> Also biographed in this book.

As the Black Social Movement was remarkably close to the Secretary herself, Rosane had Macaé's personal number. And two weeks later, on a day when we were going to a meeting with the Governor, in the official car, the Secretary receives a call, answers it and, looking at me, talks on the phone and smiles. She starts talking to this person, and until then I had no idea who it was. It was Rosane Pires, and she asked about me, about my sexual orientation, and from then on, I started to suspect that those looks meant flirtation. Secretary Macaé gives me my contact and we start talking about work, the Afroconsciência<sup>4</sup> campaign, which my superintendency was launching at the time.

It got so intense that, within in a year, we got married, with the certainty that it was the meeting of the century. Our wedding became a political act, it was a great event, in which were minister Nilma Lino Gomes, who was our godmother<sup>5</sup>; Macaé herself and so many other women from the black and LGBTQI social movement, who strengthened us on the journey as black

*The Pires Viana family all together: Iara, Aïle, Ayala Vitória, and Rosane.*

*By: Personal Archive*



<sup>4</sup> Literally, Afroawareness.

<sup>5</sup> It is tradition in Brazil for brides (and grooms) to have godparents to their matrimony.

and lesbian women. A very striking wedding, whose ceremony, on 21 May, was in the open air, celebrated by our mother of Santo Glória D'Oxum, along with leaves of mariô, golden carpet, and scented environment, all within the molds and precepts Candomblé, which is our religion.

When we first met, one of the things that connected us was our common desires. I always wanted to have a daughter and Rosane too, who already has a son, Àile Pires, who is now our son. With that, we decided that, after the wedding, we would enter the adoption queue. And motherhood was a crucial point even for my mother to look at Rosane differently than she did my other relationships. Because she, my mother, expected grandchildren, so that we could close the cycle of our Viana family; but I certainly didn't know how to demand that of me. My mother's relationship with the arrival of our daughter Ayala is something magical, because she has several grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who number more than twenty; but with Ayala's arrival, it's like she's closed her family's cycle. She, the matriarch, with her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the generation will not stop there. My daughter, now eleven, says: "My best friend is my grandmother Beth." She is the person she calls, who she wants to tell the secrets, secrets that sometimes she doesn't even want to tell Rosane or me.

## Religiousness

When I got close to Rosane, we got married in Candomblé, and Mãe Glória, who officiated our wedding, is the Mãe de Santo of a *terreiro*<sup>6</sup> Candomblé Banto in Santa Luzia. In fact, we realized how much things were already connected, how much ancestry already showed us that. My father had a *Terreiro* de Umbanda in Bairro Serra before meeting my mother. After they met, due to the separation, the departure from his home and the circumstances, he took a break. But he resumed work at our house, already at the Morro Alto complex, with seances – I actually loved participating in all the rituals. When I met Mãe Glória and the people of the Casa, I realized that there were several Filhas de Santo of my father, that is, Mães de Santo who had also been initiated by him. And these people recognize and remember me from that period when my father had the *terreiro*. So, it's like we became a single Quilombo.

And this is the path I have taken; but I also experienced the whole Catholic scene, due to the influence of my mother from the boarding school run by nuns. So, everyone at home had their first communion and Confirmation. Regardless, with my father, the religion of African origins was always extraordinarily strong. And here, me, Rosane and our children, we actually share Candomblé, our wedding was held in this place. When Ayala came to us, she was also baptized there, and

<sup>6</sup> A Mãe de Santo is a priestess in the Candomblé or Umbanda religions. A *terreiro* is where the religious ceremonies of these religions take place.

her godmother is Preta Velha de Moçambique. We also present to her what the Bible is, what the Catholic Church is, and she will certainly be free to make her religious choices. But I confess that it is in candomblé that I, my wife, and children really feel welcomed, freedom, and respect. Be who we are inside a temple. When I enter a Catholic church, arm in arm with Rosane, my daughter and my son, for example, I still feel a little uncomfortable. If I'm in a Candomblé *terreiro*, that doesn't happen. The looks are different; in fact, there aren't looks at all. So, this is where we feel most comfortable to be, to connect with our ancestry and our history.

## 2. Schooling

When we went to Morro Alto, we were on the margins again, before the Arrudas Creek, now in an elitist municipality: Vespasiano. And my father always had a remarkably interesting analysis of this situation. He analyzed the space, how things happened and did a lot of political reading, even without having studied, but with his own resistance literacy. And with that he started to lead community associations, fighting to have a school in the neighborhood, with adequate infrastructure close to our homes. For about six months, the entire population of Conjunto Morro Alto went without studying. With this pressure from the association, the city administration quickly installed random classrooms to respond to the community association.

With that, I go back to my studies, three of my brothers too and we walk to the construction site of Congressman Renato Azeredo State School. This was the first identity I had with a large school, in the Morro Alto complex. There we established very strong ties with the territory, as this whole that strengthens and grows, and people in this environment, knowing that it would be us for ourselves. At school, I was highly active, participated in associations, games, dance battles, and I was prone to demanding improvements. And that drew the attention of the school principal; at the time, teacher Edith Bueri Nassif, who was a lawyer for the elite of Vespasiano, who was managing this school in the Morro Alto complex. And I think that actually with the goal of trying to control my interventions at school a little, she says: "If you pass the university entrance exam, you will teach at that school".

Upon hearing this, I faced it and chose to treat the invitation as another challenge. I studied a lot for the entrance exam, without any possibility for a prep course and without any information about the process of entering a university. I asked questions, many questions of my teachers and so I passed the entrance exam in 1996, at the IGC of UFMG<sup>7</sup>. I chose Geography, because I had a teacher, Maione Lauar, for whom I think I developed a platonic crush on because of how much she managed to make us travel beyond the walls of the school. She taught by believing in us, believing

<sup>7</sup> Geosciences Institute of the Federal University of Minas Gerais.



in our path, which wasn't the case with all of our teachers. She was the only teacher who left that classroom space with us. The classes in the courtyard, with this teacher, seemed to take us out of the neighborhood during the fifty minutes of class, I thought that was fantastic. And the content caught my attention a lot, due to the geopolitical and social bias it brought; so it was the course that I fell in love with and was enchanted by.

When preparing, I didn't have a prep course, Internet access; it wasn't like today, I had nothing. I had to dive into it for about three months, studying with xeroxed copies, cram books, borrowing books here and there. And I had to pass at the federal university because I couldn't pay. I faced the challenge and there was my name on the first call. After I passed, I knocked on the door of the school principal's office and say that I passed the entrance exam. She replied, "So, you start teaching next week."

I was apprehensive, I had butterflies in my stomach, but I looked at the financial side of it. Young, needing cash to pay even for the photocopies at the university, it was important to pick up some hours. But right away, she placed me at the high school. I started teaching my classmates after all, I had friends all over high school. And it was really challenging; but at the same time, as she always said it, even on graduation day: "Iara, you turned the Congressman Renato Azeredo State School around. We had older teachers and you were the young woman, you were the young lady of the group, at that time with the language and engagement that the students needed".

My language with the kids was different; but I also realized that I had to take a different stance. I was their friend, but I was a teacher, and I tried to align this rhetoric with the established partnership, which is what I still call the great accords, which was a great learning experience for life. I didn't read it in any book, but it made it possible to start my career in education.

So, my career started as a teacher, as a possibility at that moment and that, in fact, grow. I fall in love with this possibility because I discovered that it's possible to do things differently. It's possible to reach people and change the course of their lives. Because that's what my parents did for me. They could have done anything else, including being silent. We had lost everything; certainly, they could have other priorities, but no. With education, we change the course of life, including ours. The course at Arrudas Creek changed the course of our lives. Education will also change your life in this scenario.

### 3. Professional trajectory: *I started teaching and I never stopped*

After that first experience at the Congressman Renato Azeredo State School, I never stopped. Before my first public exam to be a teacher, I taught at different schools in the North Region periphery. These different realities start to bother me, added to a series of administrative issues at the school. As an example, I experienced moments in the teachers' lounge with the principal or the vice-principal, who said: "This order here has arrived from the Education Department", and I'd question: "Gee, but we are also part of the department, we can't give an opinion on these things, on this decision-making? Is it always like this? Top-down? " These provocations at recess with the vice-principal, with the principal, made me believe that I should aim a little higher and try to be the vice-principal of this school. And I went to find out how the procedures for elections in public schools worked. But then I stepped back, thought, "No, I'm going to stay in the classroom, this is where I have contact with people, with students".

Meanwhile, still on the sidelines, living in the Morro Alto complex, I was spurn by the great Machado de Assis State School, which was in the city center. It was a historical discomfort that I never had the opportunity to enter it. I was curious and wondering why a school, which was public, was so different in structural terms from the school in the Morro Alto complex? If we were part of the same network, with such powerful professionals, why such a difference? Is it geographic, is it peripheral, is it segregation again? I decided that I wanted to break that barrier and teach at that school to understand how it worked.

And you can only work in this school by public exam. So, I had to wait for an exam to come up and pass in first place, because there was only one place for this school. And so I did, I passed first and took over. In 2005, I joined the staff of the Machado de Assis State School with my head held high, appointed to the post of high school Geography teacher. I remember like it was today. My first day, principal Iris Martinha Salomão welcomed me, saw the paperwork, presented me with the timetable, the classes and took me to that place: the teachers' lounge, which is a world apart.

When I entered the teachers' lounge, everyone looked at me. The feeling was one big question marks; they questioned what foreign body was the one who had arrived at the school. Everyone there had known each other for many years. They were teachers who treated themselves like this: "Ah, you are from the Fonseca family, you are from the Viana family, you are from the Iças family". Only surnames. In other words, Vespasiano, although very close to Belo Horizonte, has a logic of coronelismo and this type of relationship. For me, it was as if I didn't have an identity, since I wasn't coming from any of those places that constituted Vespasiano. And, of course, with my other

markers: woman, lesbian, black, peripheral, and resident of the Morro Alto complex. Enough said. It was as if a bomb had fallen on the Machado de Assis State School.

And with all the skills acquired in life and at school Renato Azeredo, when I take this experience to Machado de Assis, in dealings with the students, my fellow teachers and management begin to realize that several students, who were not my students, wanted to be in my class. Certainly, because I felt extremely comfortable listening first and then starting class. Sometimes I wouldn't even teach a strict geography class, but I was going to deal with human geography, which was dealing with the social function of the school, in fact. "Teacher, I was angry and destroyed my entire video game." "You were angry and broke your video game, but was it really the game that made you angry or were you angry about something else?" "Ah, can we talk for a little bit later, teacher?" So, this complicity and this affection took on an exceptionally large proportion with the public served there.

### Starting in management

In a way, when I realized that this relationship with the group of teachers was more tranquil and we were receiving the same top-down demands, I thought: "I've gotten into the Machado de Assis School, but let me go up a little bit and see how education administration works up close". I talked to the then-principal and said that I wanted to apply for vice-principal, on the shift I worked in. We had about 2700 students and a gigantic body of servers; she saw it as strategic to invite me to take this place. In other words, a historical principal of that school, in fact, granted my participation in management, knowing that if I organized a ticket and ran as principal, perhaps she would not be able to reelect herself. The school was primed for change.

So, she acted strategically; but I also needed her seal to start this process. All of this with great transparency. We won, there was no challenger ticket, because they already knew we were going to win. I remained as vice-principal for three consecutive terms, eight years. And in the third term, understanding the Education Department worked, the political game, the changes in government administration and how it affects public policies in the educational field, I said: "Guys, I'm going to be the principal of this school to reach cabinet meetings". The vice-principal didn't participate in them, only the principal. So, I got the information that the principal brought to me, and I often asked myself, "did she question this"?

That said, I had the same conversation with her, transparent, and said I wanted to take over the principal job. She was a little afraid but realized that I was determined on what I was going to do. I set up a ticket with people who already had experience in school administration; one of them was the vice-principal with us on the night shift. We ran and got a lot of votes from students. When

I won these elections, it was a big deal in Vespasiano, because it came out in the city newspaper, and the calls began to find out who it was, what are the changes, the politics, what are the political-pedagogical projects for that school.

The fear of changing an entire cultural context due to a new black face that appears in that place was latent. All the photos framed with the previous principals at Machado de Assis - an old school, which is about 60 years-old - are of white people. It begins with a series of men, men, men ... then there are women in the teaching profession, but all are white; and now my face is there, all cute and black. It's the only one.

I take over this place of management already knowing that, in a school of that size, I have to articulate with the mayor, with the deputy-mayor, with the municipal secretary. A principal of a state school of this size must do all these articulations, meetings, negotiate school calendar, check the resources that are being transferred from the state to the municipality, the issue of transportation and food, as well as paying attention to different realities. And in these negotiations, I acquired management experience and lived them.

My first action was to question: we could no longer conceive of the Machado de Assis State School as a private school. And I needed to inform the population of Vespasiano that they could knock on the school door and ask if there is a place. And that your child could enroll in that school. With that, the classes started to change color. I had a context of many white people at the school and, from this reorganization and communication to society, I started to receive students even from the Morro Alto group at the Machado de Assis School.

On this journey, managing a school of that size, I received many demands directly from the Superintendency's office and even from the State's Education Department, but with little guidance and guidelines on what had to be done. And it bothered me a lot. It turned out that we felt a little lonely; at the school, I had to handle this whole package or give up. And give up, never! It was then that I realized that I needed to face a new challenge: I started to apply for a position to work in the administrative department of the State's Education Department. I went through another public exam for an Educational Analyst in 2013 and, in that same period, I return to academia by entering the interdisciplinary master's degree in Leisure, Culture, and Education Studies, at UFMG.

In the master's course, of course, I went to study black women at funk dances<sup>8</sup>. I've always liked to dance and questioned the lack of infrastructure for the exercise of juvenile sociability, especially for girls and women. So, I went to research precisely this group, the proibidão dances in Belo Horizonte and, obviously, my research locus was Morro Alto, it couldn't have been otherwise. I had to talk about this place.

In this context, I left the school administration after the end of my term, left my position as teacher at Machado de Assis and took up a second public position - that of educational analyst, in the Administrative City. I chose a public exam that was specifically for the Administrative City because my interest was really to act in the Superintendence of Special Teaching Modes and Themes.

I studied the Department's organizational chart, I knew how many boards there were, how many superintendencies and who headed them. It was almost a georeferencing of the entire team. And then, when you accept a position, there is a dynamic; you choose the time you go to work, and they take a look at your resumé. Since I was already getting my master's degree, working with this perspective of Human and Social Geography, they assigned me to the position within the Directorate of Special Modes and Themes, within the Superintendence of Special Teaching Modes and Themes. When I get there, the superintendent tells me how much they liked my profile and, in a second meeting we had, I discussed some issues and experience I had from the schools I worked in: "Wow, but I think that with the experience that you've had in management, it would be very good for you to take over the directorate". I was taken aback, because at the time it was monitoring the Escola Viva Comunidade Ativa Program<sup>9</sup>, which meant managing around 1200 schools in 47 regional teaching centers, keeping a close eye, working almost hand in hand with these principals. I accepted the invitation and the challenge!

This was the first challenge in the administration of the Education Department. Looking at me, visibly, I'm left-wing. There's no other way. But that happened when the administration wasn't left-wing. I remember, like it was yesterday, a conversation I had with a friend and today my comadre<sup>10</sup>, Daniela Tiffany<sup>11</sup>, that it is important to be very flexible, even without flexibility, to live

8 Brazilian funk is somewhat derived from hip-hop and rap, although it has evolved to its form, style, and musicality. It is performed in "bailes", accompanied by dance, often in slums. It has been a point of contention for many years between police and communities, often being banned and known then as a "proibidão", but also judged by cultural elites and what is "good" Brazilian art.

9 Living School Active Community Program.

10 Word used among Brazilian women who are godmothers to each other's children or who were godmothers at each other's weddings.

11 Public administrator also biographed in this book.

between one administration and another, understanding which one are technical demands and which are political ones. Otherwise, people's heads are easily cut off.

It was hard. Until then, I was in extremely comfortable management areas for me. At the school, I was leading a group of people who decided to "give the novice a chance". I was having exchanges with them, but at the same time, immersed in a network of suspicions about my professional potential, even though I had total control. It was different now, I had people hierarchically above, who could prevent any kind of action; so, I realized that I needed to act differently. But I was very curious to understand public administration and to have access to this training at that time. I would have studied Public Administration, but I didn't know about this major. And, of course, I couldn't have known. In the circles I was part of, I had no way of knowing.

I needed to know about public administration and have political guile. Not only to find out what I needed, but also to take public policies forward. And then I took over this directorate, made a plan, a work plan with guidelines. And then I began to understand a little more about the administrative documents, the procedures and flows. The superintendent, at the time, looks at my Lattes<sup>12</sup>, basically at the theme I've worked on, at the resourcefulness that I had at school, at the presentation letters that I had. And even though I knew I didn't have the necessary experience to take a commissioned position within the Administrative City, I had to go after it. The car was moving, and I was changing the wheel at the same time. And understanding that the network wasn't the school in Morro Alto or the Machado de Assis School. That the network was 3664 schools, more than 200 thousand civil servants, 1.7 million students.

I thought, "this is the world" and with a huge diversity of service. The north of Minas is very different from the south of Minas. There are peripheral regions in the metropolitan area, which are quite distinctive. A school in the Cafezal slum is completely different from a school in the Pedreira Padro Lopes slum in Belo Horizonte. That is, this mapping was needed, to look at the practical and bureaucratic part of management. And, at the same time, dealing with the struggle inside, for permanence, of state public policy. There were things I thought: "Is it going to be impossible to marry all this? There's no way! How do I do that?"

I needed to build a mini army, resuming some knowledge, the same strategy that I adopted at the Machado de Assis School. I convinced people that it was possible to do things differently, to be a good manager, a good public administrator, but with sensitivity. We didn't have to be just numbers and spreadsheets to show that we were administrators. You could do both, and without romanticizing. Look at the reality and at the numbers, work with indicators. But it's important to

12 Official CV of the Ministry of Education.



have that perspective, because the time always comes when you have to make good choices and that choice must be collective.

I was on that directorate, and it was great, a very important experience for me. Then, we went through a change in administration. Teacher Macaé Evaristo, a black woman, takes over the Education Department and I'm invited to take over this Superintendence, due to the work done in the directorate. She wanted someone who had already been there, not someone who was appointed. It substantially increased my workload and responsibility. I had around 70 people to coordinate internally at the department, plus the state's 47 Regional Teaching Superintendencies, with nearly 15 people in each one. That is, it was a considerable group.

In the process, I realized that there were very powerful people with discussions outside the department. But, inside the department, it seemed that they were going through the motions, putting on their nametags and saying: "here I'm a civil servant". And so, the motivation in that place was low. When I asked Secretary Macaé if in fact I had the autonomy to reorganize the team or to develop some guidelines that I hadn't seen before at the Education Department, with my almost 15 years in schools and she said: " Yes, there is. Just make the proposal, present it here in the planning sector and we will validate the actions and see the resources ".

So, I started to work closely with the different modes, with quilombola school education, rural school education, indigenous school education, youth and adult education, and I realized that I didn't know the education network in Minas Gerais. This public has always been here, but we never mentioned them in urban schools. Why? Because, in fact, some policies didn't even reach them. They didn't have the state regulatory frameworks that could guarantee their specificities, that is, we needed to engage with the government to elaborate "state" public policies rather than governmental ones. So that any government that comes through here won't change the course of the river or let it dry. I think that was an interesting point of entry, at that moment that I had a greater professional maturity. I realized that I had to shake the structures a little, but at the same time, not only in terms of militancy, I had to show something concrete.

And that would be to institute regulatory frameworks that would remain forever. One of them, which I'm very proud to recollect, was to institute specific decrees and resolutions, and to write the text of the law that placed indigenous teachers and quilombola teachers in schools. You want to teach in the quilombo because you think it's cool, that's great; but a teacher's priority when working in this school becomes primarily the right of quilombola individuals.

And, with that, we managed to establish a regulatory framework and we have about 88% quilombola teachers working in quilombola schools today. Indigenous, 100%. This made a change

in the material and immaterial plan of the more than 500 quilombola communities in our state. It was a bit of a stir at the time because there were employees who had been at this school for a long time, but teacher Macaé supported it. Many complaints, such as: "This law came out of nowhere and you want to take us out of here?" I had to build a narrative: "We are not taking your right; you will be guaranteed a place in another school. But this change, specifically, is important to have happen". This historical movement, of denial, silencing, and institutional racism itself didn't allow the creation of the identity of these schools. This strengthening of the community leading to a space of power, which is the school, has made a lot of difference. And then, another challenge was still to come because I had to prove that this change would make a positive difference in educational results.

So, I set up a team, built a working group to accompany the IDEB<sup>13</sup> of these schools, to know, in fact, if when I have a school unit with quilombola teachers, canteen servers, secretary workers, school management, does this identity strengthen learning? And do IDEB results actually improve? And we hit the nail on the head, engagement was so great that the numbers went up immensely. Including enrollments in Youth and Adult Education. So, we had quilombola schools that had higher IDEB results than urban schools and that isn't a small thing in the symbolic field and in the field of the right to education.

This brought me administrative security and, of course, ensured the place that I occupied in the hierarchy. After all, I delivered results, designed with my team. And that was what mattered, delivering a positive result. The governor or secretary could announce at that time: "Schools can choose to strengthen their identity, which is regulated by decree, and thus manage to increase IDEB". Even the headline text was ready.

This was with great effort from the team; we needed to highlight this team, which took care of the teaching modalities, but wasn't seen. It was invisible, just like those schools were. This strengthened me as a network within the department itself and in the 47 regional teaching institutions. The regional ones, which had these schools that raised IDEB, were even seen in their cities' newspapers. So, it was an organization, planning in a link chain, with positive results for several segments. And I grew to like this: "Wow, this network management business is cool, huh?" I couldn't just be at a school, really.

In the current administration, a new format comes, a new government, a new secretary who wasn't from Minas; at the meeting held by this secretary, the superintendents of the previous administration were there, and she asked to hear from each one of us. It was remarkably interesting,

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because it was a meeting that I went into apprehensively. It was all very new, people leaving a left-wing government and entering a conservative, right-wing government. But as I had already learned back there with Daniela Tiffany, we had to go through administrations as managers and be strategic - to continue delivering results based on what was possible for things to happen - I figured it out.

I went in this meeting with this mindset, talked a little about what my portfolio was. I was the only one for whom the secretary, Júlia Sant'Anna, posed a question: "What is your biggest fear in this change?". I said: "my biggest fear is to have again what I found here when I arrived, an absence of public policies for these population segments, which seem and are treated as a minority, but when you look at the educational numbers, you see that they are the majority". I stopped there. The following week, she called me in her office and made me a proposal, saying that my strategic vision was important and that she would face some challenges within the government in this field of minorities, of educational policies; but that I had a very gentle way of dealing with struggles, which in fact didn't keep people away, but included them.

With that, she made me a proposal: "I want you to be Chief Advisor to the Subdepartment for Development of Basic Education". The Subdepartment for Basic Education is the heart of the Department in terms of policy, public policy implementation, monitoring. I was surprised by the proposal, after all, my superintendency had great visibility and I was a "face" of past management. Even aware of the challenges, I accepted. I talked a lot with the undersecretary, who was already a co-worker and who was called to take this place temporarily, because we expected someone who would come from the Transforma Minas selection process<sup>14</sup>. It turned out that we worked so well together that the secretary dismissed the Transforma Minas, and we remained a duo, in this important role, with a body of 200 extremely competent civil servants in the Subdepartment for Development of Basic Education.

The challenges facing me are of various orders. I'm an intersectional woman, I'm a black woman and a lesbian. And I talked about it when I took the job. I also confess that I did consider: "Is it because they want to fill a 'quota' in the office?" I thought about that, but it wasn't, and Secretary Júlia Sant'Anna put me at ease. In fact, she had mapped people and strategically distributed the positions under her management, among those she thought would work well. We have some political issues, of course, but it has worked; most importantly, which remains, is that we listen.

<sup>14</sup> Selection process adopted by the Zema state government, started in 2019, to fill management and advisory positions.

In the professional field, for me it has been an interesting experience, because it's the first time that I've coexisted closely with a political administration that I don't have an affinity with. I discovered that not having political affinity cannot hinder a civil servant's performance. Removing the romantic lens on my partisan ideologies was growth: "Look, there are interesting things happening. There is a strategic organization with noticeably clear and cool definitions. So, I think I'm ready for the changes that come, I can do that today". Something that, perhaps, with professional immaturity, I wouldn't have been able to do.

### Discrimination suffered

In the Administrative City, right when I took the position at the Superintendence of Special Teaching Modes and Themes, I had several matters on the agenda, received many authorities and, in some of them, racism was latent. The team and I had an agreement: when everyone were in the room, my secretary would call me to start the meeting, it has always been like that. In fact, because our meetings always have a large volume of managers. When I arrived in the room, I went to the table to open the meeting, and someone asked: "What time are we going to start? Is the Superintendent attending?" Even though the name Iara Viana was written on the agenda, in the invitation email: "Iara Félix Pires Viana, Superintendent of Modes and Themes invites you to the meeting...". I arrive, I introduce myself, my name is Iara Viana, I'm the Superintendent...", and the question arises: "Ah, the Superintendent isn't coming?". They were recurring questions, materializing institutional racism.

Another recurring example is when I'm going to give an institutional speech, a lecture, or open a training session and I say: "I'm here at the table today representing the Secretary of State for Education...". When I finish my speech, people have the need to come to me to say: "Wow, how well you speak, how nice, I was delighted to hear you speak". It is as if the expectation was so low, that any sentence I spoke correctly comes as a shock. So, we become "the star of the moment", but with this racist bias. It goes like this: "It is so impressive that you're in this place and speak well". As if they couldn't exist together, skin color, gender, and speaking well. This is unacceptable to racist eyes.

These two moments have repeated since I've accessed top management positions. Except at school when I was the principal. But when I entered the Administrative City in these higher positions, it was and is recurring. We dealt with that at some points within the team, because when she started to realize this, there was a certain discomfort. "Do we warn people first? Do we organize for Iara Viana not to go through this?". I told the team: "You can't silence this. You can't get there and find a way to say: 'people, the Superintendent is a woman, a black woman, so, don't ask a question like, 'is the Superintendent arriving or not'". This hinders the cause, hides the

problem, and makes it seem that everything is fine, and it would be consolidating the myth of racial democracy. When, in fact, the question will stay in people's minds, along the same lines.

#### 4. *The paths I have taken thus far: building an individual and collective identity*

I actually feel physical pain when I talk about what I had to give up. Because you have to give up certain things to be where I am, in the field of management. Some things, including some values, perhaps. There are learnings in this scenario, but there are also pains. It's a very lonely world, because when you leave the collective, the movement, this base, it's as if you no longer belong to that group: "Ah, you are privileged now". It's so tough to talk about it, when you're part of a collective, you're fighting for people to leave that place and reach another, invert, change places in the social pyramid.

So, you end up giving up some things. Initially, being in black movement collectives was important to me. Today I realize that where I'm I can do much more for this collective. If I had to give up the management position to remain at the base, I wouldn't be able to shake the structures in the slightest. But not 100% of the movement thinks that. There is a significant part that agrees with me and says: "Iara, go, regardless of anything, I think you have to accept the invitation, you have to be there, continue to represent us and help us in this process, it's more important that you are there That people like that are there." And there are those who will continue to believe that you have whitened, even. It's as if it destroyed that whole period that you walked together and it's very difficult to keep telling these people that we are still together. Perhaps closer together now, because if I'm not there, it won't matter, this office won't talk to the base. It won't be the demonstrations in Praça Sete<sup>15</sup> that will propose, rewrite the changes in paragraphs, subparagraphs and items of public policy.

In this sense, in the construction of Iara Viana that I am today, a point of entry to a transition is demarcated; I knew there would be challenges, but not that they would be so painful. But they are necessary pains. I look at myself today with a much greater and safer maturity to talk about it, even because I avoided it. My Lattes says: "Iara Viana, Black Social Movement of Minas Gerais". I avoided talking about it because I thought I no longer belonged to a collective. But it's not that, I'm still part of it. Because what comes first is my skin color. I arrive first with my color; before I open my mouth, I'm a black woman. Whether I like it or not, I'm still part of this collective and I represent it where I am. So, I walk in fragile and get stronger in the process. The hard way. Elaborating and

reworking strategies, daily. Basically, every day it's a strategy.

We live an epistemic racism; I think it's one of the most serious. That is why it's only now, very recently, that the importance and power of black feminist narratives can be understood. And how I sorely missed those bibliographic references. I really wanted to read stories like mine, for example, in previous times. So that I could have examples to be followed, so that I would feel a little more supported, not feel alone. If I don't have this support, if I'm not supported bibliographically, I cannot advance with the arguments. It's as if we find it difficult to defend a thesis. And this difficulty weakens the perspective of the struggle because it's through persuasion, there's no other way. I need to emphasize that there is a difference between whites and blacks, and that it is this difference that needs to be visible and respected. There is no struggle for equality, nobody wants to be equal to anyone. It's for the difference that we need to fight. But, to prove this, I need science, a bibliographical reference, that supports these discussions and that are not in the canonized references.



*Iara at the opening of the Walk for Racial Equality, in 2016, in the Administrative City of Minas Gerais.*

*By: Personal Archive*

And it is the narrative of the black woman that brings this to people; because it's from this collective construction that historical facts, real life are shown. I will make a comparison that looks like it's off-center, but it isn't. And I will not be romantic. For example, Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon, a black Martinican man, when writing about black women, remains a man. I took the racial aspect from him, because he talks about the woman with the masculinity that goes through him. And that's where Fanon, who was an excellent writer and scholar of ethnic-race relations, who teaches us a lot about these race issues, slips. It's worth reading!

<sup>15</sup> Area in downtown Belo Horizonte where many protests congregate.



My wish was that, in fact, we would be able to break the silence of this discussion in schools and offices, break epistemic racism, that this bibliographical reference would be available to everyone, and we would be able to critically read all of them. The signs of erasure black production are evident. It's rare that bibliographies indicate women or black people.

That we could read beyond the writings, as Paulo Freire<sup>16</sup> says. That people could perceive the nuances created by racism. As an educator, it's trying to deconstruct the training of these people. And convincing is a more difficult process, because we need to have substantial elements for this.

A legacy that I would like to leave would be an education that truly respects and understands diversity. To have more black and non-black people, defending the anti-racist struggle, with scientific arguments, to unveil a pedagogy of absences and thus, introjecting all this as an emancipatory political act. And, finally, to paraphrase an excerpt from Cristiane Sobral 's poem<sup>17</sup>, I want to leave provocations, reflections for our young women, with latent screams of "no more washing your dishes!". The longing for freedom has to be paradigmatic, reporting class oppression, race and gender. In the same way that we are rejected every time we take on roles that were not thought of for us, I wish that this naturalization be swept away and that more black girls and women occupy the places of power.

In the social and affective field, I wish to have my family socially built. It is legally legitimized. We have a marriage certificate, a certificate for our daughter Ayala Vitória Pires Viana and Àile Pires, with the two mothers, my name and the name of my wife, the maternal grandparents; that record was very meaningful for our children. So, I think verbalizing this right and publicizing it as we did - it even became a film, Encontro das Águas<sup>18</sup> - it was and is fundamental.

16 Paulo Freire, educator, philosopher, and Patron of the Brazilian Education. Author of Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968), he is considered one of the most notable thinkers in the history of world pedagogy, having influenced the movement called critical pedagogy.

17 Theatrologist and black poet, she was the first black actress graduated in Theater Interpretation at the University of Brasília. She studied theater at SESC in Rio de Janeiro, in 1989; edited the play Acorda Brasil, in 1990. She performed in several theatrical and cinema shows. She is a Master of Arts (UnB), having published numerous articles and books. She was a theater critic for Tablado magazine and is a member of the Academia de Letras do Brasil - DF section.

18 The documentary Encontro das Águas was directed by Mestre Negroativo, directed by Flávia dos Santos and Zaira Pires, produced by Divindade Cultural and sponsored by Avon

# 8

## MARIA DO CARMO FERREIRA DA SILVA

Maria do Carmo Ferreira da Silva  
Leticia Godinho  
Renata Souza-Seidl

### 1. Origins: a family of migrants

My origins are in the north of Minas Gerais, Montes Claros, known in the 1950s as the little princess from the north of Minas Gerais. I spent my early childhood there, until I was 4 years old. My father is from Coração de Jesus, close to Montes Claros, and my mother from Pirapora, also in the north of Minas.

Some of my grandparents worked on farms in Pirapora, in the Montes Claros region. I remember that most of these farms belonged to the Paculdinos and that one of them was even godfather to my older brother. We have pictures of my grandmother when she was still working on these farms, with stylized scarves on her head. It was those scarves that were tied in the African style, and she was very black, bluish, dark green eyes.

According to some of our ancestors, the people closest to my grandmother came from Africa. In the past, people used to walk around barefoot. And I remember her also working the pestle and mortar, we also have photos. I learned from her how to mill rice. Still on my grandma's side – I don't know if my great-grandfather or great-great-grandfather – we called him Grandpa Felipe; he came from Portugal and that's why we have the surname Silva.

On my father's side, the origins are indigenous; my great grandmother was “caught by the noose”<sup>1</sup> and, there in the region, they were all seen as bugres<sup>2</sup>. My cousins who live in Montes Claros are black, brown, with straight hair. In Pirapora, many were known as or called “purplish”. Now, in the fifth generation, some have with lighter or darker skin, with straight hair and, sometimes, with lighter-colored eyes. It's miscegenation, which was and has always been very common, especially in this region of Bahia and northern Minas.

My family moved to Belo Horizonte in the 1950s, much as a result, at that time, of you going to a big city to try your luck and get out of the drought period. At the time, I was 4 years old. But I still have relatives in both Pirapora and Montes Claros, and in the surrounding region, close to the Francisco Sá and Grão Mogol region, and also in São Paulo, Brasília, and Portugal. We try to maintain a good family relationship, despite the physical distance. I have uncles still alive on my father's side.

On my mother's side, I no longer have living uncles or aunts, just cousins. There might be, but that's the thing; sometimes people left to try their luck elsewhere. Like my aunt, my mother's older sister, who went to Brasília, and we never heard from her again. I have another aunt, who was reported missing, had dry leaf-colored eyes, and was called Aunt Preta. So, my family is a bit of that: the old people were



*Maria on the day of her first inauguration as City Mayor, with her mother, Lucy. Nazareth School in Araçuaí, January 1997.  
By: Personal Archive*

mostly rural and some farmworkers and migrants; on the younger end, today, some have gone to university, like me. And some cousins and nephews, nieces are dentists, doctors, geographers, teachers, biologists, mathematicians, and historians and human relations.

My father worked for a long time, showing films. He was a cinematographic operator, so he traveled a lot in these regions of Minas Gerais, mainly north and northeast of Minas. I learned from him how to repair the films; in the past, films, to be shown, had to have two, three machines, because when one cut the tape, we had to sequence it. I remember that this operation was done with razor and clear tape. At that time, it was no longer silent cinema, it already had sound, recorded. I learned that from him, and then, I took a liking for cinematography. We also started to enjoy cinema a little together, with my father. Living in Belo Horizonte, sometimes, when my mother had to do something, he would take us to work. My mother had always been a homemaker, she washed a lot of clothes for other people, made prepared meals, and always took us too.

At the time, we were three brothers born in Montes Claros and two sisters born in Belo Horizonte. Then, in Belo Horizonte, we started to study. That's where I went to primary school.

### **The capital Belo Horizonte, childhood stage, and the first years of studies**

When we came from Montes Claros to Belo Horizonte, my father worked at a film company. As he was considered a businessman, so I went to kindergarten at Sesc<sup>3</sup>. Our kindergarten was up there on Padre Rolim Street, near Brasil Avenue. My older brother and I went to primary school at the Dom Pedro II School Group, in front of the Faculty of Medical Sciences. I still remember the name of our religion teacher at the time, Mrs. Esperança.

During this time, we needed to help the family, so each one of us had a job. I helped to take care of a baby, the son of my first elementary school teacher, who was our neighbor, and the family was from Raul Soares<sup>4</sup>. So, I helped take care of my elementary school teacher's son. I was already about seven or eight years-old; kindergarten, I remember, was when I was five, six years-old.

I went to catechism at the Church Santa Efigênia, near the headquarters of the BG<sup>5</sup>. Where today is the healthcare area<sup>6</sup>, there was a large square, 13 de Maio Square, where we went every day to play. When we didn't go there, we went to the BG square, where there were swings for us to

<sup>3</sup> Commerce Social Services.

<sup>4</sup> Town in the Zona da Mata region of Minas Gerais.

<sup>5</sup> War Battalion, unit in the Brazilian army.

<sup>6</sup> Informal area in Belo Horizonte where most healthcare services, particularly public ones, are focused around.

<sup>1</sup> Practice of kidnapping indigenous women and forcing them to marry.

<sup>2</sup> Bugre is a derogatory term given to indigenous people, as they are considered non-Christian, not civilized by European colonists.



play; we went also in the Municipal Park. My first communion<sup>7</sup> was in the Church Boa Viagem. My childhood, until 1960, 1965, I spent there, in this region.

When we left Montes Claros to go to BH, we lived for a while in the São Lucas neighborhood, also, in the Santa Casa region, with my brother's godmother. She was a pharmacist and a civil servant and housed us for a long time in Belo Horizonte. Then we moved to a shed that was ours. In the rainy season, everyone had to huddle in one bed, to escape the leaks. But in the hot weather it was good, because you could look up at the moon and the stars. From 1965, we were able to buy the house where the family lives until today, which is there between the Glória and Alípio de Melo neighborhoods, in the São Salvador neighborhood. It has been renovated several times.

Even in Belo Horizonte, we had to fetch water from a mine. Where Alípio de Melo is today, at the time it was a large farm, where we used to gather firewood. I remember that I knew how to make a bundle of firewood, but when it came to tying it, I wasn't strong enough. There, where the Contagem Mall is, it was all a cattle ranch, Contagem das Abóboras. There were many *congadeira* families<sup>8</sup> in the region and *folias de reis*<sup>9</sup>.

The mine where we used to get water to drink and wash our clothes was in the Ressaca region, almost ten km from where we lived. And that moment was just a big party, the whole neighborhood got together, there was a certain day for women to go and wash clothes. Then you made the *rodia*<sup>10</sup>. With the basins on their heads, they went with the bundle of clothes; we had to bring food, water, and it was just a huge party. I say party because everything for children is a reason to have fun! Eating was the best part. I've eaten a lot of prepared food, and I think sharing that is the best thing to do, because one eats some of the other's food. When we were small, we had *gamelas*<sup>11</sup>, from our African and indigenous heritage; food was put in the bowls and the grandmothers made *captain*<sup>12</sup>. There were people who said: oh, how disgusting! But the grandmothers made captain to give to us

7 Religious rite in Catholic Church.

8 Congadeiras are people who dance and organize the cultural festivities of Congado. It is a mixture of the celebrations brought by enslaved Africans with colonial Christian religiosity. Its origins date back to an African rite, in which the subjects held a procession (or cortejo) in honor of the Congo Kings, to thank their rulers.

9 The Folia de Reis or Reisada (revelry of kings) is a festive, catholic celebration commemorating the religious feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, which celebrates the Adoration of the Wise Men at the birth of Jesus. In this celebration, the participants visit the houses door to door while singing, remembering the journey of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. Its historical origin is Egyptian and was adopted in Europe by the Romans.

10 Support made from fabric or vines for the head, supporting bundles of firewood or basin with clothes.

11 Type of elongated bowl, shaped out of wood, present in both indigenous and African cultures.

12 Way to knead the food with your hands in the shape of a small cake, which was given to the children to eat

and when we already knew how to eat ourselves, we had spoons; the mothers gave a spoon to each one and shared the food in the bowl.

In the same neighborhood, our “church” was under a tree, it was our little chapel of Saint Anthony, where we did everything: bingo, a contest to be able to get money to build the church and such. And it was a neighborhood where everyone knew each other, at least the older families. When Holy Week and Christmas arrived, even the meals were exchanged, divided. What one made differently, they always took to the other, and even purchases were collective. When CEASA<sup>13</sup> was created, we took that Ressaca bus; I kept looking at the time that the bus was going to go up there on highway, where we lived, and said: “Here comes the bus!”. Then everyone would run around with bags, a cart, like a bricklayer cart, which we took – because, as it was all extremely far, very difficult, you made a purchase for the month. And then you put it together, to make it cheaper for everyone. For example, we would buy an orange bag, then we would come and do the divisions, each one would pay for what they would actually consume. So, there was a lot of good things, but also a lot of suffering, like the water issue, which we didn't have, nor sewage. Because sometimes they say: “I live in the capital”. But people in the capital suffer a lot. We see this, even in the news. There are still many people who suffer from the lack of water, the lack of sewage, sanitation, despite all the advances.

We no longer have our father and mother. Our family, today, is formed of only three siblings, my youngest brother, my youngest sister, who is also 60 years-old, who is the “capitalense”<sup>14</sup> in the family, and me; and two more nieces. My sister and my older brother were married, and each has one daughter. Me and my middle brother are the single ones. And the house has been the same since the 1960s. The youngest of the family God took too early, only three days old. My mother used to wash clothes for other people and was out in the cold a lot at the time of pregnancy.

### School life and racism: *childhood dreams that suffered retaliation*

I finished high school in the São Salvador School Group, in the Glória neighborhood, where my younger brother also studied. My youngest sister got to go to Colégio Polivalente. At that time, we took an admission test; the poor had to go through this process, and you had to study hard, because otherwise you wouldn't get scholarships. So since then, we've had to prove that we were good. And sometimes, we didn't have the money to be able to take the tests. Sometimes, there were teachers who, when you stood out a little, helped you in that direction. I remember my little brother wanting to take the test and crying, because there was no way for us to pay. I did it, after

13 Supply Centers of Minas Gerais SA (CEASA, in Portuguese).

14 Born in Belo Horizonte, capital of the State of Minas Gerais.



high school, with the help of a teacher, who we called Gugu, Maria de Lourdes, who lived in the house across from ours; a black teacher, who was a pianist at that time, in the 1960s. It was thanks to her that I was able to take my admission's test, and then kept going.

There's always a story like this, of helping one another, someone finds a way to help you. And I remember that, when I switched to regular high school, when I took the technical course on commercial practices, I used to go to radio stations a lot to ask for books, on Inconfidência and on Itatiaia stations. Wow, how expansive was Beatriz Alvarenga's physics book! There were those books that you never could afford to buy; so, I went there to second-hand shops, Amadeu, there on Tamoios Street, or at the Galeria do Ouvidor, to buy them. And we always did group work, gathered the least able to and bought the books. Each one gave a little. When the end of the year came, we raffled the book, for those who got it, got it. But it was a way for us to help ourselves study.

I was never one to be very quiet, I always struggled, like so many classmates from my time, we took things head on, we were literally compensating as we went along. If you wanted to win, you had to have someone took a liking to you or someone who discovered you were talented, so to speak. That question of empathy. And we needed a lot of help to be able to study. So much so that only I, among my siblings, managed to go to university.

My experience of racism in these spaces is not much different. We were already bullied back then. Where the human being is, the relationships are mixed up. Which school kid who goes quiet when he sees that another one is different? It's also a lot of what they live at home. I often came home crying, but you had to learn, and parents were educators in the literal sense of the word. We were educated at that time to not to take anything home that was not yours, to not to accept the bullying. So, we also helped to bully others. They said we had "saracura legs"<sup>15</sup>, because the legs were very thin; or "cricket", "little black doll", "get out of here, mosquito!", "nappy hair", and so on. Then, sometimes, at mealtime, when there were soups and they were white, we used to say that it was "pasta from Santa Casa"<sup>16</sup>. It was famous, for those who ate at school, who were poor – those who could afford it didn't need the school lunch, they brought their own snacks. Then, when there was a white colleague, the people kept saying: "look at the 'pasta from Santa Casa'".

We were immensely proud when we ate bread with ground meat, bread with "mortandela"<sup>17</sup>, drank Crush<sup>18</sup>. It was fancy, they were things you didn't have every day at home, only when it was

15 The slaty-breasted wood rail (Aramides saracura) is medium-sized bird, with a heavy-set body and thin legs.

16 The Holy House of Mercy is a Catholic charity hospital and used to be the main source of care for low-income families before the creation of the Unified Healthcare System.

17 Baloney.

18 Soda brand around that the time.

someone's birthday. These childish things that we have a good memory of. In this sense, it was like that also in the matter of racism, because it was a very pure thing, a child's thing; but when you grow up, you see that it's not like that, it's different.

It's only after you realize that this way of being treated has a meaning. For example, I was crazy to learn ballet and play the piano. I received every reason for giving up: because I was too small, or because my hands were small, that I couldn't play the piano, that the piano was expensive, and that ballet was only for the children of those who could afford it. They were things like that, that you talk about they're childhood dreams that later, throughout life, you see the meaning of those dreams or actions; that you've been retaliated against throughout your life. When things are said by children, they are "just kids", it's easy. The question is when it comes from the oldest to the youngest, without the slightest concern, to put you in your place, telling you: "look, you don't belong here". That's when see you have childhood friends who are rich and white, poor and black friends. And then you seek to conquer, or you will prove that, yeah, you can be in that place.

## 2. University trajectory: two higher education courses, working on the side, and other experiences

Through my father's job, who was also a street vendor for Diário de Minas for many years, I got a scholarship to go to an integrated high school. I went to take a course at the Vila Rica School, in the Sion neighborhood, where there was already a preparatory course for the university entrance exam, which was Promove. Right after that, I passed the entrance exam, did a year of Mathematics at FAFI-BH<sup>19</sup> and then I went to PUC Minas<sup>20</sup>, formerly the Catholic University of Minas Gerais.

By the way, I got two higher education degrees. Here in Vale do Jequitinhonha<sup>21</sup>, I went to Law School in Teófilo Otoni. It was this epic journey, leaving Araçuaí on the weekend to Teófilo Otoni in the middle of the week, and returning on Saturday. I went to Law School much due this need, already in the 70s, to understand that whole process of "deconstructing citizenship", of our people. That was when the effervescence of the Basic Ecclesial Communities began and to fight for rights, to ensure the rights of people, mainly the most excluded, and especially from the rural area. So, we needed to know a little more. So, Law, at the time with this intention, to know a little more about reality, to know how to deal with the laws, and discuss the problems we were experiencing a little more deeply. I love the profession I chose, which is Social Work. No matter how conflicting it is and how it doesn't make you "rich", you fulfill yourself as a human being, as a person, as a citizen.

19 Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters (FAFI-BH).

20 Pontifical Catholic University (PUC Minas or PUC-MG).

21 Low-income area in the north of Minas Gerais.

How did I pay for university at that time? Everything was paid for. We had some aid, which PUC always had, to serve the neediest most needy student. But my income was so low, so low, that it didn't even fit the criteria for receiving support. So, how could I study? by taking a loan from the bank. Our colleagues also helped me a lot, several of them were references so I could get a loan from the bank, because they already knew our history.

What I learned at FAFI-BH served foundation for PUC. We also met people there who helped us. Even helped with clothes: I've worn a lot of hand me downs, with no embarrassment. The clothes I had were what I got from them to be able to go to college. Sometimes I shared a snack. Then, they found me going on foot, and said: "no, we will help you take the bus". In my transfer to PUC, I had also gone through a selection process at the state, and those people helped me. I got a degree in Social Work, and, at the time, I was the only black woman in the class.

### 3. Professional trajectory and the path taken in political militancy

Before I went to college, out of necessity, I was determined to go cane-cutting in São Paulo, where we have several acquaintances. While I was figuring this out, I ended up going through a selective process for the state, in the former for Labor, Social Action, and Sports Secretariat. Everything functioned there, in Praça da Liberdade. An aunt of mine worked there and she said: "A position is opening up; you could do it. Don't go to São Paulo". And I ended up passing. The exam included typing, so I took typing at UMES - BH, the Secondary Students Municipal Union of Belo Horizonte, which had a typing school that worked out of the Maletta Building<sup>22</sup>. When I took the admission's exam in the 70s, I came in first place. Then I worked at the completion of degree course Champagnat, on Curitiba Street. I became one of the typists at the State Secretariat. With to this job in the Secretariat, due to my selection, I already started in the Secretary's office, helping the Chief of Staff. And when there was classified work, it always came to us. Sometimes, we worked so hard, that I worked through the night and went straight to class in the morning. When the secretary needed someone to help, and there was no help, I volunteered to stay and learned the job. I remember that later I went to work as coordinator of the Social and Urban Centers, within the Social Assistance Directorate, dealing with exactly these issues of the people included from the communities. So, my experience with social work begins in the early 1970s.

When I had to get an internship, that was a problem: how could someone work eight hours a day and still get an internship? The internship was not always paid, so we chose to do it on

<sup>22</sup> The building complex Conjunto Arcângelo Maletta is a historic building located in the center of Belo Horizonte, built on the Grande Hotel, in 1957.

Saturdays, but those who offered it on Saturday, were usually hospitals, as on-call shifts. So, it's an area that I identify with a lot, healthcare.

That's when it fit like a glove for us who worked and studied the Rondon Project<sup>23</sup>, because we took a month off from work and went to do the internship. It was a way we had to keep our jobs and the fulfill the mandatory internship hours. So, as nothing happens by chance, I ended up here in the Vale do Jequitinhonha, working with the Rondon Project.

That's when I received the proposal from the Cáritas Diocesan<sup>24</sup> to work here in the Vale do Jequitinhonha. So, once again, in coming here, these same co-workers from the Urban Social Services Coordination, helped me to get the things I needed to come. To this day I still have things from those gifts. With that, I want to talk about things that happen in our lives: you aren't alone, or the "I alone", he can, but he can do very little. Now, collectively speaking, we can do much more.

We always worked with that conviction that you didn't just perform a service, you "worked with and for people", in certain situations. We took theories very seriously; so there was this Gramsci<sup>25</sup> that messed with people's heads, and the thing about the "organic intellectual" was important. So, I started working with the issue of rural community associations, with neighborhood associations. Since I worked closely with the church, with the Cáritas, we also worked a lot on the issue of youth, women and children, clubs for mothers, and daycare centers. At the time, the church had opted for the poor, so it had the whole issue of rural communities, that's when the CPT, the Land Pastoral Commission, the Youth Commission, the Child's Pastoral begin to appear. And we also supported union movements.

By the way, the church played a very significant role in the lives of our people, in Brazil as a whole, but especially in this region. And, especially, when the first organizations start to form the unions, it is also through the action of the church. So, we advised the union, and in a way, in the

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Defense extension project for higher education institutions. The participants developed actions to produce benefits for the communities, mainly related to the improvement of the social well-being and the qualification of the public management. It also aimed to consolidate in the Brazilian university student a sense of social and collective responsibility, citizenship, development and defense of national interests, and to provide them with knowledge about the Brazilian reality.

<sup>24</sup> The Cáritas Brasileira was founded in 1956, following the actions of Dom Helder Câmara, then Secretary-General of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB). It promotes solidarity actions aimed at serving communities affected by socio-environmental disasters or in situations of vulnerability.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an Italian philosopher and founding member of the Communist Party of Italy. He was arrested by the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini. He is mainly recognized for his theory of cultural hegemony, which describes how the state uses cultural institutions to conserve power.

1970s, 1980s, the PT<sup>26</sup> started to appear. We helped in this construction, like any good organic intellectual, who saw the need and the importance of transforming people, and who saw the situation that the people lived at that time. But we did this more for the cause, not only because of the enthusiasm, but because of the will and need of the population, which lived in extreme poverty and social injustice (many aggregated families that when they left their lands, left without any rights and were sick). It was a commitment for you to help, and without that concern of being a protagonist.

When someone had an internship, they had it for 30 days; then they could sign up again, and I kept coming here more often. Because right after that, I made chair<sup>27</sup> to oversee the Social Service Department here. So, I came here practically once a month with our classmates, also interns. This connection grew stronger, and because of the church, which has always played a significant role in the social field everywhere, whether with the issue of the first daycare centers, the first hospitals, or the first training schools.

So, with these projects, when I was a part of the Cáritas, 113 projects were carried out, most of them focused on the issue of agriculture, especially on the issue of water in the region. At that time, I didn't see myself living here permanently and that's why until the 1990s, I didn't worry about changing my title. There was always a reason to come home to Belo Horizonte to see friends, to see relatives. You don't leave a part of you overnight. But there comes a time when you have to leave a part of yourself. And talking to people, people were saying: "You have to apply, you have to help us with this". But, until the 1980s, I still managed to make some refusals.

In the 1980s, made our first big move, we had our first councilor for the Workers' Party in Padre Paraíso, Zé Gomes. Later, here in Araçuaí, Manoel Pinheiro, from the Tesouras Community, who left as legacy our people's tribune, which still exists in the chamber. Then Itinga, which was our first city to have a mayor from the party, my co-worker Solano de Barros, who worked with me here at the school.

## 4. Professional rise and overcoming adversity

### The first run for mayor of Araçuaí (MG)

In 1990 I launched myself as a candidate for mayor here in Araçuaí. A history very rich with meanings. We didn't have a party fund as we do today, we sold pigs, eggs, there were people who gave two or three dozen eggs for the fund. We the entire militancy participated. Who were the

<sup>26</sup> The Workers' Party.

<sup>27</sup> Term used, at the time, to refer to an undergraduate course discipline.

militants? They were workers, like teachers; there were the people from the cultural sector, who at that time, supported us with cultural movements, shows, and forró<sup>28</sup> at rallies. And we really enjoyed all of this, and each one who helped didn't think about what they'd get later on, they just always thought about improvements for everyone in the community.

Then, that moment comes when you stand between a rock and a hard place, and you have to give in to the yearnings of the moment. When it came to sealing an identity with the local people, with the local people, working on the commitments, there was had that rhetoric: "you aren't from this place, you're an outsider". Then we also start to have to reconstruct that thinking, the way of being, doing and seeing the world, and begin to perceive ourselves not as a citizen of a place, but of the world. And it's where you are during those moments, then you realize that you have the right to choose, and to be where you please. You realize that, even if you don't have a geographical birth, you have the identity that was built. And you begin to want to understand what it means to be Brazilian. That's it. So, when they come to talk to me that I'm not from here, I say: I'm in Brazil, I'm Brazilian, and the Brazilian territory is immense, and if it's here in this place that I settle my life, that I pay my taxes, that's where I relate to as a rightful citizen and in fact... Today I have the title of honorary citizen, which was granted to me – but would I need that to prove that I have the right to have rights? So, this generates a whole philosophizing and remaking of thoughts, concepts, and prejudices. But instead of instilling in me a feeling of inertia, of not belonging, we worked on the positive side, and called people on to start having another look, another thought, another way of seeing. There are so many people who act as if they aren't from the place, and who use the place for their own benefit ...!

In 1992, we ran for mayor, with 4 candidates and we weren't elected. However, there are those who say that we did win the elections, we just didn't get the office because of coronelismo<sup>29</sup> and the particularistic deals that still prevailed at the time, and we didn't have much experience of control in the elections. We had news of ballot boxes that went up and down by ropes in the forum building, of electoral IDs retained for people to pick up after the elections and agreed benefits, votes were switched at counting, right when they were being checked. We lived with jagunços<sup>30</sup> at the time, things that we don't even hear about anymore; there was a shooting in the city, to intimidate us, not to mention the bombs that were thrown in our backyards.

<sup>28</sup> Forró is a style of music and dance, typical in the Northeast of Brazil and in the north of Minas Gerais.

<sup>29</sup> Cultural political form in Brazil, where a local leader, known as "colonel", carries the votes of the people who are dependent on him. This political arrangement was the informal norm for centuries, and while it is still present, it is less prevalent and takes on different presentations than just the all-powerful landowner.

<sup>30</sup> Men who fulfilled the criminal activities of colonels, including death threats and homicide.



## The first black woman mayor, in the *little princess of the Vale do Jequitinhonha*: the faces of racism and sexism in public life

The second time we ran for mayor, we had already a little more experience. So, the control over the inspectors was tough, and the parties had representatives who took turns day and night while they were there. On the day of counting the votes, the judge made the following observation: "Any attempt to change the will of the people, I send you, from here, to jail". The place was packed with people wanting to know the result. With every ballot box tallied, people cheered! Near the end, I was practically consecrated, the judge advised me to go out with the police, because there was no way to contain the people. During this entire period, we suffered many attempts at physical aggression, but the moral and psychological aggression was worse and constant. We responded with work, which was collective, and seeking as much transparency as possible. We adopted the participatory budget, we adopted a "literal" accountability method - we put it in the public square,

*Entry to the Solemn Session with Banda Marista of Araçuaí. Maria do Carmo in the center, flanked by President Lula on the right; by the Deputy-Mayor of Angra dos Reis, José Antônio Martins Santana, on the left; and by Mayor Luiz Sérgio, at the back.*  
By: Personal Archive



we used the Market wall to do this. That bureaucratic accountability was also of no use to those who couldn't read and write. So, we tried to show that which is technical in the language of the people.

I was sued by the opposition ten times, irresponsible, that dragged on for a long time. Because of the symbols, of Brazil's own political culture, black people aren't found in politics, especially women, who come from the people, from the church movement, and mainly from left-wing party. We denounced it. We opened racism suits; but, at the time, the authorities' "perception" was that it wasn't racism. Then it was easier to put it as a slander, or set it aside, let it go. But there was even the incitement of children to stone us. There was a lot of "black people belong in slave quarters", "a woman's place is in the bed, in the kitchen". All these concepts and prejudices rooted in our society, emerged during this period and, mainly, by traditional families, with exceptions. They always asked: "where's the mayor?" And when they looked, it was a "black stump", as they said. They also said that I'd only take office if there were no men in the city - it was necessary to call for police reinforcement.

I remember a rally that was even historic, in the market square, I think it was one of the last. I used the image of Our Lady Aparecida<sup>31</sup>: "I didn't come here because I wanted to; we black people aren't here because we want to, we were brought here after all! If a black person's place is in the slave quarters, here in Brazil we can't say that. I know of a black woman that many white people, during time of the crisis, appeal to her, Our Lady Aparecida", as a way to neutralize that violence, due to her symbolization as a black sanctity. The point is to occupy spaces that aren't traditionally destined for us, whether we are women, black, indigenous people, believers of a certain faith. This makes us bigger and stronger.

### The Boys of Araçuaí win the country over

The fact that Araçuaí is in the center of the Vale do Jequitinhonha, in the polygon of drought and is the city of greatest expression, put the spotlight on us. At the time of one of the great droughts, we needed some Basic Food Baskets<sup>32</sup>. One of the important partnerships that we had here, at first, was with Natura. We had the *Ser Criança* project, with Tião Rocha as coordinator. With Natura's support, we rehearsed some songs with the boys, and at Christmas, we went to São

<sup>31</sup> Patroness Saint of Brazil, the story of Our Lady Aparecida is that in 1717 some fishermen found an image of Our Lady of Conceição, darkened by the mud of the river. After finding the image, the fish, that before were scarce, were plentiful. She's called "Aparecida" due to having "appeared" in the river.

<sup>32</sup> Cestas básicas, or basic food baskets, are the essential food items for every Brazilian household for a month. The concept was first designed by the Getúlio Vargas administration in 1938 and today is calculated by the Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE). Most supermarkets carry a ready-made selection available for purchase.

Paulo, to the company's factory, to thank them. It was so impactful that the Meninos de Araçuaí choir was born, traveling around Brazil, and they have been around for over 20 years. Today they're totally independent of the local government but are partners. We always believed in these projects, where people take ownership of what is offered to them, and then become protagonists in their own history. Today the project is already in its seventh generation and through its resources, the Meninos de Araçuaí cinema and the Dedo de Gente Cooperative were created, where they produce a lot in the media and crafts area.

Once the two terms in Araçuaí were completed, we helped in the electing our deputy for succession. I dedicated myself to regional and political projects at the federal level that were taking place in the region. I have always been present as an affiliate and companion in all electoral disputes in the region during these more than 30 years in the Workers' Party.

### Experience in the Federal Government

I was invited by our first Minister of Racial Equality, Matilde Ribeiro, to be a part of the SEPPIR's staff, the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality. It was a unique experience for me to be able to contribute, at the national level, with achieving respect and the rights for our Afro-Brazilian population. So, there were unique moments, such as the approval of the Racial Equality Statute, which was paralyzed for more than 10 years in Congress, as well as the issue of the Indigenous Statute, also without progress for more than 20 years. The emblematic issue of our domestic workers: the majority of our female population is in this category, and they weren't recognized as legal and de facto workers. These were arduous struggles, even though we're aware there's still resistance, to the registration of our workers. But also, their insertion in the political life of our Brazil, participation in associations, unions; integration with universities, which at that time was also opening up to their children. But mainly through the recognition of their dignity as workers who have worked a lifetime helping to build many families, not having a place to live, a school, or daycare for their children. Not having the same labor rights as other workers; that is, not being recognized as professionals.

There was the moment of the Maria da Penha Law, how it affects each one of us! We know the stories of our grandmothers, our great grandmas, our mothers and aunts, nieces, friends, colleagues, and anonymous women. And we also know the meaning of that. I was there, face to face, with Maria da Penha on the day Lula signed the law, so much emotion and pride. Another very important moment that I keep was when we worked on the project that recognized our traditional midwives, as a profession, and the resistance of even part of academia! It impacts us to know that, for example, here in the Vale do Jequitinhonha, we have midwives who, with their knowledge, have brought thousands of living beings to the world. How can this person not be considered as wise, as

a rightful citizen and, who in fact contributes to Brazilian society, even more so in a country in need of medical care? These people are working and have been meeting the needs of the population, which is actually the duty of the state.

I'm remembering these projects, because they have great significance throughout Brazil. When we arrive at our places, then the concern is how to make this a reality in our small and medium-sized cities, which is the reality of most Brazilian municipalities. These are projects that were important to me in terms of moving me as a human being, as a person, as a citizen, as a public agent. Because we don't separate these things.

The great challenge of being a woman in politics is to remain yourself, living all this, without losing your essence. Positive and negative external influences interfere with your daily life. But in what way can you remain a woman?

### Quotas in the affirmative action policy

It was really the boom within public policies regarding to affirmative action. The quotas are there today to lead us to reflect even on our recent past in Brazil, in which quotas existed; but they weren't for black people and the excluded. And were always naturally accepted. Which were the quotas for the children of farmers, including in universities, in the main posts, for being considered as such. And that some places were reserved for them, and nobody ever complained about it. And it was according to the number of cattle.

Quotas put our academic and professional world in check. Our academia, which has always been considered a space of excellence, starts being questioned. Because if this place is of excellence and is universal, where are most Brazilians? Academia also has the constant challenge of contributing with its thinking, with its science, to create quality life for the people. So, is academia's production actually going to be applicable in the construction of dignified life for people? Or to get people out of difficult situations? Then we change the question: Is academia prepared for this? Who are the people in academia? So, this is a discussion that has to go through the issue of public management.

Those who always defended white supremacy, say quotas are a negative thing, a stain in the most noble space of academia. And it started to generate contrarian, controversial, and confusing discussions in people's heads. That's what goes for society. The important thing is that you see that quotas are an instrument that is being made available to people in society to match conditions. And also, to correct distortions. Whether in the offer of products, in the offer of benefits, which were always channeled to the same individuals. Quotas exist to try and create a balance, including in the workplace. Is there black and social representation at the scale of command of large companies and industries and even state-owned companies? And in the political world?



Now, as this is not politically convenient, because it touches on privileges, it was camouflaged and always placed as an offer, but it is actually an achievement.

I understood our senator Benedita da Silva<sup>33</sup> very much, when, years ago, she was one of the first to come out in defense of quotas. She knew what she was talking about. It is not ideal, but at this moment in Brazil, with the political conditions we have, in these structuring conditions, there must be a way out of this situation. So, quotas are a necessary and temporary instrument. And I don't mean that it will end soon, no. Because there are walks that we walk a lifetime until we reach the ideal. The ideal is what is just.

It's the law today in Brazil, Law 10.639/2003, Law 11.645/2003, the various UN resolutions, we have ILO Convention 169, that deal with the issues of traditional communities. Why is it so difficult for people to understand that there is jurisprudence on this? Why can't they really happen?

Who is the old politics? The old politics is them, who don't want to let the Brazilian people take over its history. And history is dynamic. Today is you, tomorrow is another, respectfully. And our young people, academia has a responsibility in that, schools have a responsibility in that too. When I say responsibility, it is in the sense that, since childhood, as in traditional communities, knowledge must be passed on from the oldest to the youngest. In order to show our youngest that they should not be ashamed of being who they are today, of their past, and that they continue defending causes.

### Back to Araçuaí and to politics

I retired in 2012, through the INSS<sup>34</sup>. During that period, I was in Brasília, and then I returned to the Vale again. I'm not retired politically speaking, because for me politics is not a profession, but it's a provision of services to the population, a mission. So, even though I spent eight years in the city hall of Araçuaí, I found myself entitled not to do the so-called "old politics", but to be and remain political, in the literal sense of the word, to be a political agent. Not retiring through the job.

So, I ended up here, where I am today, when I thought I would come back only to take care of myself and my family. There are people who talk like this, who are even mean: "Oh, because you aren't married, you don't have children, so this is all you do!". No, this isn't all we do, we also have the right to exist and be happy. When we came from the university, it came with all that fire that made you think: "I'm going to marry the community". So, my marriage to the community was like

33 Benedita da Silva is a black woman career politician from the Workers' Party. She started out as a domestic worker, and eventually was a deputy in the Constituent Assembly and the first woman and black governor of Rio de Janeiro. She is currently a federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro.

34 Brazilian Social Security Institute.

that, it lasted longer than I thought. When I realized, I already had more than 30 years of life in the midst of this people, which is not by chance, neither for me, nor surely for the people with whom we are in everyday life.

### Religion and ancestry

My family is Catholic, especially when we were already living in the city; when we lived in the countryside, not so much. But in my family, today we have some who are evangelical (plus the people who live in São Paulo), a some who are spiritists, and the majority is Catholic. We have a very peaceful coexistence in this sense, including strengthening ourselves with each other in our respective religions, when necessary - it's a harmonious issue. We loved to follow the Folia de Reis!

But we also had the opportunity to get to know other religions, my godmother was of French descent, her name was Sophia, mother of Godmother Minerva who was a Kardecist. Then we had contacted with another side of spirituality. And my relationship with religions of African origin is natural. My family, for example, has a Montes Claros custom that we still remember a lot, we'd go like this: "the caboclinhos, where are the caboclinhos?". There's a neighborhood where some caboclinhos<sup>35</sup> live, it's a group that parades with indigenous clothes, to the sound of guitar, viola, and fiddle.

The first store I worked at was Abre Gira, a shop selling religious articles in Belo Horizonte, geared towards low-income people, there on Caetés Street, close to Praça da Estação. Then for a while, I was secretary at the Spiritist Umbandista Federation of Minas Gerais. Godmother Minerva was a secretary there voluntarily. When she got older, she took me to help with the work, and I kept the minutes of the meetings. Because at that time there was a great deal of strictness with religions of African origin; today, despite the so-called "democracy", the openness, there's a prejudice, which sometimes happens with more intensity and with a lot of violence. So, there was a rigor from the state itself. For example, Umbanda houses or temples were required to keep monthly reports or minutes of activities, and you had to send this to the police. So, I helped, I made kept several minutes for that, each temple, each *terreiro* had to have its book of minutes and that had to be inspected by the police, at the time, by the Federal Police, if I'm not mistaken. You had to have the police chief's authorization to function, this was a condition.

So, there are's all this knowledge that I acquired and this connection, that later on, when on 2005 onwards, when I was part of SEPPIR, the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality of the Lula government, as Director for Traditional Communities. Later, as Deputy-Secretary and

35 Indigenous folklore present in the Northeast of Brazil and the north of Minas Gerais. Also known as Caiporas, caboclinhos protect the forests by tricking those who want to harm it.



Manager of the FIPIR - Intergovernmental Forum on Racial Equality Policies - I learned even more. I met several people who were part of the National Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality, and there were all religions of African origin and all the traditional communities represented, especially indigenous, gypsies<sup>36</sup>, quilombolas, arabic, jewish, and several representations.

## 6. Black feminism and the confrontations of black women

I believe that our daily life is marked by this daily confrontation. Every time you're in front of a mirror, you'll see your image as it is. Sometimes you won't be able to show how you are on the inside, not on that day and time, but depending on the day, you can see it clearly. When looking in the mirror, you have to try to see if the image you see in the mirror is really you, what you would like to see. Of course, today at 66, I have the peace of mind for that; I wouldn't say the same thing if I were 15 years-old, which is when this whole fight starts, not just because of blackness or the fact that you're a woman, but the culture that's already starting to act on you.

I remember once, between eight and ten years-old, when you started to change your body, I was playing with my brothers on our street block, and then an older boy passed by and said: "You know you have a jewel? I want this little jewel for me". Then, during this other time, we started to realize these were the famous pick-up lines, to put it into today's language. Then we remember other moments, when I was already doing the basics, once I even put it to my mother: "Mom, I don't want you to ask me to go to that place and talk to that person anymore". Because I had a negative experience with this person in my pre-adolescence. When a child or teenager is afraid, they're often capable of various actions and reactions. I remember that we took a taxi, we were going in the same direction, I had some bags in my hand, there was space in the car and the person came and didn't stay in the space that fit him. And the taxi driver, seeing everything and didn't do anything. And when the person realized that I wanted to get out of the car, they gave me, as if it were compensation, a packet of fruit. Every time I eat this fruit, I make this association and I don't really like that fruit anymore.

And this continues to happen today with all women, mainly because it's historically accepted that every black woman has an obligation to be available to everyone. So, many times the look we get is not that of a companion; the first impression is this, that we are objects of bed and table. We can observe this, both in relation to the people who are closest to you, even in the same party, or distant.

36 Gypsy (cigano) is an accepted umbrella term including peoples such as the Rom, Calon, and Sinti ethnicities.

There are also colleagues of ours who sometimes out their sexist views: "it's the male who is saying, the superior who is saying". We have this in our daily lives. That is why we embraced this cause of combating violence against women, children, the most vulnerable, because these are situations that involve defenseless people, who are in our daily lives.

In our case, black women, who live with the issue of domestic violence, we know of terrible cases. Women won't always come forward, for various reasons, whether it's due to access, of where she lives, due to finances, and the fact that her partner is often also black and therefore will be more exposed to violence as well. It often seems quite simple to us, but for those who live this situation it isn't. She leaves, and half a meter later she is already bumping into the people or the person who abused her. In the big city, with the instruments that exist such as the women's police station, the Casa Benvinda<sup>37</sup> in Belo Horizonte, we have more opportunities, including of preserving people, offering a guarantee of leaving their home, with their children and elderly. But in a small town, where does she go? Because there everyone knows, everyone knows the name, surname, and address.

And in the pandemic, has it increased? It increased in terms of statistical numbers, but in fact, it's not only that it increased, it's that it became evident, statistically speaking. Another issue is that of violence against black men, it's public and notorious.

I also remember a friend, we became friends due to a circumstance in life, in the 1980s. We went to a meeting of Christian women in politics, which was in Guayaquil, Ecuador. I remember that she spoke about the situation of black women in Maranhão: "I know black women who today are afraid of becoming pregnant and don't want to get pregnant, so as not to suffer, so as not to see their children suffer, because she sees others suffering or they've gone through it themselves".

And there is also the issue of our acculturation, which has always been seen as a policy to destroy our identity, in the sense of saying that black people are ugly. I look in the mirror and I don't see it in me, nor in several people in my family, and colleagues. But there's the global standard of beauty, of this phenotypical beauty. So really people who are deprived of this beauty, does it take away from them the right to the dignity of being happy, to live with dignity among people?

So, I believe that the one thing that we have to work hard for not to lose is the sense that diversity exists, and that it has its purpose. And what is your relationship or your responsibility in all of this? All these issues, such as that of femicide, prostitution, early pregnancy, when we start looking, if you don't focus on things, you just go insane. So, I think that these issues cannot be left out of the daily discussions. We cannot deny them.

37 Women's entry point for shelter from domestic violence. Shelters are in secret locations.

## The strength of the black woman

The woman's strength comes from this ability that the woman has to see the world in a very particular way. And to rebuild, here comes the example of the phoenix. Just like a phoenix, through all tribulations and hardships that she's subjected to, she will always rebuild herself. This vision that we have, facing forwards, based on what our ancestors lived.

You have an origin. You know your origin. And there are scholars who say that, of course, it's not you who choose where to come from, where to be, there is a whole arrangement. In our composition, we are mystics too. So, I think that we get strength from that. And nothing better than tough love to learn how you position yourself. That is, these punches you take, these punches, this negative energy that they try to put you on. With that you learn and comprehend. And then it's up to you to seek that insight, on your own.

## 7. How would you like to be remembered

I would like to be remembered as a person who knows that, because of the profession I have chosen, the circumstances I have in life, be it family life, be it social life, the opportunities I have had, those I haven't, and I could choose what to do, what to carry on. The person who perceives every day, already said the philosopher, the great Socrates, who little knows. I'm one of those people who knows I still have a lot to learn. And as long as I have energy, I'll have this willingness to learn more. And if they let me, I want to continue contributing.

I never want to impose anything on anyone because life is not made of imposition. We know the history of everything that was imposed. And the results of that imposition..



*Maria evaluating and discussing with a municipal worker at a construction site. Araçuaí, 1998.*

*By: Personal Archive*

Cleide Barcelos  
Sérgio Luiz Felix da Silva  
Rosânia Sousa

# 9 CLEIDE BARCELOS

## 1. Childhood and Adolescence: upbringing

I'm Cleide, lieutenant colonel in the Minas Gerais Military Police. I have three siblings, two women and one man. I'm the eldest. My father is a sergeant in the Minas Gerais Military Police and has been in the reserve for over ten years. My mother was trained as a teacher. She worked for a while, but as soon as she married my father and stopped working, she started to dedicate herself to the house.

Teaching is a priesthood. Today, I teach and I've realized that so much from us stay in the people with whom we have contact, especially with those who really want to learn. Throughout my trajectory, I had countless teachers who really left a big mark in my life, people who were dedicated, committed, who tried to teach us in the best possible way, not only the subjects for which they were responsible, but also about other aspects of life.

My childhood and that of my siblings were incredibly happy, despite the financial difficulties. Several times my mother had to cook on the wood-burning stove because she had no money to buy gas. Sometimes, even to go



to school. So, I got up early, five or five-thirty in the morning, to be able to cook yam or cassava root. They were cheaper food that we could and then go to school.

Despite all the hardships, my childhood and adolescence were very good periods of being with my siblings, due to the education that our mother and father gave us. At the time, we thought it was bad, but now that we have a son, my view has totally changed.

My mother always taught us to be fraternal, to share things with one another. She also taught us, from an early age, how to do all the house chores. She said that, in her absence, we should be able to do everything. And she recommended: “You women are going to study, you are going to get a job, because on the day you get married and the man raises his hand to hit you, tell him to leave quickly, send him away, because you can survive alone, you don't need him”. And she added: “If they lose respect, send them away!”. Today, I tell her: “Mom, I'm working with domestic violence prevention, and I always remember what you said to us”.

As we grew up, she taught us to divide the tasks. We had to clean the house, make breakfast, lunch, dinner, do the laundry, clean the yard, etc. There was a rota. Since we were little, we got used to it, especially my brother and I who is in the military, with the chore schedule. One week, one was responsible for breakfast, the other for lunch, one for dinner, the other for laundry, cleaning the yard, etc. So, we all had chores, we knew how to do something, including my brother.

There was a neighbor who told my mother that my brother would ‘turn’ homosexual because he was only among women. Look at the narrow mind of these people, thinking that it changes the nature of the person. They think that men do not have to do certain things, especially housework.

Actually, learning to do all kinds of housework was very good for my brother because, when he was accepted to the Military Police<sup>1</sup>, he had to move to Ipatinga. And he had no trouble since he knew how to do everything. He knew how to cook, do laundry, iron his clothes. Certainly, the only difficulty was the distance from the rest of the family. His wife, my sister-in-law, sometimes laughs a lot about it. When she was on bedrest for their two daughters, my brother did everything inside the house, washed, ironed, cooked. And so, she was able to fulfill be on bedrest with no worries.

Anyway, we fulfilled a whole range of chores. For example, when I was responsible for the laundry, I preferred to wake up at 5 am, so that at 7 am the clothes were already on the clothesline. And look, back then, laundry wasn't done with a washing machine. It was in a washing tank. The first washing machine we bought was after I passed the public exam and started working. Me and

<sup>1</sup> Military Police of the State of Minas Gerais (PMMG). The Military Police is not a branch of the Armed Forces, nor does it apply to the military. It functions parallel to the Civil Police and is mostly responsible for routine policework, such as patrolling the streets and answering to emergency calls.

my brother, who worked since the age of 16, pulled our money and bought, paying in installments, a washing machine for our mother. I was already 19 years old. Until then, people washed and wrung clothes in the tank and then spread it on the barbed wire clothesline.

Sometimes, we joked with our mom arguing: “Ah mom! And what are you going to do?”, Trying to put her name on the rota as well. But we were the children, we were the ones who needed to learn things. And today, all four know how to do everything in the house.

Our parents didn't let us to go to parties alone on the weekends. With my younger sister, for example, even when she was 18, my father continued to take her and pick her up at the bus stop when she went to and from school.

We, as young people, failed to realize the importance of this type of concern. We think our parents want to take away our freedom. But today, I'm very grateful to them. It was thanks to this that all four siblings managed to win in some way, managed to establish their families. Anyway, this has shaped us in such a way that I try to educate my son in the same way. Today, we all value the teachings that our parents have given us.

Another issue where my mother was always incisive was the racial issue. This matters to her a lot. She told us that black people need to stand out, and in the right way, whether in studies or at work. You need to stand out in what you do. And I believe that this was especially important in our upbringing. She always positioned herself that way, trying to teach us, perhaps because of her life story, with the things she experienced. So, she always said to us: “Look, you need to stand out wherever you are. Not out of vanity, but because you have something to prove”.

Now, my dad, because he was a police officer, always guided us a lot, taught us a lot about what to do, how to do it, how to talk to people, how to have resilience to face the situations that we would experience all the time.

*Celebration of graduation in Psychology for her younger sister, Cleliane. Husband Joaldo; son Daniel; parents José Teodoro and Maria Geralda; brother Cleiderson and sisters Clelia and Cleliane; sisters-in-law Jailda, Celia and brother-in-law César; stepdaughter Caroline, and nieces Cecília and Alice.*

*By: Personal Archive*





As for religion, despite not going to church regularly, my parents declare themselves to be Catholic. When I was young, I used to go to church alone on Sundays. Much older, when I went to work in Venda Nova, I visited an evangelical church and converted. Later, I started attending the Central Baptist Church of Venda Nova. In my home, only I attend this church, for the past 17 years. This experience was a watershed in my life because the Lord needs to be placed at the center of all our desires, of all our will. We are not perfect, we make mistakes all the time, but even admitting these mistakes is a basic prerequisite for Him to act in our lives. It's from the moment that we recognize that we know nothing, that we do not have the power over all things, that we recognize that the power is all His, that he has this primacy in our lives!

## 2. School trajectory

I went to preschool for three years, but since my birthday is in May, I had to do the third year twice. Then I did it went to first to the fourth grade at a school in the Jaqueline neighborhood. At that time, I already suffered from bullying for being too thin. In addition, my mother braided my hair. And people kept making fun of my braids, making jokes.

I felt out of place because I was very thin. Today, differently, I try to lose weight, but it isn't easy! I was so skinny, really skinny! I felt out of place and people, especially classmates, always made fun: "Olive Oil!". And they gave me a lot of nicknames, made a lot of jokes. This made me so anxious, that for years I didn't wear shorts or skirts, because I got extremely stressed out by my shins, I thought they were too thin.

As a teenager, I got really stressed out. There was a boy who studied at the same school as me and who sometimes went to the door of my house to make these jokes. So, it bothered me for a long time. Today, I see that it bothered me because I allowed it. So, if I go to the beach, wear a bikini, for example, I owe nothing to anyone! That's how the Lord made me, and I don't have to worry about that. But adolescence was a time when it hurt me a lot. Sometimes children, and even teenagers, make these jokes with each other because they don't know the impact it has.

Even at the time of the Police Academy, there was a colleague who, because I was very thin, thought I wouldn't be able to handle it. He thought I was not going to endure the four years of the Officer Training Course (CFO). But he didn't say that to me during the course, he said it to a friend of mine a long time afterwards. The issue of my physique made people very suspicious about my ability, or not, to get things done. But glory to God, everything worked out.

I attended fifth grade at a school in the São Benedito neighborhood. The sixth grade, I attended private school. Because of tuition, I couldn't keep going. In the seventh and eighth grades,

I studied at the same school as my brother. To go to this school, we had to walk, one hour there, one hour back. We had no money to pay for bus fare. My mother says that she worried if we'd be able to make the journey. After all, I was very tall and very thin. It weighed less than 50 kg. One day, she came with us to try it out. Anyway, we never skipped school, not even because of the weather. If the rain caught us halfway, for example, we wouldn't stop, we'd continue even with rain.

I attended all of high school at Colégio Tiradentes<sup>2</sup>, Anexo Minas Caixa. When I joined, it had just opened and was close to our home. We kept walking to and from school. The walking time was shorter, about 40 to 50 minutes.

And I've always loved to study. I never had difficulties to learn any subjects, to take tests. My mother used to remember that when I was in the seventh and eighth grades, there were strikes at school. And, with that opportunity, I stayed at home studying. If children today have computers, games, cell phones, a lot of things, at the time, during strikes, I studied. I took the books, did the exercises, read ahead. When classes re-started, I'd already done all the exercises, everything was copied in the notebooks. This was a particularly good, peaceful time, and I was able to channel my efforts into the study.



*Cleide in her 2nd grade uniform.*

*By: Personal Archive*

<sup>2</sup> Public school, administered by PMMG, which has several units in cities in the state of Minas Gerais. Its objective is to offer school education to the military police officers and their dependents, with a military-style education. Again, this institution is not connected to the Armed Forces.

In the seventh and eighth grades, I had a History teacher who noticed my love of reading. So, she asked me to read a book and give a lecture to the class. And I thought that was wonderful, because it was a great incentive to be able to broaden my perspective. In high school, I also had other teachers who ended up becoming a reference point.

Childhood and adolescence are phases in which you can be influenced in different ways. When you have the right person to direct you, it helps a lot. And that contributed a lot to my training. So, practically all the teachers contributed in some way so that I could be what I'm today. I'm very grateful to all of them, because we also saw their obstacles in being able to work, especially in a public school, where there was always a lot going on. But they overcame all these difficulties in order to really teach us in the best way possible. It was an exceptionally good experience. Except for the issue of bullying by some colleagues, high school was a wonderful experience.

At Colégio Tiradentes, a public school, there were no strikes - nor other problems that sometimes exist in other public institutions. I always had a good performance at school, but I had a below-average score in English. My mother, to this day, jokes with me about this: "This girl cried!". I really did! I wanted to take a make-up exam to remove that grade from my transcripts, but it didn't work. I got a good grade, but the bad one wasn't taken out. It's there in my transcripts. The only below average grade in my life is there. At the time, I set a goal, took the English book, translated all of it, did all the exercises. When the teachers arrived in the classroom, I had done the exercises a long time ago.

In my final year, when I finished high school, I wanted to take the exams for the Officer Training Course (CFO) and for the Air Force Academy (AFA). I always wanted to join the Military Police. I don't know what drew me to it. Perhaps the fact that my father is a military police officer. But he never imposed it, nor did he encourage or dissuade it. He left it up to me and did the same for my siblings.

At the time, due to financial difficulties, I thought I wouldn't be able to go to university. I needed to work, help my parents and siblings, and getting a college degree was going to make things very difficult for me. Studying would be incompatible with the need to work. We didn't have the money to register for the university entrance exam. But it turned out that an aunt on my mother's side lent my dad the money to register me for both the police and air force exams. At the same time, a Math teacher, knowing about our financial conditions, raised funds, bought the candidate's manual, and gave it to me. Not only did she buy the candidate's handbook, but she also registered me.

And, in the end, I got into both the CFO and the Mathematics undergraduate degree at the Federal University of Minas (UFMG). I passed the first and second stages. Funny thing was that the day of the final round of the second stage for the UFMG's exams, the Physics exam, coincided with the day of the last phase of the CFO, the day of the interview. I don't remember if the test started at 7 or 8 am, I just know that at 10 am I had to be at the Military Police Academy of Minas Gerais (APMMG) to be interviewed by the officers. At the time, there was an interview with the officers to be able to join the CFO.

So, what did I do? When I went in to take the exam, I told my dad: "Dad, how about this? You stay with the taxi outside the college building. I take the test and do what I can. When it's time, I'll hand over the exam, get out, get in the taxi and we go to the Academy". That's what I did.

When the result for the second stage came out, so did the result of the CFO. I was approved in both. My mother was very moved. I think that she keeps the newspaper with the approved list until today. But I wasn't able to get the college degree in Mathematics at UFMG at that time, because at the CFO, the first year of boarding school is mandatory. And it wasn't possible to register at UFMG and defer immediately. So, I had to choose. And I chose the CFO. I imagined that I would try another degree at another opportunity, and that's what happened.

The CFO, which lasted four years, had countless classes in Law. These are recognized by Cruzeiro do Sul University, which opens the possibility of obtaining a new degree. It's a distance learning course and, glory to God, I ended up graduating in Law. I don't intend to practice, but it's an extremely necessary knowledge for the execution of my activities. After these degrees, I concluded two postgraduate degrees, CESP and CEGESP<sup>3</sup>.

The CEGESP I attended was with an exam. I was approved and took the course in 2017. In addition, I have an MBA from Estácio de Sá, in Human Resources Strategic Management; a specialization in Military Sciences, from Cruzeiro do Sul University; and, now, I'm taking a course on domestic violence.

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<sup>3</sup> CESP (Specialization Course in Public Security) and CEGESP (Specialization Course in Strategic Management of Public Security) are postgraduate specialization courses for intermediate (captains) and superiors (majors and lieutenants colonels) officers, respectively. For a long time, participation in these courses depended on approval in an internal competition at PMMG. As of 2006, the competition was abolished and a set of criteria for selection was adopted. In 2016, there is another change in favor of the internal competition. Both courses are a prerequisite for career advancement.

### 3. Professional trajectory

When I joined the CFO, one of my goals was to get good grades so I could choose where to go. In the Military Police of Minas Gerais, the designation for a given city is according to your placement. This, as I see it, is spectacular because you are valued for your merit. My goal was to stay in Belo Horizonte.

But I lived in Santa Luzia<sup>4</sup> and the Police Academy is in Prado<sup>5</sup>. And, if I were to take buses every day to get to and from the Academy, it would hinder my study schedules. I wouldn't be able to study, I wouldn't be able to do all the activities, I wouldn't be able to dedicate myself the way I would like. And, if my goal was to get that classification to have the right to choose where to go, I had to dedicate myself to studies. Knowing these difficulties, my option was to, even after the internship period, stay the four years at the Academy. And that's what I did.

I wanted to go to the 13th Military Police Battalion (13th BPM). That was my first option. I was very fond of the 13th BPM, because my father served there for 15 years. This unit had two vacancies only and I got one of them with the classification I obtained in the CFO. Assigned to the 13th Battalion, I got to work with my father for two or three years. During this experience, he guided me a lot.

At the 13th BPM, I always worked in operational activities, coordinating the shift policing, always on the street in contact with the beat police. I stayed there, in operational activity, for approximately nine years. Then, I was assigned to the then created 49th BPM. I went to work on the battalion's organizational communication. I was in this activity for about ten months. But I always liked operational activity, being on the street.

I had already been promoted to captain and was eager to go back to work on the street. The Battalion had three companies, and two were of territorial responsibility. Then, at a certain time, the unit commander was reorganizing some postings and I thought that I could be contemplated. I wasn't! I thought, "Oh, Lord, I wasn't considered, now what? I'll stay here. But, glory to God, let's move on". Until the unit commander called me and said: "Look, you'll command the Tactical Mobile Company"<sup>6</sup>. And I was surprised. There was no other woman who had commanded a Tactical

Mobile company. Actually, there had been no female officers in a Tactical Mobile at that time. And I thought, "A gift from God."

I accepted and it was a wonderful experience. In the Tactical Mobile, perhaps because I've been in the battalion for so long, I didn't face the same difficulties when I was an aspiring officer. As an aspirant, at times, I had difficulties with some policemen who were older. Sometimes, if I said anything, some looked at me as less than, and I felt that it wasn't only because of my little experience but because I was a woman. But little did they know that my father had already taught me a lot. Sometimes, I'd try to correct something, do something. I had to impose myself all the time. But not in an authoritarian way. He said: "Look, you're going to do this here because of this, this and this". The challenge was to not only to be firm but, at the same time, manage to harmonize the whole environment so that people really did what was necessary, to fulfill our mission in the best possible way.

In this beginning as an aspirant, one of the challenges, if not the greatest, was to break this paradigm: some people's doubts as to my ability, due to being new and a woman. Sometimes, I'd say something to a lower-ranking officer, and he disregarded it. For example, it wearing the vest was mandatory. So, I let them know: "Guys, you can't go out for the shift without your vest". Then, there was a time when an officer turned to me and said: "Ah, ma'am! But I was with Rotam<sup>7</sup> and a colleague died next to me with a shot to the head". Certainly, in another situation, depending on who was in charge, he wouldn't have questioned it. In reality, they are tests that people do to check what your reaction will be, your positioning. Like children. You tell them: 'Don't do this!' Then they do it and keep looking, taking a step, repeating, to see how far they can go, how far you will tolerate or not. So, that was one of the main challenges.

There was one time, for example, when we approached a high criminality area. So, because you're a woman, there is an understanding that you won't be able to take a firm stance. Sometimes, people look like they're thinking: "What is this woman there? She can't handle anything; she won't be able to do anything." So, this breakdown of paradigms, of this type of initial view, was a challenge that I had to face. I was fresh out of the Academy, with no professional experience, I didn't know the men and they didn't know me. Gaining that respect, getting them to recognize my ability and knowing what I could and couldn't do and how to do it, took time.

But this difficulty that I had in many opportunities while I was an aspiring officer was not the same difficulty that I faced when I went to command the Tactical Mobile. I didn't fall in unawares in

<sup>4</sup> City in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte.

<sup>5</sup> Neighborhood in the West region of Belo Horizonte.

<sup>6</sup> Tactical Mobile are military police units (companies) with the objective / effort of covering and intensifying policing under territorial responsibility. They have as their basic mission to act in the repression of violent crime in the area of the respective unit in support of specialized companies. They are designed to deal with events characterized as violent crimes.

<sup>7</sup> Rotam: Metropolitan Tactical Patrol is a special force of reaction and maneuver capable of prompt action, which can be used by the PMMG general command in places where there is a serious violation of public order.



Tactical, I already had some baggage, knowledge, and experience. So, many officers there welcomed me very well. We were able to combine both the professional part and the human resources management part. We worked with the officers on the issue of temperament, interpersonal relationships, aspects of their private lives, we tried to help in the best possible way in what they needed. It was a wonderful experience. In the end, it was two wonderful years of work, two years with goals met in succession, in great harmony within the team.

In 2013, I did my first specialization by the Police. At the time, I had asked God: "Lord, I'm going to graduate from the course, and I want You to send me where You think I should go." And when we pray and ask God like that, from the bottom of our hearts, there is that hope that He will do what you want. And I thought, really, that maybe I would go back to Tactical to do the same activities.

But when I finished the course, I was assigned to work in the communication area of the PMMG. Only this time, at the ceremonial sector. And that was another challenge. I thought to myself: "Guys, what now? How am I going to do it? It was like I was joining the police again, in a totally different activity. I'd have to learn everything again. Even the uniform was different. If in an operational role, I used to walk in boots, now I had to wear shoes and dress uniform. What about activities? They were totally different. But it was a wonderful experience too, it was particularly good, because I had the opportunity to meet other people who taught me a lot.

Some colleagues joked with me and said: "If you make a mistake in ceremonial, you'll make mistakes with the greatest authorities of the Military Police, no one else". And I said: "Great, you're helping me a lot. What an incentive!" But, fortunately, these authorities have taught me a lot. Sometimes, I got stressed out, upset about something that went wrong in some ceremony. So, I came to them to talk about the ceremony, and they said: "Thank you very much! Congratulations on your service." I was surprised: "How can that be!" Anyway, people teach us a lot. That is, when we are willing to learn. Anyway, it ended up being a very rich experience.

I worked at several events and, in reality, sometimes things didn't work out so well. I even got the name of important people wrong, it happened that the flag disappeared when it was supposed handed over to the higher-ranking officer, etc. But all of this contributed a lot to my training. Before, I thought I should have everything under control, everything that happened around me. And I ended up learning that no, not only do I not have it, but it also isn't possible to have control of everything. I need to learn to coordinate things well. And to know that at some point something can go wrong. I need to learn to live with the possibility of an error, but I can't stay focused on it. I need to look at the good things that happened too. Sometimes, during a ceremony, we at in the ceremonial realized that something had gone wrong, but when it was done, they said: "Wow, what

a spectacular ceremony!" And I thought: "You don't know the half of it! There were mistakes". Anyway, God taught me a lot during this period, it was a wonderful period.

With the creation of the Organizational Communication Directorate (DCO), my husband joked with me a lot, emphasizing that I arrived at the places and the units separated. When I got to 13th BPM, part of it became the 49th BPM. When I arrived at the Joint Chiefs at PM-5<sup>8</sup>, the DCO was created. But then I'd joke around: "Calm down people! It's all for our betterment". And to the extent that the changes are still there today, it means that the decisions were extremely right.

When I went to the DCO, I became responsible for the PMMG's internal communication. Since it was a new directorate, we had to build the entire organizational communication doctrine. The first director who worked with us at the time was a wonderful person. He managed to conduct all that work. I'm very grateful to him because if it was a period when I worked hard, it was also the period when I received the two highest commendations from the PMMG. This was the result of the work performed on the directorate, recognition of that work.

I remained on that directorate until 2017. At the end of that year, I received another gift: I was assigned to command, at the time, the Independent Military Police Company for Domestic Violence Prevention, which, in 2020, became First Company. I only learned about this promotion by the publication at the Official Journal. It was a very big surprise, and I was very happy. A service to be passionate about. I left the DCO and came to the Independent Military Police Company for Domestic Violence Prevention.

Anyway, when I think about this professional issue, I always like to teach my son that everything we do needs to be done as if we were doing it for God. We need to do it in the best way possible because we will be rewarded at one time or another for that. And, often, we do not need to associate this reward with something that is palpable: "Ah, you did that, you'll receive the medal; you did that, you'll receive a promotion". No! Sometimes, the reward that we'll receive is in another area.

My father, for example, always told me that one thing that moves him a lot is to go to the 13th BPM and have people greet him. He says that the friendships and the marks you leave in people's lives are especially important. And it's not that he didn't have to take action against someone. No! You just need to be fair, righteous. At the same time, you need to leave a mark on people's lives. And this mark of professionalism, delivery, dedication, concern, it's an extremely important brand, because it'll make this person grow and evolve.

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<sup>8</sup> The fifth section of the Joint Chiefs, responsible for communication.

Getting back to the courses, when I was about to take the CEGESP exam, I was a recently promoted major, and I saw the course as an opportunity. I reflected, talked to my husband: "Look, do I take the exam or not? What do you think?". At the time, I was in the Communications Directorate. My husband said: "If I were you, I'd do it. If it's from God and it's your time, you'll pass. You dedicate yourself, study and, if It's your time, you'll pass. If not, you try again later. But you don't know the future, so try! So, I made up my mind, studied, devoted myself to studies, took the exam, and passed. And, once again, I understood that if God opens a door, go through it, because you don't know when that door will open again. You don't know if it'll open again. I took the exam, I passed. "Glory to God!"

In the CEGESP class there were several soldiers who had trained in different years, which made the experience extraordinarily rich, very good. It's really good when you bring together professionals from different generations in the same room, with different views, with different ways of thinking. It was a course in which we had the opportunity to learn a lot, to share a lot with each other. And I managed to be third in the class. Interestingly, this placement occurred both at CESP and CEGESP. In both courses, I managed to graduate in third place. It was very good!

Anyway, throughout my career I have been guided by trying to do my best, trying to work in the best way possible. Sometimes not in the way that I would like. After all, I demand a lot from myself. But I've improved a lot already in relation to that. I always wanted to be able to do more, go further. We need to learn to respect the right moment for things to happen, and that life teaches you over time.

As for the feeling of some differentiation in my trajectory due to the fact that I'm a woman and a black woman, I felt nothing within the institution. At the PMMG, all I got was for the recognition from the people, for my results, for what I presented and as a direct consequence of the exams I took. I have always been highly respected within the institution.

As for the challenges, they're mainly related to the different forms of management or work throughout your career. I worked, for ten months, in organization communication. Then, two years at Tactical Mobile Company. After that, internal police communication. And the biggest challenge was learning to move between all these different universes. The organizational communication of the operational execution unit has a different form of management and priorities. The command of the mobile tactical company has other priorities. I needed to have all the instructions from the unit's command and translate them to the officers in a way that was possible, so that the objectives were achieved. People need to have the appropriate emotional intelligence to learn how to receive information and pass it on in the best possible way, so that people can really understand what is

being asked. We'll only achieve this through legitimacy. We break that initial perspective people have in doubting our ability.

At internal communication, I was already a high-ranking officer, major. The great challenge was the deployment of the Military Police strategic plan and the creation of sectorial plans for the directorates. Part of the challenge was adapting to a new language. But God set everything out very well because I took several courses in the area of management. I took courses on Strategic Management, Process Management, Strategic People Management, Knowledge Management. I really managed to put it all together and harmonize all that knowledge in order to apply it properly. We needed to apply it as accurately as possible. And today, I thank God very much, I thank all my commanders who allowed me to take all these courses.

When I took over the Independent Company for Domestic Violence Prevention, I had the opportunity to apply all of it, to be able to map the process, the protocol. In order to update the domestic violence prevention protocol, we mapped everything. If I hadn't taken the courses I previously had, I wouldn't have known how to do it, I would've had to ask someone else. But I sat down myself to map the processes in "Bizagi"<sup>9</sup>, to seek the effectiveness of knowledge management. I said to my officers: "Where are the documents, where's the story, where's the origin of the domestic violence prevention?". There isn't any! So, we need to act within an area of knowledge management. We need to have this here so that whoever comes next will be aware of how everything works, in the shortest possible time, to forward the improvements they envision.

So, each one of these courses, each one of these opportunities helped me in some way in my trajectory. In other words, we can't stand still, we need to take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. These may have been the biggest challenges I've faced.

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9 A software used to model processes.

## Professional trajectory and motherhood

Whenever a woman makes the decision to become a mother, she needs to really consider what the consequences will be. I had to make several adjustments. Both my husband and me. For us, everything was always very planned. Before we got married, we dated for two and a half years. My mother actually said that there is no engagement “ad eternum” in her house. So, it had to be figured out quickly. After being married, we chose not to have children for three years. We needed to have this moment for the couple, travel together, do some things together, consolidate our home. We bought the house before the wedding. When we moved in, it was already furnished.

I was a lieutenant when we decided to try for a child. He worked in operational execution, directly on the street. During my pregnancy, I went to work administratively. I went on maternity leave. When I returned, they created the 49th BPM. That is why I talk about adjustments. Everything has to be thought out, well-planned.

Both my husband and I worked in the operations, and we tried to work on the same schedule, but not at the same times. There was no way to work the same hours. So, I worked from 3 pm to 11 pm and he started at 5 pm until 3 am. So, there was a time when neither one of us was home to be able to be with my boy. So, I left home earlier, left my son at my sister-in-law's house. Then, when stopped at 11 pm, I'd pick him up.

Sometimes, when we talk about difficulties and problems that we faced, many people think: “No, you are a lieutenant-colonel in the police! You're in a good position! It was much easier for you!”. But it wasn't, people! No, it wasn't!

I left work, took him, a little baby still, put him in the car seat, and went home. My husband didn't come home until three in the morning. That's when he didn't stay until later. He was in Gepar<sup>10</sup>. Sometimes, I'd wake up at 5am and: “Guys! Where's João?” I'd call him: “What happened?” “Ah, I'm stuck with a call. I'll be there soon!” So, we needed to have this construction, to be allies in the care of our son. He's a lovely boy, he likes to study. He loves Math. It looks like it runs in the family. Anyway, we've been adapting throughout life to be able to really give him the best study conditions. We needed to be by his side, because there's no point in wanting to correct things after he's already grown. This is a process. We need to be together with the child along the way, teaching him what we think is important, and what God reveals to us as important.

<sup>10</sup> Gepar (Specialized Group for Policing At-Risk Areas) is a military police group focused on “qualified prevention and repression against violent crimes and social improvement in at-risk areas”. Its objective is to reduce the criminal rates in these areas and devise strategies to reduce involvement in the practice of crimes.

Fortunately, both my son and my husband are very sensitive and support me in different situations. We support each other. When my husband took a special sergeant training course in 2011, I stayed with our son. He was very young. I stayed with him so my husband could study. I said to my husband: “You're going to study. Let me take care of him”. In 2013, when I went to do my specialization, he stayed with our son so I could study. He encouraged me to take get a Law degree and encouraged me in other specializations. So, we are together in the same goal, and we learned to give up, to give up certain things so that the family would grow, so that it would sustain itself. And today, by the hands of God, we have a healthy family.

The family is our base. We need to plan all our actions very well, talk a lot. It isn't the man, the husband, superior to the wife, or the wife superior to the husband. Both are together in the same mission. That's how I understand submission. It's not one being subservient to the other, submission is both under the same mission. So, we need to work together for things to evolve, to grow. Because if one falls to one side and the other falls to the other, it'll inevitably collapse. That's why my family is wonderful.

## 4. Gender, race, and class

Being a black woman? What does it mean? I'll use the hair issue as an example. Each woman wears their hair the way they want. So, we have black and white women who also straighten their hair so that it's smoother. I, for much of my life, relaxed my hair. But, today I ask myself: “Guys, why did I relax my hair? Was it supposed to be easier to take care of because I didn't know how to handle my afro hair?” With maturity, I started to think: “I'm going to change! I'll keep my hair natural”. I kept limiting myself, harming my hair. After all, this is a form of aggression. And why? Why can't I keep my hair natural?

With this change, I also noticed that it changed the way people see me. I found it remarkably interesting and very cool. Sometimes, I arrive, especially at a meeting, and people comment: “Wow, how cool! Your hair is beautiful!”.

This has to do with how we identify ourselves. I can't say that there are no difficulties, or that there can't be difficulties for other people in general because they're women, because they're black. Each one will talk about their experience, what they experienced, what they lived. I value myself a lot, I'm black, I'm a woman, and wherever I arrive, when I need to introduce myself, I see in other people a respect, a great recognition.

Regarding the absence of women in the places of power, I feel competent to talk about my experience, the institution in which I work, of which I know the criteria used to choose people,



to carry out activities. In the Military Police today, we have a woman colonel responsible for the military police's finance directorate. And we also have other women who are working in other areas of the PMMG.

When it comes to being a black woman, specifically within the PMMG, I see myself as an example that if we dedicate ourselves, if we apply ourselves to what we are doing, delivering the best results within what is possible, we will achieve our goals. This effort will be recognized in some way, but I can talk about the universe of the PMMG. I have no way of speaking about other institutions, because here the criteria are more objective. With me, until today, it has been that way.

What I emphasize is that people often don't discuss this issue of being a woman and being black. They highlight the fact that she is an officer married to a beat cop. It's curious what catches people's attention. In some cases, this can be understood as recognition. There are people who highlight this: "Look, you, black woman in this position". But I like to point out to them: "Dedicate yourselves, make the effort, work with professionalism because things are going to happen, sooner or later, they are going to happen.". And we are capable, we are all capable. So, however much the forces outside us try discouraging us, try to make us stop, try to diminish us in some way, we need to look for everything in order to be able to face adverse situations, to become increasingly better, and to make our story strengthen us and others, so that they can win too. So well, I see myself today black woman and successful.

### Quota policies

Today I'm here not because this vacancy was designated for black women within the PMMG. I arrived here with the help of many people, certainly, mainly from my family, but because I learned a lot, because I gave results, because I did something, because I earned this place. I strongly believe in dedication and in the strength of work, and today I see myself as a successful, married black woman with a son.

My mother always said to us: "Look, Brazil owes a debt to the black population, because it took us out of our homes and brought us to a new place". And, as soon as slavery was abolished, there was no restructuring of our society in order to absorb this labor, which has been neglected throughout history. And we haven't been able to ensure an intervention that was specific to equalize things, make things equal, equal in terms of opportunities.

I think what would be ideal is to give everyone the same conditions to compete for jobs in the market, whether in the public or private sector and not need compensatory measures. So, although we have quotas today, we need to reflect on why they are needed. Black people are invariably in public schools and do not have access to quality education, despite there being good public

schools. So, why am I going to act on the consequence, if I can act on the cause and avoid future problems? We need to learn to work on the causes, and so that we can give equality of opportunity for all people. That's how I see it.

To sum up, we don't have the same conditions to be able to face challenges. When I speak of conditions, I speak of education, of training. We, black people, the poor, and women invariably don't have opportunities to have quality education, quality training, to compete on an equal basis with people who have had these conditions, for jobs in the labor market. It's this limitation in training and qualification that is detrimental and when competing in a public exam or for a job vacancy. So, what we need to work on making these opportunities uniform, to really seek the qualification for all people, a better qualification, a teaching that is really effective so that all of us at the time of an analysis, which must be objective and not subjective, are really able to compete for these vacancies on an equal footing.

### The myth of racial democracy

In the case of domestic violence prevention, we are often asked: do you get more black victims or more white victims? Our selection as it's made on the most serious and recurrent cases doesn't favor this selection. We serve white women the same way we serve black women. What will initially come out, at the time of screening, are the stories that are portrayed through the police report. So, in the same way that we serve people from the Buritis neighborhood<sup>11</sup>, we serve people in the agglomerations<sup>12</sup>, because the stories will tell the real need for intervention.

For us, in public security, situations are always exceedingly difficult in this respect. I, for example, have seen cases of police officers being accused of racism, because they approached a black person, while the garrison was composed only of black police officers. How? Did the uniform make this policeman white? Was the person selected for their skin color?

When people talk about the issue of incarceration, I've already been asked this question: "why is our prison population mostly black?". I wonder if that would be the right question. Let's think about the facts that led these people to be incarcerated. The questions are usually: "Why are they there? Did the fact that led these people to incarceration occur or not? Are they authors of robbery, theft, homicide or not? Did they commit a crime or not?" "Ah, ok! They committed a crime".

But these questions don't get to the heart of the matter: what made these people commit this crime? Lack of opportunity, lack of character, lack of education. How can we change that?

11 Upper-middle class neighborhood in Belo Horizonte.

12 Official designation for favelas.

Incarcerated people come from agglomerations and weren't reached by the state, being subjected to a situation of vulnerability. How did crime come into their realities? Or are they people who have had all the opportunities and made their choices? I believe that involvement with crime, and consequent incarceration are consequences of a set of factors that we need to tackle in order to reap different fruits. If I act only on the surface, I won't get anywhere. I need to know what the origin is, what is causing this ice to appear, what is solidifying this water? Then yes, I'll be able to solve the problem.

## Teaching Afro-Brazilian History and Culture

Often, dealing with certain problems implies taking action, creating specific legislation. For example, the lack of respect and the widespread violence of men towards women demanded that the Maria da Penha Law<sup>13</sup> be created. It's not a law for women only. But a law that points to something obvious - what people, society, it must be said, especially men, cannot see.

It's the same with the issue of Afro-Brazilian culture. It should have been inserted in schools a long time ago. But not it only, also indigenous culture. That is, all other cultures that are part of the construction of our knowledge, of our identity. After all, if I don't know where I came from, I can't identify who I am, where I am and I can't establish where I want to go.

African, indigenous, European cultures are part of the construction of the Brazilian identity. And everyone needs to have in-depth knowledge about it. We need to value each other and mutual understanding, the knowledge of each other's history and culture. It's what will enable this respect. Knowledge and insight broaden horizons and are antidotes against prejudice.

## 5. A message, a legacy

I hope to be remembered as a black woman who managed to face several challenges, many problems, several obstacles throughout her life, but who didn't give up, who kept going. I'd like to be remembered as a person who believes that with professionalism, dedication and, above all, faith, it's possible to win, move forward, achieve our goals. Perhaps not in the way we'd like, but in the way that is best for us at that moment.

I would also like to leave a message for people to believe in themselves, especially to believe in God. Let everything you do, do as if it were for God. Don't sit around waiting for compliments from others, don't wait for pat on the back. Because what human beings can do for you is just

<sup>13</sup> Law 11.340/2006, named after Maria da Penha, pharmacist and activist, who was paralyzed from the waist down by a gunshot fired by her husband after multiple calls for help to the police, which included a homicide attempt.

that: give you congratulations, thank you for your service. But the reward that God will give you for what you are doing goes beyond your professional environment, it reaches your personal life, it reaches all areas of your life. If you have to study, study; if you have to work, work; get up early, go for it, really try to work with all the tools at your disposal to achieve your goals. And believe, firmly, that you will achieve. You will get it.



*Lieutenant Colonel Cleide Barcelos, Commander of the 1st Independent Military Police Company for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.*

*By: Personal Archive*



# 10

## YONE

### GONZAGA

Yone Maria **Gonzaga**  
 Ana Paula **Salej**  
 Maria Clara **Mendes**

#### 1. My origins

My full name is Yone Maria Gonzaga. People call me Yone Gonzaga. In the colonization processes, one of the things that our people lost was their names. Here in Brazil, they became Mary belonging to farmer X, Francis belonging to farmer Y. Although “our names” are “our colonial names”, we need to assert ourselves with name and surname, as Lélia Gonzalez said. So, I am Yone Gonzaga, a member of a large black family: father, mother, and six children, including me.

My parents are from the countryside of Minas Gerais. My father, Manoel Raymundo Gonzaga, is from Curvelo. My mother, Margarida Aparecida Gonzaga, is from a city called Rio Espera, close to Conselheiro Lafaiete. Both came to Belo Horizonte as teenagers and met here, in Belo Horizonte. My mother had lost her mother at the age of five. At 13, when she lost her father, she and my aunt, her older sister, decided to come to Belo Horizonte and bring their brothers. As soon as she arrived, my mother went to live around the Ipanema / Frei Eustáquio neighborhood, near the Dom Bosco Church. My father also lived in the area. When she got married - she got married

early, at 17 - she worked in a nail factory and the boss said: “people who marry need their own home”. So, he encouraged her to buy a plot where she already lived. So, she bought the lot where she lives until today. All my siblings and I were born and raised in the Ipanema neighborhood, in Belo Horizonte.

#### My parents' presence in me

My family is quiet, with a remarkably close and strict mother. I understand the weight of having to raise six children well. There was this huge fear that the daughters would get pregnant and that my sons would use marijuana. She said: “I don't want to have a pothead for a child” - that was heavy for the time. She insisted: “We have our work and our word”. So, things like honesty, truth, being very sincere in what is said, my mother always demanded that a lot. She also said that the studying created possibilities. My mother had several jobs. She was a domestic worker for a long time, a vegetable seller, worked in a restaurant. Around the time I was in elementary school, my mother had studied up to the third grade, in the countryside. It was only when I was a little older that she went back to school. When I was in high school, she passed in a public exam for the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), for the position of Operational Assistant for Diverse Services. She managed to have a civil servant job that provided better financial support for our family. After joining UFMG, she decided to study. She took the Nursing Assistant course and then the Nursing Technician course. With that, she had mobility in the career of administrative technician in the university and, when she retired, she held the position of Nursing Assistant.



*Manoel Raymundo Gonzaga and Margarida Aparecida Gonzaga (in memoriam) at the end of their daughter Yone Maria Gonzaga's graduation.*

*By: Personal Archive*



My father was a bricklayer, he worked civil construction. He was illiterate, so he didn't have this formal understanding of schooling. I say formal because he was always wise. He dealt with everyone, he was quite easy to deal with, he talked with everyone. Although he didn't know Durkheim, Marx and such, he had the baggage and knowledge of life, orality, tradition. Thus, he was able to be in any environment. As my mother says, he was much more tranquil about life. This made him have a different presence in our lives. He passed away in 2014 and the memory we have of him is of someone who whistled, who sang. With his grandchildren, there he launched into games, laughter, dances, and such. He was not like that as much with us, his kids. He always danced with us, but with his grandchildren he danced a lot more. My mother would say: "In your father's family, a fork dropping becomes a samba". Today, over 80 years-old, my mother is ill. Every now and then, to make her laugh, I throw my fork on the floor. I go take care of her every day. Then I sing, make noise, put on music. I like to play, laugh, and dance. She says: "Here comes the noisy one". To her, this belonged to my father and not her. I think I carry a lot of their presence, both of theirs, my mother's seriousness for the things I do and my father's lightheartedness.

I have an older brother and sister and three younger brothers. I am the third child. Our neighborhood has always been very peaceful, all getting along. Since my mother was a strict person, she didn't let us to go to the neighbors' houses. The neighbors, on the other hand, could all come to our house, so we welcomed a lot of playmates in the yard to play, eat fruit, things like that. I have many memories of a materially poor childhood, but rich in people. We did not have a television at home. We watched television at the neighbor's house. It was interesting. At her house, the room was very large, the television was there in the corner of the room crowded with people. The whole neighborhood went to her house.

## 2. Studies

My older brother didn't find himself in his studies. He ended up having to help the family financially, as there were many children. My sister had several health problems when she was little. This affected her possibilities a lot, she only finished elementary school after she was an adult. I'm the third daughter, so I managed to leave this place and had the chance to study.

I remember that when I was still little, I was already taking my sister's booklets, who is a year and a half older, and was in elementary school learning to read with difficulties. I already could read. So, when I entered the first grade, I already knew how to read. I remember the teachers saying: "Wow, you already know how to read!". Many of my memories have to do with the school. I have always been very studious, and I did well in all subjects, both Portuguese and Math. I wanted to travel, I dreamed of traveling; without the opportunity, I think I traveled through books.

In high school, I studied at Imaco<sup>1</sup>. I was in love with that school that allowed me to move around in other spaces. There, I took the technical course in Accounting. At the end of the 3rd year<sup>2</sup>, I was going to take the university entrance exam, but there wasn't a lot of information on majors. As a black teenager, I was not encouraged to think about entering university or the course I was going to take. No, there was no encouragement like that and no family reference. So, when I read the brochure for the exam in which came the syllabus of each course and which universities offered what, I only knew that I couldn't go to PUC<sup>3</sup> or other private universities because I had no money; I would have to go to UFMG<sup>4</sup>. Then, I saw that the Literature course had many things that I liked (I always liked Literature) and I had the possibility of taking classes at night (I had to work, I couldn't afford to study all day). It was my first and only entrance exam, at 18, and I passed.

In 1981, I joined UFMG. I started studying at night and started to open paths for myself. At university, everything was hugely different from what I lived. At that time, the 1st semester was called the "basic cycle", which brought together the disciplines of social sciences and humanities, and the people in those courses studied at FAFICH<sup>5</sup>, at Carangola Street. For me, it was remarkably interesting and challenging, because, as I said, I liked to read, but Durkheim, Marx, Weber, that was a kind of reading that I did not have. The basic cycle, with this mixture, was a challenging moment, with new expansion of possibilities. Then, I went to the disciplines of the Literature major itself, which weren't that challenging, since they were about Literature, which I liked a lot. I did very well in them. My relationships during undergrad were limited since I had to work. I have no friends from my undergraduate years, my contact with my classmates took place almost strictly in the classroom.

I always wanted to study, I graduated, and soon after I got a postgraduate degree in People Management, also at UFMG. But I always did a lot of things at the same time. When I finished my degree, I had concurrent professional activities. I held the position of professor in Basic Education teacher in the State and the Municipal Educational Networks of Minas Gerais and Belo Horizonte, concurrently with the position of Assistant in Administration at UFMG. In addition, at 33 years old I got married. In 1997, I had my first child, Vitor Gonzaga, and the second, Tomás Gonzaga, in 2002. With young children, I had to make a choice and leave one of my professional activities. Even so, I soon joined the union activity. That is why I didn't get a master's degree right away.

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1 Municipal school which functioned inside the Municipal Park back then; today it resides at Gonçalves Dias Street.

2 Final year of Brazilian high school.

3 Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, a private university.

4 Federal University of Minas Gerais.

5 Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences, now in the Pampulha campus.

## Master's degree: collaborating towards the racial identity literacy of a professional category

In 2006, I started acting in the Affirmative Actions Program at UFMG, which was coordinated by Professor Nilma Lino Gomes<sup>6</sup>. I participated in two studies coordinated by Professor Inês Assunção de Castro Teixeira: “Memories and trajectories of black students at UFMG” and “Memories and trajectories of black professors at UFMG”. When I started my master's degree in 2009, I wanted to research the memories and trajectories of black administrative workers. If the university has a tripod - professors, students, and admin staff - one of the bases was missing. That was my question for the master's. I was supervised by professor Nilma Lino Gomes, which was already prominent at the time.

But there were some stones in the middle of the road! There was no institutional information on university workers' ethnic-racial background, so one of the first challenges for my research was to build this database. When I moved to field work, one thing that came up very intensely was the white workers' questions. They asked why I wanted to talk to black people only. At the university, there was another type of discrimination, professor-admin discrimination. Unfortunately, the admin staff is a second-class citizen within the university. I ended up surveying people of all racial backgrounds. White people, who also felt discriminated against, appeared so frequently that Professor Nilma said: “We won't be able to disregard this fact, we'll have to work with white people too”. Thus, my research stopped being about black workers only and became about technical-administrative workers<sup>7</sup>, race relations, and actively produced invisibility.

Thinking about the technical-administrative category was thinking about the relationship between white and black people in the most diverse positions, in hierarchies, in the invisibility actively produced, both for white and for black people. You remember the saying: “those who can, give the orders, those who have good sense, obey them”? The technicians had to obey. But there was still a difference in this process, black technicians were much more discriminated against. In addition to being technical staff, they were black. I think this process was interesting because many workers recognized themselves in my research. The union has appropriated this category of invisibility and my text to think about and expand its own position in relation to affirmative

<sup>6</sup> Nilma Lino Gomes, graduated in Pedagogy and held a Master's degree in Education at UFMG and PhD in Social Anthropology at USP. She completed a postdoc at the University of Coimbra. She is a professor at the Faculty of Education at UFMG. In 2013 and 2014, she was dean of the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB), becoming the first black woman to occupy the most important position in a federal university in Brazil. In January 2015, she became Minister for the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality - SEPPPIR, for the federal government, until 2016.

<sup>7</sup> The name of the professional category studied.

policies. I like this work a lot because, in a way, it was a form of racial-identity literacy for a professional category of workers. People talked about the way they were treated by professors, but when I managed to categorize this form of discrimination, we started working on it, thinking about affirmative policies. I think that my work gave support to this movement.

## PhD: reflecting on the management of racial ethnic diversity

I finished my master's in 2011. In 2012, I participated in the selection for the PhD, which I started in 2013 with the goal of thinking about the management of ethnic-racial diversity at UFMG. I was interested in knowing if the university's management changed with the presence of a larger number of black students. Again, the issue of institutional racism ended up appearing very strongly during the PhD. We observed that the university does not prepare itself to handle this black presence, it reacts to the presence of black students. Black students have a greater demand for retention policies. So, the university “puts out some fires” and provides certain things. By that, I mean, that it does not organize itself to meet the demands of these bodies, because it was not designed to receive these individuals. For example, it is more common among black students who, right from the start, need immediate access to the lunch voucher. The university was designed by white people to serve white people.

Another observation on the quotas issue is that just as the university does not organize itself to provide service to the students, it also doesn't organize itself to train its workers (professors and technicians) to work professionally with these individuals who arrive at the institution. It is one thing to talk about blackness, it is another thing to talk with technical competence about ethnic-racial relations in Brazil, because people think they can say anything about the racial issue, that they don't need training. The university agrees with this by not preparing its workers politically and affirmatively to deal with the racial issue.

## The challenge of being in a space that my own did not access

In my family, both paternal and maternal, we are many cousins. In my generation, I was the first person to go to university. The first to graduate, to get a driver's license, to go to graduate school, the first, first, first! This ends up being a brand that I carry, for better or for worse.

My achievements were victories for my parents, but also for the family. When I graduated high school, Imaco had a graduation ceremony and a mass. I remember the whole family being there. At least one member in each family went to my graduation. For my undergraduate degree, it

was the same thing. For my master's and PhD, the closest family nucleus was there with me<sup>8</sup>. For my family, it has always been a source of great joy to see a daughter, a niece arriving at this place of doctor. Dad used to say: “My daughter is going to be a doctor” but, unfortunately, he had already passed away when I defended my doctoral thesis in 2017. My mother was present in all these moments. Since she worked at UFMG, it was common to have people saying that their children had started university. For her, it was a source of pride to answer that her daughter had also conquered this space.

Some people in the family sometimes don't understand my insistence on them seeking a different possibility in education. The cousins in my generation got married at 18, 20 years old. At 40, they were all becoming grandmothers. They had children when they were very young, and their daughters had the same trajectory as their mothers. I do not mean to say that motherhood is not a nice thing, but I think it is necessary to structure yourself to be a mother, to be a father. Having a job, a profession, having the minimum to offer the child. When I put this to my cousins and then to my cousins' daughters, not everyone understood. They didn't understand the need to build other possibilities for women. My sister and brothers didn't go to college, so it was always a challenge to be in a place that my own didn't access. I had to be able to cope with the university's grammar, vocabulary, and all the possibilities that being at the university offers, and at the same time, I could not forget where I came from. That is why I joke that it is for good and bad, because it demands a lot from me until today. There is another thing, being a doctor: there are few women doctors, few black women doctors. I am among the few black women doctors, dealing with that is a permanent challenge.

### 3. Professional trajectory

At 9 years old, I already helped my mother. She had a stall selling legumes and greens and I stayed in that stall. We thought we had an obligation to help. I always took on the educational responsibility of my younger brothers. My mother worked, she couldn't go to school meetings, so I went, helped with homework, took them to the pediatrician, and to get vaccines. They are memories of a childhood with a lot of responsibilities.

When I was in high school, my mom still worked at a restaurant. I interned at the Belo Horizonte City Hall (PBH), in the sector responsible for the Code of Urban Space Usage. From the PBH I went to work in an accounting office, where I stayed until I started university.

<sup>8</sup> Brazilian Master's degrees and PhDs do not have graduation ceremonies, only the student's defense/viva, which is open to the public.

At the time I started higher education, I passed the UFMG public exam for the position of administrative technician. I was assigned to work at the UFMG's University Hospital. When I finished my degree, I became a Basic Education teacher. I kept the work parallel with that of the university for 12 years. When I had my first child, I left teaching. My salary at this job was lower, so I had to make a choice, and I chose to continue at the university.

At UFMG, when I left the University Hospital, I went to the Office of the Dean of Human Resources to advise on the Permanent Commission for Technical-Administrative Personnel (CPPTA). I worked there for two years and then went to the Human Resources Division, which was the central area for human resources (HR) at the university. I stayed for several years there and became coordinator of the evaluation field for a period. Finally, I coordinated the people management area at the Faculty of Dentistry. In the 14 years that I was there, I was a supervisor. Since the positions I held at the university were administrative, they were not seen as relevant within the university. There, positions are filled by the person who performs their duties well. I think that is why I got to those positions.

I expanded my union activity in the early 2000s. I was coordinator of social policies for the Workers in Federal Education Institutions Union (SINDIFES / BH) for some time. When I started university, the career plan for technical workers was from the 1980s. The process of discussing the career plan at the university had been in place for decades. With Lula's arrival in the government, the approval of a new career plan became more palpable. In 2005, a National Commission was formed to discuss the new plan and I was part of that commission. I went to Brasília and participated in the conferences by the Federation of Unions of Brazilian Universities Workers (Fasubra)<sup>9</sup>. At UFMG there was also a commission that discussed the career plan of the university's admin staff and I was elected by them to represent them. I served as a sub-coordinator of this commission. When my name came out in the university bulletin, my mother liked it, people told her: “I saw your daughter's name”, Margarida's daughter.

Agora eu sou professora contratada na Faculdade Latino-americana de Ciências Sociais (Flacso), onde oriento estudantes de Mestrado do Curso Estado, Gobierno y Políticas Públicas.

I also worked as a teacher in university extension courses. I was a teacher in for the Policies to Promote Racial Equality at the School course<sup>10</sup>, in the Youth Life Tutor Training Course and in

<sup>9</sup> In 2004, there was huge mobilization and victories for the Federation. After a strike which lasted about 90 days, the category achieved the Career Plan for Technical Administrative Workers of IFES - Federal Institutions of Higher Education, established by Law No. 11.091 / 2005.

<sup>10</sup> A partnership between the universities and the Affirmative Action Program for the Black Population in Federal and State Institutions of Higher Education (Uniafro).



training courses promoted by PRORH<sup>11</sup>, in the latter case I worked for a long time as a teacher in the field of Instrumental Portuguese for technical-administrative workers. The teaching experience in university extension and training courses was also interesting. Now I am a teacher in the Latin American Social Sciences Institute (FLACSO), where I supervise master's students in State, Government, and Public Policy.

In 2016, I was allowed by the Faculty of Dentistry to assume the position of Superintendent of Affirmative Policies at the Undersecretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SUPIR), of the Human Rights, Participation, and Citizenship Secretariat for the State of Minas Gerais (SEDPAC), where I stayed until the end Governor Fernando Pimentel's term. I returned to UFMG and soon retired in 2019.

Today I have an ethnic, racial, and gender relations consultancy micro-company. Training managers has been one of our activities. My desire to work with managers is to generate institutional change. That is why I have specialized in this area. It has aspects of technical knowledge, political relationship, dialogic relationship with the various social movements. Some managers are stuck in their offices producing legislation and guidelines, without developing a dialogue with their surroundings.

### **Teaching in basic education, a time of great learning**

As soon as I graduated, I passed a public exam for a state school and went to work at a small school at the neighborhood of Venda Nova, Teacher Maria Coutinho State School, which was starting an expansion process. I worked there as a Portuguese teacher for six years. I followed the creation of the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades for the students of that time. In this region, on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, families had migrated from cities in the countryside. The children came from Santa Luiza, Sete Lagoas, from the metropolitan area; for them, being in Venda Nova made a difference. It was an improvement: "I left Santa Luzia and now I'm here in Venda Nova". So, the students had an extremely positive reference regarding the school in Belo Horizonte.

In this school, the families established a close relationship and because in this region there weren't many leisure possibilities, on Saturdays, at the school, they played volleyball, soccer. We had a couple of teachers who taught agricultural practices and they made a vegetable garden. Thus, in addition to going to play in the schoolyard, on Saturdays the students also watered this garden. Thus, a closeness was developed, strengthening bonds and the school's protection network. Today, we see violence, invasions in schools. In the years that I worked there, there was no history of school depredation. The community, as a participant in the school, saw this as a space for possibilities.

11 The Pro-Chancellor at UFMG Human Resources offers employees a number of different types of training.

It was also there that I started to introduce the racial-ethnic question in my Portuguese classes, working with some texts and music. There was still no legislation on the insertion of the theme in the curricula, but I had already inserted it in this very articulated work with the Geography teacher and the History teacher, because I had learned about this necessity in the black movement. Another interesting thing is that some students had never been to downtown Belo Horizonte. We had a field trip to the UFMG campus since I also worked at the university. I took them to see the buildings, to see the Dean's Building and to understand what it was, to know the Faculty of Languages, where I had studied, and the library. This experience of knowing another space, another possibility, had never happened in my time as a student, so I always thought about providing this for my students.

I did another public exam for the Belo Horizonte municipal network, where I worked for five, six years. At a school in the northwest region, Father Edeimar Massote Municipal School. During this period, I found a group of teachers who already had a more focused activity regarding ethnic-racial relationships, a more open thought for education. It was a more left-wing group of political activists. Our school was one of the best in the city of Belo Horizonte. Several teachers later went on to become trainers at the Teacher Enhancement Training Center of the municipal educational network. I believe that there I was able to improve my teaching because I had already undergone through a teaching experience at the state school. When we leave college, we find a grammar of the daily life of the classroom, which we do not learn, that the day-to-day will teach us. In this school, the experience was much more worthwhile, in the sense of the perception of what I could do, how to dialogue with other educational instances outside the school, such as the theater, the cinema, the network of libraries. This school made all this possible and, as a Portuguese teacher, I made use of these possibilities. Thus, the 12 years in basic education were a period of great learning.

### **The management challenge at the Faculty of Dentistry**

The Faculty of Dentistry operated in Cidade Jardim<sup>12</sup> and in the 2000s it was transferred to the Pampulha Campus. When I arrived, I was welcomed by my admin colleagues, many already knew me because of union action, but I was really rejected by the teachers. In addition, the presence of white people in places of command was much greater. They were used to doing things the way they wanted. In personnel management, a large part of the activities was standardized, and many didn't like it, they thought that I wanted to rule and not that that was the norm. My interpretation of this behavior was that, since they were mostly white and wealthy men, they had always been in charge. Suddenly, a black and poor woman arrived to give the orders.

12 Upper-class neighborhood in Belo Horizonte.

The person who preceded me had a more notary-like perspective - open the process, forward it, fill out the form. I wanted to look beyond the processes, for example, to pay attention to the people who were dissatisfied in certain sectors. Solving these other issues was a priority for me. The career plan was very recent and talked about the possibility of administrative staff having a salary bump when taking courses. So, I was very interested in enabling them to take classes. In a way, this interest of mine broke the logic that existed at the unit, as the staff arrived there at 8 am and worked until 5 pm to meet the needs of students and professors. From the moment that these technical-administrative workers started to take courses at HR central or in a college, it became evident that the teachers were not used to talking with them and understanding that they had rights. This beginning was challenging. Then, people learned that there is a law that lays out these possibilities for admin and professional responsibilities. I managed to show that, as an admin staff learned more, they gave a better return on the work he developed.

I think that, because of this, when leaving Dentistry, many professors said, “I will miss you very much”. I had already achieved an organization of work and an understanding of the insertion of workers as participants in what was produced at Dentistry. I always said that dentistry cannot only treat teeth, it is a unit linked to healthcare. Having this greater understanding, that the person is not just a mouth, but a whole, is part of a broader thing, health, SUS<sup>13</sup>. There were people who went on to get a degree in Dentistry, Social Work, Health Management courses, among others, based on this dialogue that I had been promoting about the possibilities that the career plan offered and what Dentistry was in the context of the university.

### **Understanding the workings of another public machine**

I was appointed to the position of Superintendent of Affirmative Policies at the Racial Equality Undersecretariat (SUBIR), at the Human Rights, Participation, and Citizenship Secretariat of the State of Minas Gerais (SEDPAC) when this secretariat was created, under the administration of Governor Fernando Pimentel, from the Workers' Party (PT). The secretariat was coordinated by Nilmário Miranda. There was a wish for the undersecretary to articulate with the federal sphere, which was coordinated by Professor Nilma Lino Gomes, SEPPIR Minister.

I often say that the challenge for the secretariat was twofold. The first was to understand the functioning of this quite different public machine. As superintendent of affirmative policies, I had to give answers, I had to think about policies to serve the population sections based on ethnic-racial management, since we worked not only with black people, but also with indigenous people, gypsies, traditional communities, riverside communities. Thinking about policy possibilities for

all these segments was a challenge, because until then I did not know how the administrative machinery of the executive branch worked. For that, I had to search for other knowledge, readings, and people to think about projects, to think about the relationship with the Legislative Assembly, the relationship between secretariats. Our policy to promote racial equality was a cross-cutting and intersectoral policy. Understanding this and figuring out where and with whom we could talk to put in place a policy to promote racial equality was a challenge.

The second type of challenges was related to institutional racism. Until then, there was no undersecretariat or superintendency that had the policy of promoting racial equality thought of as public policy. When we said: “I am from the Human Rights Secretariat”, people had a notion, however vague; but when we said: “I’m from the Racial Equality Secretariat”, the person would grimace immediately. They started with those speeches built on equality, in a logic of exclusion of differences, as if everyone were equal and we didn't need a specific undersecretary for black people. In addition, people don't understand the racial issue for several individuals, they only think of black men and women.

The challenges posed by institutional racism were very intense. Getting people to understand that we need an affirmative policy because it works within the logic of reparation, within the logic of ensuring human rights, that these individuals are human and that social indicators show the inequality to which these populations are subjected to. This needed to be reiterated countless times during the day.

In addition, our articulation took place internally within the secretariat. So, understanding what was going on inside another secretariat, for example, what resources and policies that secretariat already had and that could be crosscut by the issue of racial equality, was not easy. For this, we created the Intergovernmental Forum on Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality, and we invited all the secretariats to participate explaining its objective. So, we started to find out where policies had already been designed that we could act on to promote racial equality. For example, a secretariat had a program that worked with community gardens, so we showed that in a quilombo there was a garden that could be enhanced by expanding the possibilities of own consumption, but also the economic possibilities of that collective - that is, making an affirmative policy. Having this view, being able to inform those who were in another office that quilombola<sup>14</sup> is a subject with rights, and that investing in an affirmative policy there would bring significant returns both for that individual and for the state was challenging and interesting, and it allowed me to get to know the structure within.

13 Unified Healthcare System, the public healthcare system in Brazil.

14 Quilombo is a traditional Community descended from enslaved people; a quilombola is a member of that community.



I learned a lot. In some departments we had a lot of feedback from managers who said: “we were never asked / guided to think that way”, to think about these individuals based on this logic. Public policy is often thought of in the territory: “territory X has a larger number of poor people, so we have to have cisterns in the sanitation policy, for these people”. They never thought of those individuals as black individuals or as impoverished black individuals because of the historical past of enslavement, of colonization. Why do you have more quilombola territories in the north of Minas Gerais? These individuals left the coastlines and went deeper into the territory so that they could have possibilities for their lives. To think about this historically and politically was something new.



A SUBIR project that I'd like to highlight is the Program for Gender and Racial Equality, in which we worked with Rede Minas, COPASA, CEMIG, BDMG, and CODEMIG<sup>15</sup>, at the state level, and the Post Office, at the federal level. It was remarkably interesting when we went to talk at BDMG. One of the things we stated was the need to have different financing conditions for these groups, which constitute a collective that is more impoverished than the reality of Minas Gerais. Since BDMG is a bank that thinks about development, it was important to add these individuals and consider their specificities. The first time we said it, they look startled, as if to say: "What is this thing? Who is this madwoman?"

Another interesting situation at BDMG was that we had a great team of partnerships within the program. When we talked about the internship project that was offered to PUC and

*In honor of the 70th birthday of Sueli Carneiro, philosopher, activist in the Black Brazilian Movement and the Black Women's Movement. June 2020.*

*By: Personal Archive*

UFMG, we warned that, since the institutions where the program was made available were the best, the group of interns was very homogeneous, young white men and women. We insisted: if the bank is a development bank, it must have an affirmative policy. Then they opened the possibility of applications from other colleges. In one of the debates, we had on affirmative policy, a young black woman who lived in Ribeirão das Neves and took the business course at a private college, said that when she saw the call for the internship she had never thought about the possibility of working at BDMG. Before signing up, she thought about it a thousand times, then went to talk to a professor who said: "sign up, you already have a 'no', you can still get the 'yes'". And she had the 'yes'. A black woman, from Ribeirão das Neves, at a small private college, which she had entered thanks to the scholarship she got from Prouni<sup>16</sup>. This young woman already had a little daughter that she left with her mother to be able to work and pay for her studies, among other things. She said that being an intern at BDMG made it possible to have better pay, so she could pay a person to stay with the baby for a period and not overburden her mother. Affirmative policies change the gears and knowing that these gear changes are also a result of your work and effort is really cool.

Finally, being at the secretariat allowed me to get to know the quilombos outside the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte - the indigenous territories, the gypsies, and therefore to know and speak about a reality that goes far beyond what one hears about.

## 4. Reflections

### Constructing my identity

The construction of my identity has been present since always. Through all that racism produced, discrimination and fear, in my house my mother said: “you are black people, you have to know where you are going, with whom you are going, because with black people the weight [of police violence] is greater”. She guided us, especially my brothers, black men. Thus, we always understood ourselves to be black. Activism helped me to understand politically this way of being in the world. Not because I was worse, but because there was the pressure of racism, there was a hierarchy.

I only started to have a racial interpretation of how society treated us differently in my youth. In my day, the one who stood out in Math was the school's big shot. I was that stand-out in Math. In my class, from first to fourth grade, there was a boy who was also excellent in all subjects, but something was different, his mother was a teacher. My mother had studied in the countryside, she

<sup>15</sup> Respectively, the state of Minas Gerais's public television station, water company, electric company, development bank, and development company.

<sup>16</sup> University for All Program, which gives scholarships to low-income students to attend private colleges or universities.



didn't have educational opportunities. So, on the day of the diploma award in the fourth grade, he received a medal of honor, and I was surprised that I didn't receive a medal as well; his grades were the same as mine, I felt badly that I didn't get one. My fourth-grade photo with the diploma was not with my teacher. I took a picture with a third-grade teacher, who was a person who always valued me. These things are striking. I only realized this as a racial issue, as a discrimination suffered by black students, from the activism in the social movement and later, as a researcher, when I went to investigate the various racial violence suffered by black children at school.

I discovered the black movement in my teens. The librarian at the school where I studied always saw me reading, I went to the library a lot. One day she asked me: "why don't you join the youth group?". So, I started to participate in the group of young people at the Catholic Church. At one of the training meetings, one of the trainers spoke about a black awareness group, I became interested in it. He was a seminarian, he left the phone for us to call him, but we could only call at a certain time. Then I would call at that time, from a public phone, the coins would fall, and I could not speak properly. He then invited me to a meeting. I went to that meeting and then to others, and that is how I started to participate in the Black Unity and Awareness Group (GRUCON). A group that had national expression. It was organized in 13 states in Brazil and articulated a lot with the Unified Black Movement (MNU). I participated in many joint activities in Belo Horizonte. This gave me political knowledge, broadened horizons - I even had the possibility to travel. At around 22 I had deep knowledge of the black movement. This activism also opened doors for me. Today, I am part of the Black Women Network of Minas Gerais. We started in 2015, organizing the national march. In 2018, we held the Black Women March. The march is a manifestation of a continuous process of reflection and articulation.

### The African worldview

Because of activism, I also had greater contact with religions of African origin. My mother was Catholic, so we were raised in the Catholic church. I know that my grandfather, my father's father, was Catholic, Vincentian, and had an Umbanda *terreiro*. But my mother didn't allow us to go to my grandfather's house on those occasions. My grandfather was well known in the neighborhood, we were known as José Júlio's grandchildren there. In my neighborhood there was Congado<sup>17</sup> and we knew everyone, but we didn't participate. When they left for the streets, they passed through our

17 Congado is a mixture of the celebrations brought by enslaved Africans with colonial Christian religiosity. Its origins date back to an African rite, in which the subjects held a procession (or cortejo) in honor of the Congo Kings, to thank their rulers.

door. During my activism, I met the Community of Arturos<sup>18</sup>, with which I have a great affinity, a friendship. I was Festivity Queen there in 2007.

I learned that for African religions there is no division of things, everything is a construction. There are several paths. Many people say that they don't understand a person who goes, for example, to Congado and also to Candomblé. This is possible because African religions are not a closed box, you have the possibility of being this and that. The African worldview makes this possible. Since everything is construction and there are several gods, you don't need to be limited to a space or a religion.

### Insertion of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in curricula

I like to think of Law 10.639 / 2003 that mandates the inclusion of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the curricula as a result of the struggle of black activism. When we think about the Black Experimental Theater, we realize that Abdias do Nascimento<sup>19</sup> and Guerreiro Ramos<sup>20</sup> already discussed the need to bring the cultural elements of Africanity to schools. Black movements were creating these possibilities. I have a letter in my house from 1989, scheduling a black movement meeting to discuss the racial issue in education. We were already thinking about ethnic-racial education, although we did not name it that way. The black movement questioned the absence of black people in textbooks and disciplines.

The law is fundamental, but the curriculum guidelines also need to be known. Knowing the guidelines and how to apply them at all levels of education is essential. The law has potential that needs to be further explored. Obviously, if truly implemented black women and men will be strengthened, because their origins will be valued. Unfortunately, it has not been implemented as it should have been and there's a lot of rhetoric to justify this. There are teachers who say until today: "I don't know what to do to implement it." Why don't they act as they do with other laws, and they are proactive? What is behind this passivity? There are teachers who say: "I don't use the law, because I don't have any material". I do not need to create material; I need to be critical of the

18 Community descendant from Camilo Silvério da Silva, who was enslaved and brought to Brazil from Angola in the mid-19th century. Their festivities are considered historical and cultural heritage of Brazil.

19 Abdias do Nascimento (1914-2011) was a black Brazilian politician, university professor, activist, and multi-faceted artist, including acting, poetry, and playwriting among his work. He organized the National Convention of Brazilian Blacks (1946), the First Congress of Brazilian Blacks (1950), and the Third Congress of Black Culture in the Americas (1982). He founded the Black Experimental Theater, the Black Art Museum, and the Afro-Brazilian Research Institute. In 2010, he was an official nominee to the Nobel Peace Prize.

20 Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1915-1982) was a Brazilian sociologist and politician, having served as federal deputy and as a member of the Brazilian delegation to the UN. His books and papers have been translated into several languages.

material that is in the classroom. That rhetoric of not knowing or not having material to implement the law is part of the racist discourse.

When my children were in basic education, teachers often talked in a very caricature way or only talked about black people in culture, dance, music, and soccer. They didn't show the truth, that black people built our country. My children already knew this, but not everyone has the opportunity to have a mother who talks to them about the issue.

In early childhood, my children studied in municipal schools. Even before the law was passed, the municipal educational network already had an ethnic-racial training nucleus. At City Hall, this discussion was already being made within the Municipal Education Secretariat. Patrícia Santana, Maria do Carmo Galdino, Fátima Gomes, Mara Evaristo and her sister Macaé Evaristo formed a group of people who thought about social relations in education, who were also activists. One of the first things that this nucleus proposed, and that the city took on was the development of a literary kit. In this kit were placed books written by black people or that used the ethnic-racial theme. Thus, my children had the opportunity to reading these, as well as other children who were in the municipal network at the time.

### **The struggle for affirmative policies (quotas) at university**

I was one of the people who fought for the quotas. I participated in the Zumbi dos Palmares March in 1995, in marches in Belo Horizonte, in the mobilization within UFMG. The university didn't implement quotas until it became a law. Our conflict at the university was very intense, but institutional racism prevented the university from making that choice. It was also the black movement that sensitized and politicized me to defend quotas, it was not the university. It was in the black movement that I started to understand the absence of black bodies at the university, in this place of knowledge production. I started working very early at the university and at a UFMG unit that had many black people, the University Hospital. But there, black people occupied, and still occupy, certain places: infrastructure, restaurant, nutrition, laundry, nursing, and other activities. I mean, there is a mass of black professionals, but those who command them, in general, are white professionals. This racial interpretation of occupational places, I started to do in the black movement.

When the quota debate was brought up by the social movements, I soon began to have this debate also at the university. I already understood that the black workers at the university were in more precarious jobs within the institutional organization chart. I noticed the absence of black professors, an evident split between white students and professor and black technical-administrative workers. This also made me engage in dialogue for the approval of quotas.

In late 2008, UFMG approved the bonus policy, I was part of that debate. Then I joined the Social Inclusion Monitoring Commission (Cais), for as long as it existed. The university created a social inclusion policy, not a quota policy. It is undeniable that as of Law 12.711 / 2012<sup>21</sup>, there was a much larger insertion of black students in the university, even though it is a social class law. I like to highlight this because people often forget that this is a social class quota law. Our demand as a black movement was for racial quotas, quotas for black students. In the current law, blacks are benefited in a second or third instance, they must be black and poor, while the racial quotas proposal was designed for historical reparation, it would be for blacks, regardless of social background.

As I said, there is a much larger influx of black students, but these students face institutional racism. Their lack of themes focused on racial issues in the courses is still immense. I interpret that as, although we have the disciplines of Portuguese language literature and Brazilian literature, racial issues were not present in my graduation. Cruz e Sousa, Machado de Assis and many others were not highlighted as black authors.

The absence of black knowledge in curricula persists. Since 2003, we have law 10.639 / 2003, which speaks of the mandatory insertion of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the curricula and, however, the university, which is a professional training institution, remains without this guidance. In some areas, there is a little more of this thematic insertion, but in others there is not. For example, at the Faculty of Education undergrad, where I got my master's and PhD, there is still no specific subject in the history of African and Afro-Brazilian culture.

### **Academia and activism**

I usually question how the issue of activism is presented by academia. I think there is a desire to hierarchize knowledge, distinguishing knowledge and practice, knowledge, and awareness. I understand that academia uses this dichotomous way to rank. I really like the book *O Movimento Negro Educador*<sup>22</sup>, by professor Nilma Lino Gomes. In it, she speaks a lot about the possibility of education and re-education that black movements bring to Brazilian society. Not only for the academic field, but for society.

21 Law No 12.711, 29 August 2012, provides for admission to federal universities and to federal high-school technical education institutions. Federal institutions of higher education will reserve, in each selective competition for admission to undergraduate courses, the minimum percentage of 50% of their places for students who have fully attended high school in public schools. When filling these vacancies, 50% must be reserved for students from families with an income equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages per capita and also filled, by major and attendance shift, by self-declared black, brown, and indigenous people and people with disabilities. (BRAZIL, Law No. 12.711, 29 August 2012).

22 The Educating Black Movement.

Both in the master's and in the doctorate, I was asked in the jury if the themes I brought up weren't related to my activism only. When I started my master's degree, I wanted to talk about technical-administrative workers, I was with the union, activism was there, but activism is part of my life. There is no way to dissociate the activist Yone and the researcher. Because the researcher Yone was also built from this activism; it was the activism that expanded conceptions, perceptions, and values in a political context, and that gave me the knowledge I must question even academia. I think that activism and resistance by us, peripheral black women, helps us to have a different perspective on management and in the classroom. I cannot escape my corporeality, my ancestry, this is present in me.

### **Racism in public management**

The racial issue is a barrier everywhere. This thing of being called the "n-word", "monkey", it happens to all black men and women. We live in a society that is racist and that denies racism. This story that racism in Brazil is veiled is all talk; it is in plain view! For example, I, a black woman, when I arrived at the secretariat, I could only be with the racial equality portfolio. They didn't think I was there because of technical competence, but because I was a party member. People were also surprised when I said that I was doing a PhD, some people were shocked: "what, you are getting a PhD?". I knew white women who were superintendents for 14, 15 years, a life built as Superintendents; but who understood almost nothing about the functioning of the secretariat to which they were assigned. I knew about the need to think about politics, transversality, intersectionality; but as this takes effect in everyday life, I went to talk. When talking about it with these Superintendents, they retorted: "Wow, never thought of that." They were never required to think about it because they were white, blond, blue-eyed women.

### **Hair and skin color are markers**

In this hair thing, I went through everything! In childhood, our mother braided our hair. I went to school with my hair braided. I remember the boys pulling on my braids. When we started adolescence there was that thing of looking beautiful, going out at night, and needing to have presentable hair. This "presentable" was straightened hair. So, my mother straightened our hair. Today I understand that it was her strategy, to make her daughters presentable in the eyes of a racist society. I always had an aversion to these things. Saturday was the day of torture, we had to clean the house in the morning, do the chores, and in the afternoon go to the salon to get our hair done - straightened - and be able to go out dancing at night. At least there was the dance. I straightened my hair until I was 22, 23 year-old.

When I started activism, I discovered that my curly hair, my afro hair, was also a tool for presenting my identity. I met some people who were already in the process of braiding, then I migrated towards them. I remember that when I started braiding my hair, in my family they said: "wow what hair is this?". I wore my braided hair in a bun for a long time. The militancy went through another hairstyle phase, square, and I also cut my hair like that. Then, I accepted my curls and wore it down. The tall, afro hair was more challenging. The afro is part of the black beauty composition, but it is a painful process, because people are stigmatized the whole time, discriminated against, and abused because of their hair.

The looks say everything. For example, when arriving and introducing myself as Superintendent, there were people who looked me up and down several times. They said: " Ah, Superintendent!" I wondered: " Ah, why? I already know, needless to say, the look has said it already". One of the things that stand out in management is the issue of black corporeality. If you think of black women in management, you will see some who are brown. When the person is brown, they still have a degree of being able to "pass". I don't have that, I'm black. As black woman manager, it's something else. When we arrive and it is said "this is the Superintendent" people look up and down, look at the color, and look at the hair. There is no escape, these two markers are present all the time.

We were five black women, with black skin, in the Racial Equality Undersecretariat. In the Policies for Women Undersecretariat, there were four others. Two colleagues had dreadlocks. Sometimes it coincided that the seven others were with their hair loose and people passing through the corridors of our floor, in the Administrative City, stared. Superintendent, black and with black hair is a lot of transgression for colonized minds. It is a model that clashes with the preconceived idea of a manager: straight hair, high heels, makeup. We had another image. That was a learning process for white people, that black women can also be managers.

In the Gender and Racial Equality Program, we had several dialogues during the periods when policymaking for women was discussed. I talked to a colleague who worked with gender about the need to articulate gender and race. This articulation faces challenges all the time. I, as a woman, an individual who declares herself black, who positions herself, I end up being scary for some people.

Especially in this election year, it is important to think about black women and the space of power. Some women are present in these spaces that we call power, but in reality, they take on a space that until then was prohibited to black women because of racism, but these spaces are not necessarily spaces of power. Professor Nilma occupied the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR), then the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights.



Benedita da Silva city councilor, vice-governor, governor, senator, state deputy, and federal deputy, the first woman to occupy all these spaces. It's not enough! We have some city councilors, very few deputies here in Minas. At the federal level, very few.

In public administration, women generally take on those departments that are more focused on working with collectives, that is, only the sphere of care ends up being destined for women - Social Assistance, Education, and sometimes Healthcare. There are few women who assume the Planning Secretariat, Finance, these are areas considered to be more masculine. We need to understand that, in general, these places of power occupied by black women have extremely limited power. They are spaces with few resources and power is linked to economic issues, to the budget. Did the occupied spaces represent advances? Yes! But in this trajectory of black women, we still need to ask what kind of power we have.

### **Racial education is fundamental**

Racial education and training of managers are essential. It is difficult to understand that black people can talk about other things than just the racial issue. When I am talking about racial issues, I'm talking about life, so I'm talking about everything. When I say that black men and women have the worst social indicators, I am talking about economics. If I say that black men and women were not brought from Africa, they were trafficked from Africa, I am talking about a historical and political issue. Black people are participants in the construction of the Brazilian nation. For me, re-education in ethnic-racial relations is an ethical and political commitment, fundamental for people to understand the need for affirmative policies as a reparatory policy.

When I worked at Undersecretariat, we participated in the Applied Project discipline with professor Aparecida Shikida, at the João Pinheiro Foundation. We talked a lot with students about the need for them to become managers capable of reading the racial issue as a structural matter. To think of these individuals as individuals with rights. The potential that these reflections had and have is very cool. I hope they can handle that today, being within management and thinking about it. I also participated in the quota debate at FJP.

At our consultancy, a friend and I have been working on discussing the role of white people in the racial issue. Racism was produced by white people; the social and political construction of racism is white. The issue of anti-racist action involves white people realizing the racial dimensions, realizing the white privileges, realizing that they must be in this fight, because their ancestors were in the process of creating everything. White people must deal with the processes of deconstructing and confronting racism and thinking about politics, since structural racism prevents the functioning of society, for both white and black people. Racism is bad for everyone.

### **Raising male children and raising black male children**

The coordination of motherhood and work was actually easy for me, considering the many experiences I see around. But it was only easy because I always had a lot of support from my family. My eldest son and my niece were born months apart, they were the first grandchildren, first nephew and niece, so there was an intense presence of my mother and sister. Then the others came, and that presence was also very affectionate. I had many women surrounding me, helping in this process of raising children. My children's upbringing is largely due to my sister's presence; she has no children, but my children are partly her children.

In raising my children, I highlight two dimensions. The first, raising boys; and the second, raising black boys. Raising boys requires the woman's effort to not reproduce sexist processes. I have a good reference in my mother; she used to say to my brothers: "What you don't want for yourself, don't want for others". She also used to say to my brothers: "What you don't want to happen to your sisters and cousins, don't do to the daughter of others". And I try to say that to my children. Pass on to them the importance of respect and dialogue. It is another thing to raise black boys. There is the dimension of structural racism, which shakes mothers of black boys to the core. When you talk about this presence of racism, the hierarchy of relationships, I feel that this process of educating black boys is the most perverse thing for black women. Racism shows her all the time that he is a young black man. That his hair is a symbol, a target. My son has the target-skin. Target of discrimination, looks, police violence, interpretation. If he is running, he can be suspected of something, he can be stopped, a bullet can hurt him. For black mothers, there is nothing that hurts more. Raising a child, boy or girl, a black person in this racist society, it is extremely violent.

It means having to say to your child: "don't leave without ID", "if the police stop you, speak softly", "tell me everything you're going to do", "don't raise your arms". My son is almost six and half feet tall, he wears dreadlocks, he is very assertive, he has a political discourse on the tip of his tongue. He's my son and his father's son, who are two politicized, militant people. To tell him "If they stop you, keep quiet" is violence, and another violence to me, considering the life that I have led.

### **The great challenge for black women**

I think the big challenge for black women is to be able to live with dignity. There is still most black women who have nothing to eat, who don't go to school or who are beaten, because they are black. Their educational trajectory is interrupted, and this reflects on their psychological, emotional health. It will reflect on their work opportunities. The great challenge the racisms impose on us daily.

They say that our black lives matter. They need to matter in all dimensions, mainly in the possibility of people being able to live as human beings. When it comes to the dimensions of human rights, the first is the right to life, which has been denied daily. There are several ways to kill us, to kill us by silencing, by erasing our stories, by discrediting our words.

## 5. Thinking about my constructions

We do not stop and think about the constructions that we make. You go on making them, but you do not have time to have it all organized, synthesized, reflected. The urgencies of life do not give us time to reflect. Whenever I did something, I did not think about leaving a legacy.

Education has always been present in my life, that is what built me. I think I am remembered as a teacher, although I didn't get to be a teacher at a federal university, but some students see me in that place.



I would like to be remembered as someone who was in the process of struggle, of historical, social, and political construction so that black people would have opportunities. I think of the fight for the quotas, the fight for housing, the fight for political representation... my fight for the quotas at UFMG, both in undergraduate and graduate courses; then in the fight for quotas at the João Pinheiro Foundation. There were things that came on the scene for me and that I just did, because I thought it was important, necessary, strategic. Today, when looking at it from the outside, one can think: "it's a hell of a breakthrough". What does it mean for the João Pinheiro Foundation to have black students? I think of the seedling, the conversations with students in Aparecida Shikida's class. Today there is a formal course. These are things that we have been sowing and now seeing some fruits.

*Speaking about the importance of including racial diversity in companies. Gender and Race Pro Equity Program developed when she was the Superintendent of Affirmative Policies at the State Secretary for Human Rights. Sebrae/MG, 2017.*

*By: Personal Archive*

# 11 ELIANE DIAS

Eliane Dias  
Rosânia Sousa  
Sérgio Luiz Felix da Silva

## 1. My Origins

I'm Eliane Dias, born in Corinto, in the countryside of Minas Gerais. Corinto is a city that was well known at the time of the Rede Federal Ferroviária Sociedade Anônima (RFFSA)<sup>1</sup>, before its privatization. Corinto was a rich city, not only for its work with the railway, but also because of the exploitation of the crystal. White quartz, which despite being scarce due to high exploitation, is still a source of income that feeds many in the city. I come from this city that has a very welcoming and creative people. My family is black, a former resident of the deep country, of the Roça do Brejo district of Curvelo, we're simple people. My father was a cowboy; my mother washed clothes, was a domestic worker, a cook, and she also took care of and grew a small vegetable garden to feed the family. We left the countryside and went to live in Corinto, which remains with its almost 25 thousand inhabitants.

<sup>1</sup> Federal Train Network Company.



Although the city has a black majority, power is concentrated in the hands of white people, in the hands of men. There is no discussion of racial agenda, and, with that, we remain in that place of subordination, of oppression. This characterized our transition from leaving the country to arriving in the city, a simple family of workers, poor, and in search of better days.

Through a lot of struggles, my parents bought a house. My father had to work unhealthy jobs, such as in the metallurgical and steel industries and gas stations. The Companhia Mineira de Metais<sup>2</sup> "stole", more or less, 14 years of our lives together, the children with my father, because it was the resource we had at the time. My mother washed and ironed clothes, she was a domestic worker, she spent a long time caring for her children, fulfilling in a very admirable way the function of feeding us, guiding us, putting us in school. There was a moment that really affected our family, and me too, which was a period of many hardships in relationships. My parents experienced an exceedingly difficult situation after the dictatorship: lack of work, lack of resources, tensions and fears. This generated many concerns and conflicts in the family, it was not healthy for my parents' relationship. They fought and walked together for over 30 years. Today, already separated, they remain my examples, my guides, my old people, my ancestors!

My mother is 70 and my father is 80, they were married in December 1966. My mother was 16 and my father, 26. In 1968, their first daughter came. In 1969, another son came. In 1970, one more came. In 1972, the other. I don't know what my mother did, how she positioned herself, but she gave a longer interval between pregnancies, so I ended up born on 20 October 1977. And precisely in that period, when women were around the world, fighting for the feminist movement, still white, but organized, fighting for women's rights; it was not until much later that my mother learned about the first contraceptive methods. She went straight for the sterilization process, at the birth of her last child, 33 years ago. It is an extreme process, which can also be used to lower the numbers of the black population, in the absence of health policies. But it was what was possible.

My mother is my first and my greatest example of struggle, courage, and feminism. If I'm here, in this moment, it was because I had my mother to say: "you will not depend on men or anyone". So, all my sisters are these independent women, who don't depend on other people, who have their professions. One is a pedagogue and teacher, the other two work in health as nursing technicians in public and private organizations and follow their paths with great courage and determination. My father was there as a provider, who generated the most financial resources, but it was my mother who guided us most of the time. So, obviously, it's not just because of the umbilical cord, but because that was the person. That is, not only the mother, but she was also the woman who guided us, who pushed us forward. Somehow, if we didn't go down a bad path, if we are all still

<sup>2</sup> Metal Company of Minas Gerais.

living in society, working, taking care of our families, living these conflicts all and seeking our happiness, it is because my mother, Venina, dona Preta<sup>3</sup>, was, above all, a guide to us. It isn't cliché, I just truly recognize how much she was and is important to me. So, every time I can bring this black woman to be by my side, along with me, I will, as I'm doing now.

In my family, we are four women and four men, a total of eight children. I have twelve nieces and nephews, I always lose count and have to say their names to make sure: Saulo, Rafael, Anna Carolina, Victoria, Lucas, Victor, Tamires, JR (Junior), Tulio Henrique, Pedro, Andrew. Antonella (Tontom) is my mother and father's first great-granddaughter. In October 2020, another beauty came to the family, Helena (Leninha). We live in three different cities and most of the family is in Corinto: my mother Venina de Moura Filha (Dona Preta), my father Antônio Dias Evangelista (Fogão)<sup>4</sup>, my siblings Antônio Dias, Aparecida Dias, Warley Elbert, and Ueriston Bruno. I have a brother, Ueniton César who lives with his family in Itaúna. And here in Belo Horizonte, is the rest: my sister Matilde Aparecida and children, Denise Dias, me, and some cousins and aunts. It is important to record the sisters-in-law that close out the clan, Valderês, Diana, Carla, Walesca, and Denise.

I'm no longer the young woman from those days, so I'm proud to be in this place, to speak of my origins, of a black, hardworking, simple family, that's full of swagger. Me, who already saw my mother carrying bundles of clothes on her head to wash and iron, who went across town to be able to buy cheaper rice bags, because we didn't have enough money to buy at the supermarket, I get emotional remembering these and so many other moments. I remember the times I was going to buy a single bottle of Baré<sup>5</sup> on the weekend. This one-liter bottle was shared with almost eight children at the time, plus mother and father. Despite the struggles, I felt happy, I miss my childhood!

<sup>3</sup> Preta" literally means "black woman", and "dona" is a less formal version of "Mrs.". So, Mrs Black is the nickname used for Eliane's mother.

<sup>4</sup> Literally meaning "stove".

<sup>5</sup> Brand of guaraná soda.



Counterclockwise: Eliane, aged 5, on her sister Matilde's lap, on the left. In the lap of her mother, Venina, brother Warley. Next to her, her father Antônio. The other siblings, standing behind: Denise, Antônio, and Aparecida. 1982.

By: Personal Archive



## 2. Religion and ancestry

To speak a little of religion, there is no denying that my first access to religion was within the Catholic Church. I was baptized, I had my first communion, I attended a prep course, which I don't even know if it exists anymore, but it was a meeting of young people, and I had my confirmation. But right now, it's interesting to say that today, connected to the black movement, I realize that, even being initiated within the Catholic Church, I was already making *macumbas*<sup>6</sup>. We were already connected to other religions, such as Spiritism. How many times did my mother take me to the Saturday morning meetings of the Alan Kardec Spiritist group, because there we could hear a word, receive an energy transfer; we could also receive physical food, food, soup, porridge and, above all, spiritual food. So, I'm also very grateful not only for being welcomed by this religion, but also because I carry it, until today, in several other moments.

Both in my youth and as an adult, I had access to Spiritism, which comforted and welcomed me. However, it was only a few years ago, about four years ago, that I met candomblé, with my mother Mametu de Munhadê, who is the dona Efigênia, from Kilombo<sup>7</sup> Manzo. It's through this connection that indeed I find myself, because I recognize and live my ancestry. It's knowing that when my mother burned incense at home, those smokers in order to cleanse the environment, she was making macumba too. She was bringing African origins, orixás into the house to protect and guide us. When she took us to be blessed, and I remember those moments, I would sit on my grandmother's lap, she would turn my foot upwards and tap the slipper in her hand, she would rub rue on her body, evoke spirits of light, saints, and all the energy of nature to heal us. This is ancestry, this is candomblé, this is umbanda, this is African origin, it's something from black women and men.

Right now, already in my 40s, I can understand my trajectory through the Catholic Church, Protestant churches<sup>8</sup> like Batista da Lagoinha and others - I refuse to say which ones because I'm ashamed, because they are neoliberal churches with political leaders who are in power today killing our black people. So, I will stick to this initiation in Catholicism. We still remain, my family as a whole, connected with Catholicism. But all of us, especially women, had a moment, a connection with spiritism. I don't lose this place. It is in my *terreiro*, with my mother<sup>9</sup>, that I find myself. I'm not

6 Macumbas are percussion instruments used in religions of African origin in Brazil. Often, and usually pejoratively, they are used as synonyms for rituals known as despachos, also from these religions.

7 Another spelling of quilombo.

8 In Brazil, "protestant" is widely used to mean religions derived from the Protestant movement (such as Lutheranism and Methodism) and more conservative, neo-charismatic Christian denominations.

9 Meaning her spiritual leader in candomblé.

initiated, but I call her mother. I call her, and she gives me her blessing. It's very good to have my ancestral mother and my birth mother in the same place of affection, concern, care, and refuge. I will always listen to them, and I will always carry them with me, because I understand and recognize where I come from. In this field of religion, I feel extremely contemplated. And today is a Saturday from Iemanjá, our mother's Saturday. The ancestral strength I also find in the street processions, made with my people from the Afro Bloc Angola Janga, a quilombo who lives in me. Through music, African heritage, and drums, I found another place of strength and axé<sup>10</sup>!

## 3. School trajectory and the discovery of sexuality

We were all very well guided by my mom and dad to study to improve our lives. We all finished high school, except for one brother. I was the first to have access to the university, I was the first to have a university degree. Unfortunately, after me, only another one of the eight siblings concluded university. I have a degree in Public Administration and I'm doing a postgraduate course in Legislative Power and Public Policy. One of the oldest memories I have is, precisely, of school, maybe five or six years old. We called it preschool at the time, before first grade. I arrived there and wanted to sit with the boys, I thought it was more interesting to be there with them. I remember the teacher pulled me from the boys' desk and the put me on the girls' desk. Obviously, I acquiesced. But also, obviously, I was upset. I didn't understand it, but I was always there, wanting to be in that place of coexistence, with that way of playing, of doing; but I couldn't, they wouldn't let me be free. Everything was very oppressive, very sexist, very separatist. Girl wears pink, boy wears blue, girls separate from boys. So complicated.

In the third or fourth grade or so, I went through a few moments when I did not feel included, moments of exclusion, quietness, shyness, fear. But of a lot of admiration for the teachers, especially teacher Gildete, a fat black woman. With her, I felt at ease, I liked the way she taught Portuguese. Perhaps, because, somehow, I recognized myself in her. I had never stopped to think about it, why out of all the teachers, who weren't many, I liked teacher Gildete the most. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to say this to her already as an adult, with more awareness. I understand that there's in there a little bit the issue of representativeness, the importance of us seeing each other. That's why that trust, that well-being, that increased participation in Portuguese classes happened with her, the black woman teacher. That's it, I saw myself in it somehow.

In the fifth and sixth grade, I had to take Home Education. It was terrible! Look, I had no political awareness. What a horrible thing to learn to cook and sew. I wanted to be outside playing soccer, flying a kite. In my house, my mother allowed it, gave me this freedom to fly kites, play

10 Axé is the life energy of all things and the energy from the orixás.

with marbles, play soccer with our neighbors. (I remember that once I really wanted a pair of Xuxa<sup>11</sup> boots, but I'm glad I didn't get them). In addition, I was always involved with my mother's backyard, which was always full of many fruits and plants, different trees. I always look for those smells and memories when I'm there. The first place I go to is always the backyard, because it gives me strength.

From the fifth and sixth grades, I was more in touch with issues of sexual orientation found myself attracted to a woman, an equal and "that's cool". Over and done, I'm a dyke. But I needed some therapy sessions at the health center to deal with the daily lesbophobias. There is a whole trajectory there, especially when you don't not have sexual orientation as a priority at school and when your parents have no way of bringing you that. Inside the school, I experienced this process of oppression, sexism, and lesbophobia itself. I was not as feminine as the other girls. I'm not a feminine woman, I don't wear dresses, for example. The last time I wore a dress was at my graduation in the fourth grade, I remember like it was yesterday, I liked the dress. But I only had four! What I wore in a photo at six months, more or less; then another, at six years-old. All the photos I have at six or seven, more or less, were in that same dress. And there were the dresses I wore for my first communion and the fourth-grade graduation. But because I'm not that standard woman - not white, not blonde, no green eyes, and still wore jeans, shorts and a T-shirt - then it was harder. During this period, my issues were very much towards dealing with those responsibilities of moving to the next grade, learning something, and maintaining my sanity.

At the age of 15, I was nominated for best handball goalkeeper at school. That was 1992, I was studying at Polivalente. Ah, I have two medals: one for "best handball goalkeeper of 1992" and the other for "best community association of 2000", which I chaired. I was president of the Community Association of Maciel Neighborhood (ACOBAM) for two consecutive terms, another very important moment for me as a very successful initiation into activism. Gratitude to more senior people who believed that this journey together would be possible. In partnership with City Hall, we built bathrooms, remodeled houses, ran awareness campaigns, held events to acquire funds to build our own headquarters, for example! I think that these processes were, for me, like fuel, because I was always the class leader, despite having been held back at school. I'm not ashamed to say it, I was held back some years, at that time, to learn what I needed, due to different issues that were happening with me: my orientation, family, racism itself.

In the first year, I was already a class leader. I did the Accounting Technician course. I still have memories of that time, of the things we did together. And this movement in society, in a small town, where everyone knew each other, also provided me with other places. I learned, facing the

11 Brazilian entertainer for children, famous in the 80s and 90s.

challenges and climbing other spaces from this training. I studied in public school all my life, state and municipal. There came a time when I needed to breathe more and take care a little more of my mind. Then I went to study in the neighboring city, where I paid a course for a certain period, then got a scholarship. I studied for a year, more or less, there. So, I returned to my city, finished out my high school course at Cristo Rei School. Back then, I was already working at City Hall. I was part of the Social Assistance Secretariat team, organizing seminars, conferences, meetings, professional qualification courses, and other activities. I also had the honor and gift of working with students at a school belonging to the Association of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional Children (APAE). I learned a lot from them all.

A little later, I came to Belo Horizonte. I was unable to study on arrival, because of my activism. I resumed my studies in 2007, at UniBH<sup>12</sup>. I had started my activism in 2004 here in Belo Horizonte, at the Lesbian Association of Minas (ALÉM) and I chose my course due to its influence. At ALÉM, I was a deeply passionate volunteer with the cause, we made a lot of noise to call the authorities' attention to our demands. We held drumming workshops with recycled drums, lectures, conversation circles, seminars, courses, various events that highlighted the agenda of lesbian women, and made visible the need for specific public policies to meet our specificities in the field of health, safety, and education mainly. We also distributed informative material and condoms for health and prevention for the LGBT population and sex workers who worked in the less reputable areas of BH, that is, in hotels. At that moment, I wanted to change my life and the lives of people who were close to me, I wanted to build something for the world. Then I saw in the Public Administration course a possibility to know the public machine, to understand where

12 University Center of Belo Horizonte.



*Eliane Dias giving a speech on a float, at the LGBT Pride Parade in Belo Horizonte. 2017.*

*By: Personal Archive*



the money goes through, how things are made. During the course, I was invited by a professor to be the manager of his law firm specialized in civil servant law. This was another great professional experience that lasted about four years.

I arrived at the University Center of Belo Horizonte and, at that time, ProUni and Enem policies weren't widespread<sup>13</sup>. I joined the Public Policy Lab as an intern and got a little more flexibility to pay my tuition. I paid all the tuition for the years I studied. But it's indisputable that the quota policy is extremely necessary. It's minimal reparation that, in my opinion, is already under threat in the current situation. This week, my girlfriend and companion, psychoanalyst Cristiane Ribeiro, gave an interview to the O Tempo newspaper. The program was about racism. One of the listeners made the following statement: "quota policy is wrong, it isn't necessary, it excludes". I'll use her words, because it's very illustrative: "just look at a medical course at any university in Brazil and you will see that 99.9% of students are white and look at the prison system or the rehabilitation system, to see only black and brown people there". There's a medical course with very expensive tuition and of course there are no black people there. Who dies today from state violence? More than 70% are black, the vast majority are men, this is all connected. In the extermination policy, boys are killed more so that black people are no longer present. In violence statistics, deaths of men are much higher, and so is the possibility of more black people being born is taken away.

I attended a panel for quotas assessment at the federal level, and there you had white people saying they were black. People still use the argument: my mother or my grandmother was black, my grandfather was black. But according to the quota policy, it's the person who is being assessed, not their grandfather or grandmother. They were being evaluated, who is white and has a face full of freckles, light-colored hair, and a narrow nose. So, we still face these difficulties; in addition to the need to expand affirmative policies, many people still try to steal it from us.

#### 4. Activism and work

Activism is an engine that takes me out of bed every day, is what motivates me and gives movement. Everything I do is political, everything I do is facing oppression, everything I do is related to the struggle.

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13 The Ministry of Education's University for All (Prouni) Program, which offers full and partial scholarships to private higher education institutions for students with a monthly family income, per capita, of up to 1.5 minimum wages. Enem is the National High School Exam, which evaluates students' academic performance at the end of basic education and is used as a mechanism for accessing higher education, through the Unified Selection System (Sisu)

At the age of 15, I was already on the street handing out election flyers to peoples' houses. I also got to do programs on Rádio Cidade de Corinto<sup>14</sup> in the early 1990s. I remember playing Cyndi Lauper on my first program. It was American influence, capitalism in our lives. Thank God, today I play Clara Nunes, Jorge Ben Jor, Tim Maia, Mariene de Castro, Leci Brandão, Elza Soares, I'll look for big names, mainly names of black women to put on my radio program. I worked for a few years at Rádio Cidade de Corinto with unique figures, like dear Fátima Lopes. That early 1990s period was when Skank<sup>15</sup> started to appear to the world, they even had a concert there. Then I went to look for other experiences. And, in that other moment, already as the leadership of the Accounting class, in the second, third year, I was more in control of myself, I was already more politically aware, and positioned myself in a different place when it came to conflicts. I knew he was a dyke, that I was black and that I could be in different places. So, let's go plan the parties, parades, concerts with DJs, the first contemporary art exhibition in the city. I was 18-19, I was even on television in Curvelo. During the cocktail party for the contemporary art exhibition there was even caipirinha, it was another level. I was already someone who was more aware. I already knew I had rights, I might not have known in detail what they were, but I knew that there something called article fifth and sixth of the 1988 Constitution<sup>16</sup> and I knew that this was the biggest document I had to guide myself.

Around 2000-2001, I arrived in Belo Horizonte, to work as a cultural producer for a band called Junke Box, which today has one of the main leaders of Come Back Dilma, of the Cancel the impeachment committee, which is singer Malu Aires. I initially worked in Belo Horizonte with this singer. After that, I did other menial work such as telemarketing, which is a place that causes a lot of mental illness.

It was on this arrival here in Belo Horizonte, from social movements of street protests and an edition of the LGBT Pride in Belo Horizonte, in 2000, that I started to connect with the LGBT movement. And I connected with the feminist agendas, with the World March of Women, I went through some paths and arrived at the black movement, at N'zinga, a Collective of Black Women, and, in parallel, I had already created with other partners the Afro LGBT Network in Minas Gerais, in 2013, the Lesbian and Bisexual Women Network of Minas Gerais, in 2015, and the Black Women Network of Minas Gerais, also in 2015. And I remain in these places understanding that it is important to broaden the dialogues and get out of my comfort zone. I belonged to the now extinct, due to the mismanagement of Bolsonaro, National Council for Combating LGBT Discrimination /

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14 Corinto City Radio.

15 Pop rock band from Belo Horizonte, now famous in the country.

16 The articles that deal with fundamental rights and guarantees.



CNCD. Currently, I represent black LGBTs along with companion Rhany on the Municipal Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality / COMPIR-BH.

In the process of transition in activism, I realized that the LGBT movement was quite limited, despite the fact that we had already been a series of conflicts, several Prides, several movements, marches in Brasília. In 2011, the stable union was achieved. We had also done a series of conferences, forums, and several campaigns that had advanced it a little. I started looking for other places to better understand my own place. Because I'm not just a woman, I'm not just a lesbian, there are a lot of things that go through me.

In 2014, I participated in an event at Mercado Novo. At the time, it was a cultural space with very black characteristics, several black cultural artistic interventions from the periphery, from the favela, from the cultural scene of Belo Horizonte. There, in one of the rooms, was the headquarters of N'zinga, which is the Collective of Black Women of Minas Gerais. So, participating in this event with the Benilda Brito, founder and former coordinator of N'Zinga, I thought, "I have to be here, I have to be in this place". And Benilda called me to help build the Black Women March of 2015, which was a major political movement in the states and in the country. We put about 1,200 women on the streets, on May 13, a Wednesday, the day of Xangô and Iansã. That totally changed the activism team for me, because they were not just women, they were black women, from the *terreiro*, from occupations, from the countryside, from Vale do Aço, Ouro Preto, Rota da Lama<sup>17</sup>, young women, artists, indigenous women, students, university students, and LGBT people.

My mother, mother Muiandê, mother Efigênia or Mameto de Muiãdê, the matriarch leadership of Kilombo Manzo, was the one who delivered, in the hands of the Secretary of Government, this white man who was there representing the governor of the time, that day, a series of black movement claims. Nothing is by chance, is it? We had already held a Conference on Racial Equality; then that document was a legitimate claim with non-negotiable points, extremely necessary for the black people of the state, such as combating genocide of black youth and black people, the defense of quotas, work, in short, several things.

From then on, I continued to be more and more connected with the black movement. I participated in the creation of the Black Women Network of Minas Gerais, which connects black women from various parts of the state, including candidates in the 2020 elections. Different women who are starting the fight in their territories and who are connected through this network. And we have a national dialogue, not only with the LGBT, feminist movement, but also with this black-quilombo movement. Since 2015, we have been carrying out a series of political assessments.

At that time, the 4th National Women's Conference was taking place, before the coup. We had gotten about 50 thousand black women to Brasília. It was that great moment, before the coup, of the social movement in the streets, of demands, of denunciations; and we were harassed by the neoliberal right in front of the National Congress. The Black Women March was in November 2015 and President Dilma left in May 2016.

The year of 2016 went by with a certain apathy, paralysis. A moment, spiritually speaking, that was overly complicated, because there was a certain paralysis of the movement, in my opinion. But we didn't know what was going on, we were still trying to understand the political scenario.

So, we only managed to make big moves again in 2018, when we resumed this national conversation more forcefully. In 2018, the Reform of the Political System Platform, which has been drawn up since 2004, once again articulated itself. And in September, we held large meetings of black women, again. In September, we held a State Meeting of Black Women with 150 women, in Belo Horizonte, in which we updated a series of demands and non-negotiable issues, in a series of condemnations given the fact that Marielle Franco had already been brutally murdered in March 2018. During this period, the World Social Forum had also taken place in Salvador. The year of 2018 was emblematic in this sense, because, as in 2016 and 2017, there was also a series of "paralyses" there, and we were not quite sure where that whole thing was going, with the daily loss of rights. Marielle Franco was brutally murdered, and a seed was planted there, with several women starting to get involved with the political platform, several people who were withdrawn returning to the fight.

And that has to do with ancestry. Because, at some point, I withdrew, I was quiet, still. Sometimes you can't keep up with the fight, which can be lonely, but it's also ancestral. To observe what is happening around you, to connect with other women who will also walk with you and will from this religion, read the context. We arrived in 2018 with this awareness and we carried out the first major national post-coup act, post-Bolsonaro, which was a meeting with 3,000 black women in Goiânia, on December 6, 7, 8, and 9, 2018. It's very interesting population section that we can work on. They are not all black women from Candomblé, from Umbanda, connected with an African religion. They are also evangelical, Protestant, Catholic, Catholic women for the right to choose, Spiritist women, youth, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, quilombolas, river populations, forest and water populations, among others. Diverse women, who may or may not be connected with the African religion, but, above all, they'll be connected by the fight against racism, sexism, LGBT-phobias and all forms of oppression. So, to gather around 50 thousand women marching in Brasília before the coup, three thousand women gathered in Goiânia, with a lot of struggles, a lot of difficulty, with a lot of issues, that's not nothing.

17 Regions of Minas Gerais.

So, we get to 2018 with this certainty, that black women are the ones who will actually change the structure. If that happens one day, it will be from this place, from black women bringing this wealth of our ancestry. We understand that much of what is there in society, the technologies, processes built and used even by our oppressors, is our wealth, it belongs to our ancestors, coming from Africa. How did Zumbi and Dandara<sup>18</sup> manage to gather around 30 thousand people in quilombos, hidden in the forest?! We need to look at these places that our people have built. We don't need to invent the wheel, we need to acknowledge this, that we've spun the wheel for centuries.

So when black women are elected deputies in Minas Gerais, after 300 years of this gigantic state, and raises the Áurea Carolina phenomenon as the most voted councilor of Belo Horizonte; the federal deputy with the fifth largest vote share in the state in 2018 - there were about 162 thousand votes; and brings her to the candidacy for mayor of Belo Horizonte, we are telling the world that we can too and want to be in the spaces of power to define politics!

## 5. Being a manager and a black woman

I arrived to compose a team from the government of the State of Minas in 2015. In March 2015, the Human Rights, Social Participation and Citizenship State Secretariat (SEDPAC) was created. I arrived in July 2015 to occupy the position of Director of Institutional Articulation of the Undersecretariat for Public Policies for Women (SPM). SEDPAC had five arms, five secretariats: youth; promotion and defense of human rights; racial equality; social participation; women. It was a period of immense learning, dialogue, both with progressive and non-progressive people. It was possible to realize the need for that government, even though it was on the left, to penetrate the roots of the state in order to make the necessary discussions on human rights. You cannot build public policies without understanding; soon it was possible to notice that within the institutional articulation of the SPM, and of SEDPAC itself, that there was a long way to get people aware, especially those who were there ahead of the constitution of policies, planning advisors and the career civil servants themselves. We worked on this route to raise awareness, to create a strong dialogue with communication sectors, with secretaries, the superintendencies, with the other undersecretariats, in this attempt to bring the partnership into practice. Our undersecretary at the time, Larissa Borges, and today, friend, is well aware of the battles we fought. But we also know about victories.

18 Leaders of the Palmares quilombo, the largest quilombo in Latin America. It was built at the end of the 16th century in the Captaincy of Pernambuco (it was located in a region where today is the state of Alagoas) and came to gather about 30 thousand inhabitants. It was one of the great symbols of the resistance of the enslaved people in Brazil. It was destroyed in 1694.

We were able to run some campaigns. I was also happy, sometime later, to see campaigns that came out of other secretariats, such as Sports, for example, putting black women in evidence in their materials. SEDPAC's civil servants were exonerated in January 2019 and then it ceased to exist. But some things remain with people and in ideas. I know it's a struggle, because within the structure we have today there are a number of issues that you're not going to face up to for various reasons. But it's important to celebrate small victories.

I think one of the great products we had, in addition to being able to get the Lilac Bus<sup>19</sup> running, it was having about a thousand women participating in the State Conference on Policies for Women. And almost three thousand people at the Youth and LGBT Conferences, which was a success. In addition to the other conferences held in 2015. We managed to engage in a dialogue with society, which is extremely important to maintain these places of participation with the presence of the people. And it fuels your hopes, favoring political education, allowing people to connect with you and also to become indignant. I, in my indignation, this revolt is my fuel for me to wake up in the morning knowing that I need to accomplish some things.

But the main product we managed to deliver at SPM / SEDPAC was the Policies for Women State Decennial Plan 2019/2029, which we did in partnership with the João Pinheiro Foundation and with many other partners in Minas Gerais. Knowing that this plan is still a guide for the Women's Directorate at SEDESE<sup>20</sup> makes me very happy. The Plan is a legitimate document, democratically built, at various times with society. Face-to-face moments with women and with a great concern for it to be something that isn't impossible, but rather a daily work tool. And it has a lot of representativeness - for example, you see several times the word "lesbian", the word "bisexual", the word "transgender". And then, you make headway because the Plan reflects the diversity, identities, the specificities of women in Minas Gerais.

The experience of almost four years at SPM was very productive; but there was also some frustration, because public policy is not carried out without resources. Then, you see that it's not enough to have only political will. Today, I'm an advisor at *Gabinetona*<sup>21</sup>, in the place of other brothers and sisters, and faced with millions of Brazilians who are out of work - also because of the pandemic that plagues us all these days.

19 Initiative that aims to provide care, support, and instruction to women who suffer and, if necessary, refer them to the service network.

20 Social Development Secretariat, Minas Gerais.

21 Collective term of city councillors at the Belo Horizonte Municipal Chamber. The first official councillor heading this effort was the aforementioned Áurea Carolina (PSOL).

## 6. Racism and absence in spaces of power

In the field of public management, directly, I don't remember having suffered racism or LGBT-phobia. Especially because, theoretically speaking, you are there with yours, with the people of human rights, all progressive, coming from the struggles of indigenous and black peoples, feminists, people with disabilities, LGBT, youth, diverse individuals. You assume that everyone is in the same boat. But that moving around the Administrative City<sup>22</sup>, at lunch, during a break, to go to another place, it's very difficult. Because, for example, I already arrived knowing that "you always have to be very well-dressed here, because people take note". I said: "Yeah, dammit". I won't give up my sneakers, my sandals, my activism T-shirts, I never worried about that, I was never in ratty clothes. C'mon! I'm a militant black woman, am I not going to wear my T-shirts from the movements? But people's gaze is always something that impresses a lot. Maybe that gaze might have been the most visible I noticed. They look for a number of reasons, they can look at you with admiration, with desire; but they also look at you with condemnation, questioning, pointing and, sometimes, wanting to expel you from your place or attack you.

On the street, yes, I was a victim of racism several times. Once, a guy in a car drove by, protected in there, told me to comb my hair. I have already been called "dyke" on the street as a form of aggression. Inside stores, it's always very uncomfortable... There are some forms of behavior in these places, which is not to be picking up very small things, keep your hand always visible. It's very difficult, very difficult, because the feeling is that at any moment you will be accused of something you didn't do.

Today, in 2020, we are going through a time of pandemic, of neoliberal, fascist, genocidal government, when the deaths of the black population, of black women, continue to increase. You can't just do, you have to think, look at the past. But it's also necessary to value and recognize the places that we have already gone through, that our parents, grandparents, our ancestors have already been through, to move forward. I'm not even going to talk about money as an obstacle, because lack of resources is always an obstacle for the working, poor, black family. But we see ourselves as rightful individuals, capable, able to be in other places. Believing in this is already a way forward. I was a young woman who has already thought about not existing anymore; and I didn't go hungry, I didn't live in a canvas shack, I wasn't raped, but the other violence I suffered made me want to stop living. I think that getting well is a very big challenge today, for many people, not only because of the racial issue, the issue of orientation, of the LGBT-phobias of each day.

I think it is extremely necessary to have more black people, more black women and more women in the spaces of power. We have a rate of around 10% in the legislative spaces, no more, unfortunately. Take Minas Gerais for example: among 77 deputies, there are only 10 women, and after 300 years you have only three black women. It took 300 years to have three black women as deputies, it's absurd. It's revolting. I think we need to continue and expand a series of political and social actions. So, who knows, we'll have good surprises in the future elections, in the municipal elections, more women and more black women seeing themselves as able of occupying other places, representing their community, their territory, embracing a specific agenda or moving through various places, with authority to do it without fear. I think we can even have good surprises in collective campaigns. And even, with the presence of other men, of black men. We have here, in 2020, the collective campaigns of PSOL<sup>23</sup> and the PSOL's Nucleus of Black Men and Women, for example, bringing in several leaders, something around 15 people, with collective candidacies in several cities, such as Juiz de Fora, Uberlândia, Sarzedo, and Belo Horizonte.

Although we can have good results for this 2022 election, I think it will take too long for us to see a woman president again, because the work that the right did of criminalizing politics itself, the social movements, left-wing parties, specifically the PT<sup>24</sup>, and especially the criminalization of women, it was very well done, unfortunately.

But, in short, that's it: a very low number of women, and black women, in this space of power, not only in the legislative, but mainly in the executive. The state of Minas Gerais itself: most of the women are in education, in education superintendencies and inside classrooms; and in those departments that are also a place of care, such as healthcare. But creating, taking care of money, in decision-making spaces, there is a very low number of women, for sure. I had access to some numbers in 2016/2017 and there's actually very low number of women in the senior spaces. If these women can have double, triple shifts, why can't they be president of the country, of the Chamber, of the Senate? If I take care of home finances, which is so difficult especially with few resources, can I not manage elsewhere? We can, we are capable, yes!

22 Headquarters of the state of Minas Gerais's executive branch.

23 Socialism and Liberty Party.

24 The Workers' Party.



## 7. Black Identity

I'm a black woman, lesbian, dyke. My discovery, I think, was slow. I don't want my niece Tamires or Junior to take 35 years to discover their black identity, but it took me a while to be able to figure it out. The issue of aesthetics, for example, has always been more connected with the issue of orientation. I didn't wear many dresses, rode a bicycle - there was never public transportation, not yet, in my city. So, it was bicycle, motorcycle, and car all the time. My aesthetic was always masculinized because I also didn't have this constitution of my identity. And the city is hot, so I wore shorts a lot, pants, and a T-shirt, with a bottle of water next to me.

And I always had this great contact with nature. I thank my mother again, my ancestor. Because the land, which is a great element for me, and this contact with the cerrado<sup>25</sup>, with the bush, was especially important for me to be able to get here. I always find a way to be with plants, enlarge the plant pots and take care of the vertical garden, made by myself and my companion at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Here in Belo Horizonte, a little after my arrival, with my friends, who were also in this construction of identity and their places, I started to understand myself, identifying my places, and facing LGBT-phobias and racisms, same as my friends coming from other areas in the countryside.

And then, at a certain moment, I let myself be an experiment in their haircut projects. First, Giovanni's. Later, Weverson's. They cut my hair in a way that I understood myself better. I said to them: "Wow, that's it!". That environment became an environment of self-care. Self-care can come from many places, but there's nothing better than being with your own, with people you trust to be yourself and take a step forward. This afro hair is my identity. So, since then, I only wear my hair down, flowing, and natural. I think that reaching that point of understanding with the hair was extremely important to strengthen me. I see a lot of people doing the transition process, hair full of chemicals, cutting it short, I think it's very beautiful. Because, for me, it 's that phoenix story. At one point, in the myth, it rises from the ashes. But it's the eagle that, at some point, it will lose all their feathers, be totally naked, as it came into the world. She is left with nothing and is reborn. I don't know when that happens, but I think that in this process of identity construction, the hair transition is when you look in the mirror and are happy with what you see.

It is a prospect of rebirth, because then no one else will take it from you. They'll call you "monkey", they'll tell you to comb your hair, it'll shock you, it'll hurt you, but you'll process it in a different way, because your self-esteem will not be affected. You'll want to fight for your rights, for

that person to understand that it isn't like that, and you'll take legal measures to defend yourself against racism. When we're looked at by people in a negative way, it's these people who are afraid of going to the place of subordination. Fear of you, black woman and black man of ancestral power. The stronger our identity is, the more we see ourselves in the places that are ours too. And so that we can expand the platform, the discussion, it's best that we occupy other spaces, that we can achieve more social equality.

## 8. Black feminism

Black feminism is very necessary because it makes a series of counterpoints. It recognizes the importance of the struggle of white women, the previous struggles, the right to vote, the struggles begun. But it also criticizes, because black women were already in the struggle even before this white movement was organized. Black women were already going up against the slave quarters and the big houses, the rapes of the colonels and the bosses, they were already taking care of their own in the slave quarters and helping in the resistance processes, given that Zumbi would not exist without Dandara. Dandara also has an influence on the quilombo revolution, on the organization of the enslaved.

When white women went to the streets to fight for the right to vote, black women were in their homes taking care of their children, houses, food. So, they had support and we were already in this fight without any support. Black women were already in this fight in Brazil since the beginning, since our people were kidnapped and brought here to be enslaved.

And you must look at the indigenous issue as well. We are walking side by side with indigenous women, who are also always together in the struggle of black women. Most of the women in the countryside, in the forest, are black. Women who are in furthest corners and who have no police station nearby to report a situation of violence and will live in that place and may even die from femicide. There are very few police stations for women and other structures that make up a protection and support network. And they are there, sometimes they are extremely underserved; they are looked at as guilty, they are not considered as the victims: "What did you do to make your husband hit you?"

Racism should be a dealbreaker for any fight. If racism is not seen as something that really needs to be tackled, because the ills we are experiencing today go through it, then it doesn't make much of a difference. Something that's very important, which we discussed a lot, is precisely the killing of black youth, of the black population as a whole. There is a very beautiful project called

25 Predominant biome of the state of Minas Gerais.

*Minha Mãe Não Dorme Enquanto Eu Não Chegar*<sup>26</sup>, inspired by Adoniram Barbosa's samba. It is a project conceived by Benilda Paiva Brito, from N'zinga. Today, it is a project carried out by another organization that she coordinates, which is Odara, Instituto da Mulher Negra, located in Salvador. This project was launched in Belo Horizonte in 2017. We tried to put it into practice here, but it hasn't worked yet; but it's in place in some peripheries with a high rate of violence and youth lethality in Salvador, such as Cabula. And it starts from this premise that the mother doesn't sleep until he arrives, because the black woman's son, when he leaves, doesn't know if he'll return. When the black woman leaves, she also doesn't know if she'll return. The son may be a victim of state violence, war between factions, militia, a lot of things. This point of facing the genocide of black youth is the main one.

Another thing that we've discussed a lot, since 2015, is to have more black women in power, understanding that the change we need depends on placing women in another place in the social pyramid. Changes to the dignity of black women will come from black women themselves. But for that to happen, we need to reach those other places. We had several training sessions with women who wanted to be candidates for councilors or mayors in the 2020 election. We did a survey to identify who these black women candidates were in the state. And we're going to do these collective campaigns without money, helping here and there, quilombo-style, with the community together and working collectively.

## 9. Be a better person

I wanted to be remembered as a person who, faced with the many adversities that the system and life brought, walked through positive places of learning and evolution. And who helped to improve the reality of some of the people around me. Helping to take care of my parents, take care of my brothers, nephews, my friends, and those closest to me makes me happy. It is good to know that, in some way, I have influenced someone's life, and that that someone can also, at some point, positively influence the life of another. I think that the influence that we can have, effectively, is indeed with the people who are around us; that it will reverberate to the world from where we stand. So, I'd like people to be able to remember me as a comrade, a companion, who fought believing in their ideals and in the collective and organized strength of the people. Someone who learned to look at herself and take care of herself first in order to be able to take care of others; who sought to be good; who was a friend and a true partner to her people.

I don't aim to have a name on a street sign or a work of art, I want other things for my life and memory. I want people to feel that being at peace with what they're building, being in balance with

mind, body, and soul is revolutionary. It seems very cliché, but it's this inner peace, the balance, that has made the difference for me, so that I can go on with my day, not being afraid to apologize because I was wrong, or grateful when I receive something from someone. To wake up the next day knowing that it's another unique opportunity I have to be able to live better, be better, and enjoy every breath of the day and be happy. I think it is a quest to be a better woman for me and for the world, this all reflects on well-being. Being able to look at myself and know what needs to be changed, what needs to be improved, is something I seek. It's fabulous to know oneself! I want to be pleasant with people in different journeys in their lives, I want to bring them together and not drive them away.

I wish to be seen as a person who left a historical mark not on material things, but on those that really matter and fill the soul, the spirit. To be remembered for affection, feelings, good energy, exchanges, embraces, respect, care, like: "wow, I miss that black girl, I miss going to the samba and the club with her, I miss those conversations of ours, those exchanges and laughter, the companionship, of walking the same path, making plans, and dreaming of a possible and better world for all black women and men". To be remembered with joy and hope, and not only with the sadness that brings suffering. Knowing that I contributed and that I gave what I could give, without fear criticism or expectations. I'm fine with that, I have a good feeling about this possibility of a good memory of me. That's it! I'm happy, at peace. I'm grateful!



*Eliane Dias working in the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte, 2020.*

*By: Mayara Laila.*

26 "My mother doesn't sleep until I'm home".



## 12

XICA DA  
SILVA

Francisca Maria da Silva  
 Maria Clara Mendes  
 Ana Paula Salej

### 1. Family and ancestry

I am Francisca Maria da Silva. I think that every Francisca is Chica when they are; in my case, I am Xica with an X. I had 12 siblings, I am one of the youngest children, today we are seven. I was born in 1964 in a wood sticks and mud house<sup>1</sup> in Laranjeiras, rural district of Ipanema, region of Vale do Rio Doce, Minas Gerais.

My mother, Juventina Maria da Silva, married at the age of 14. She met my father when he went to take a swatch of cloth to give to my aunt in marriage proposal, but my grandparents told him: "You should marry this one, who is younger ... she is a bit of a hussy, if she marries, she'll quiet down". Soon she became engaged and quickly married. My mother was a farmer, seamstress, midwife, and blesser. My father, Gabriel Anselmo da Silva, besides being a farmer, was also a barber. Neither knew how to read or write.

1 Casa de pau-a-pique.

I consider my family a mixture of black and Puri<sup>2</sup>. My parents said that my mother's great-grandfather was indigenous, that he was descendant from an indigenous couple "caught by the noose"<sup>3</sup> and domesticated. Therefore, we have this strong relationship with the indigenous people. My mother's family had straight hair. My mother was black with completely straight hair. It is a pity that there are no photos from that time, in the countryside we did not have photos. On my father's side of the family, it seems that there was a *jagunço*<sup>4</sup>. My father was African black. I take after my dad's side. In my documents, I am black.

My father worked for a half or a third<sup>5</sup>. Since he was a sharecropper, half of all that was produced belonged to the owner of the land. When he worked on a Japanese farm, the division was two parts for the landowner and one part for our family. We planted beans, coffee, rice. We didn't buy much. It was a place of great abundance, it had chicken, pork, a lot of fruit. We ate fruit from the tree, took a watermelon, cracked it with a stone, ate a piece, and threw the rest away. I went to the banana tree, shook, took the ones that were the ripest. My mother sewed and cooked. She used to make lots of sweets on a big stove... Most of what we had, she sweetened with *rapadura*<sup>6</sup>, since we had no sugar. She was an excellent cook; I still have a vague memory of some cakes and loafs she made. Since we had pork, she was the one who killed and cleaned it, made soap with the lard. Every day, in the early morning, my brothers would get pumpkin, pink yam, and green bananas cooking to feed the pigs. Part of that stew was our breakfast; we added molasses to it and ate it. To this day I joke that "I'm strong because I was treated with pigs' food!".

I remember the day I did not eat canjiquinha<sup>7</sup>. My father beat me up with a truck belt because I did not like canjiquinha with chicken. My mother was taking care of my wounds for over a month. Today, I love canjiquinha. When my father had an ulcer, he had to "go under the knife" and almost died. He was in the hospital for about six months; she was also the one who took care of him and the children. Even though she was illiterate in reading and writing, she had an unshakable popular knowledge. My mother was everything to us, she was our foundation.

2 The Puri are a Brazilian indigenous group, belonging to the Macro-jê linguistic group, originally from the four states in the southeastern region of Brazil: Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais and São Paulo.

3 Reference to a custom during colonial times of using rope to grab and trap indigenous individuals, similarly to what is done to cattle.

4 Jagunços are hired guns for countryside local informal leaders and can still be found in more remote areas.

5 In this practice, the farmer works someone else's land and shares the income from the crops with the owner - usually half or a third.

6 Rapadura is a by-product of sugar refinement. It is a light-brown brick, composed, almost exclusively, of sucrose.

7 The closest to canjiquinha would be "grits", although the Brazilian version is more of a soup dish, rather than cream. It is made with coarse corn flour.



My father went to the city every three months and then he bought slippers, *Conga slippers*<sup>8</sup>, leather sandals. When he came back it was so joyful, because he always brought that marshmallow shaped like an ice cream cone with and soft candy. He'd get us in a single file and asked each child to open their hand. Each of us got a certain amount of candy in their hand; so, whoever had the biggest hand got more candy, whoever had a small hand got less. We would split the candy in five, wrap them in a banana leaf, and spend almost three months sucking on that sticky piece of candy, full of ants.

We were a Catholic family, I remember the Congado<sup>9</sup>, Our Lady of Aparecida, the Folia de Reis<sup>10</sup>. As a matter of fact, I carried the Congado banner. At the time of the Folia de Reis sometimes the "saints" were kept at our house, then the revelers took them to all the other houses. My mother also had those children's day parties, for Our Lady of Aparecida. So, we actively participated in those popular religiosity festivities. All my sisters have Maria in their names; my name is Francisca because of my grandmother. For my brothers, there is José, Jorge, Antônio... the whole Bible is in my house<sup>11</sup>.

### Going to Ipatinga

At the end of 1971, my father bought a plot and we moved to the Betânia neighborhood, in Ipatinga. We left the farm and came to live on a small, 360 meters plot. I lived there for about 10 years. When we arrived, there was no house built, my mother stuck some sticks in the ground, put a black tarp over it, and we went in under that tarp. We lived this way for about three, four months. The cement, the bricks, everything was carried by my mother.

When we arrived in Ipatinga, nobody worked and soon we started looking for work. Shortly after that, my brothers managed to work in one of the contractors for Usiminas, at that time it was easier. The one who got a better placement was my brother Antônio, with a job as a welder and with a slightly higher salary. My other brothers worked as a janitor, which today they call general services.

8 Brand of shoes widely used at the time.

9 Congado is a mixture of the parties brought by enslaved Africans with colonial Christian religiosity. Its origins go back to an African rite, in which the subjects walked in procession to the Kings Congos, to thank their rulers.

10 The Folia de Reis or Reisada (revelry of kings) is a festive, catholic celebration commemorating the religious feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, which celebrates the Adoration of the Wise Men at the birth of Jesus. In this celebration, the participants visit the houses door to door while singing, remembering the journey of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. Its historical origin is Egyptian and was adopted in Europe by the Romans.

11 English equivalents, respectively: Mary, Joseph, George, Anthony

In the city, my mother became saddened. There was no abundance like before, there was no land for planting. She went to Usiminas looking for laundry to wash. It was kind of the end for her, but she was trying to give us her strength. My mother is my example of overcoming obstacles, she taught us that it is necessary to be strong in the face of adversity.

I went to school for the first time in Laranjeiras, but I didn't know how to count, nor how to read or write. It was in Ipatinga that I actually attended school. We were me, my middle sister, and my brother Luís in the same classroom. My sister and I did well, but my brother Luís wasn't able to follow the classes properly and the situation got worse, because he still backtalked to the teacher. My mother went to the classroom and beat him up in front of everyone. My sisters were very ashamed and ended up dropping out of school. At first, only my brother and I remained in school, then he quit, and I stayed. Out of all my siblings, I was the only one who kept studying in Ipatinga. I have fond memories of school. I loved to read novels - Machado de Assis, Cora Coralina, Oswaldo França Júnior.

In 1982, there was a sad moment that deeply upset our family. After that episode, I came to Belo Horizonte, at 18, to meet my sister, who already lived in the city. In 1983, right on Mother's Day, my mother passed away, I think she was 49 years old. Living in Belo Horizonte, I could not even see my mother alive. Her death was a mystery. They said she was fine, suddenly she felt ill, was hospitalized, went into cardiac arrest. Several adults who came into the world through her hands paid tribute. My father is also deceased.

## 2. The beginning of a working life

At six, seven years old I remember that we woke up at 4am to go to the sugar cane mill. I have guided a lot of oxen in the field. Until I was ten, eleven years old I guided the oxen full of cane to take to the mill so we could work. When the beans dried, we women beat the beans with those long sticks that do not break - a stick from a quince tree - and separated the straw from the beans. It was the same with rice. For the coffee, on the other hand, the yard needed to be made ready first, a large space where we used a mixture of ox manure and white clay to seal the floor. There we had spread the coffee to dry, using a huge rake. After it was dry, we would grind the coffee in the pestle, roasted it on the wood-burning stove and grinded it again. We drank coffee with garapa, the liquid from the sugarcane. There was a time when we planted black peanuts, we had to do this whistling so we would not eat it. If we ate it, my father would beat us. That peanut was for planting, it was from the boss, the landowner.

In addition to working in the fields, my sisters and I worked as babysitters for the bosses' children. They sent a man on a horse who would say: "Mrs. Juventina, today we want one of your



Xica da Silva pregnant with her daughter Paloma Gabriela, 1992.

By: Personal Archive

daughters to be with the landowner's child". I was one of those daughters. This job of taking care of the boss's children was not seen as work, they had us over to play with the younger children. Working was working in the fields, in the mill, clearing the fields, working the coffee in the yard.

When we moved to Ipatinga, I went to work as a nanny and as a housekeeper. I remember that we always ate after the bosses, and we did not sit at the table either. For us, there was only *angu*<sup>12</sup> with beans. Today I love *angu*. When there was a different dish, it was not served to us. If we were in the room, we were "asked" to leave. And if the mistress asked us to buy ice cream for her son, we would get a popsicle. I worked in more than one family home and, it was always the same, they didn't value me, and I was very poorly paid. I worked hard to reconcile work in family homes with studies, but I could not stop at work, because the ladies of the houses didn't want to let me study.

In Belo Horizonte, I started working as a cleaner, but I could not handle it. My first steady job was in the Santo Antônio neighborhood as a cleaner and housekeeper. I met good people who taught me the trade, but I did not like to clean the house, what I really liked was cooking. My dream was to get a Gastronomy degree! I had the popular knowledge, I learned from my mother, who was an excellent cook.

I thought about starting to study, but I soon managed to take a free course in the area of food and got a job. I went to work as a "freezer": every day, I supplied the houses' freezers. Because of that, for the first time I had the opportunity to travel to Vitória, Rio de Janeiro, Espírito Santo, Rio Grande do Sul. I know a good portion of Brazil. At 23, a family hired me as a cook. I was "the maid who is practically family", who goes out with the bosses on Sundays, has lunch together, but who was the black woman who was among the white people. When people visited, I knew that I was the maid. One day, I gave my mistress a gift and she said: "I'm going to take it to the countryside, because the people of the country like it". I had given her the gift, but it ended up going to the employees. There is that same scene in the movie *The Second Mother*.

### 3. The marks of patriarchy

In Belo Horizonte, I met my ex-husband, the man I thought would be my companion forever, friend and lover. He was the administrator of the building complex where I worked as a cook in one of the apartments. Soon we were living together. I was 24 and did not know that I was going to the place that almost took my life. My history already had the marks of patriarchy. I came from a space where violence was visible.

My two sisters and I slept in my parents' room and watched my mother being raped and beaten by my father all my life. We saw this until my brothers grew up and faced him. And then there was the cheating. My father had a son out of wedlock and my mother was his godmother. Therefore, we grew up in an environment where domestic violence was widely experienced. They say that at the beginning of marriage, my mother went to my grandparents' house and said she did not want to live with that man. Then my grandparents said: "Is the tin full? Are you starving?" She said no. My mother returned to the house, she had to endure it.

At the mill, the boss wanted to come and feel us up, harass us. One day, I took a big piece of sugarcane and said: "Try it and you'll get some 'cane' over the head". We were scum, they could do whatever they wanted.

In Ipatinga, in my first "job" as a nanny, I was harassed by the boss. He was very fond of scrambled eggs and, whenever I went to prepare it, he would come and try to grab me from behind. After six months I told my mother and said that I did not want to work there anymore. She advised me: "Look, get a pan of fat heating up and when he comes burn his hand, then tell his wife." I followed her advice, but my boss's wife didn't believe me and said that I was to blame, that I was hitting on him. I ended up quitting the job.

12 Angu is a mixture of fine corn flour (*fubá*), water, and salt, stirred over an open flame. It is a common dish in every Brazilian household as it is cheap and easy to make and filling. For low-income individuals, especially in the countryside, it is still a main source of nutrition, while for middle and upper-class individuals it is a common side dish.



With my partner, the violent processes and the aggressions started when my oldest daughter, Paula, was only one year-old, today she is 30. Since I could not leave the house, I watched a cooking show called *Note e Anote*<sup>13</sup> a lot, with Ana Maria Braga. I wrote a lot of the show's recipes and created some myself. He burned them all. The little I managed to save were some recipes that I buried in the backyard. I did not note the assaults; when I went to the hospital all hurt, I'd say that I had fallen from the stairs, from the chair, I hit my head on the cooking gas canister. I was beaten, I had 88 stitches on my face and eyes, I had two miscarriages, a stillborn birth, and I had two heart attacks. I lived ten years in forced confinement, and, from that prison, I managed to leave after eight reports of domestic violence.

In 1999, I went to the Specialized Service Center for Women – Benvinda – and then I was sheltered in the *Sempre-Viva* Refuge, in Belo Horizonte. In 2000, I managed to separate from my ex-partner and went to live my life with my three daughters, Paula Gabriela, Paloma Gabriela, and Karine Gabriela. But he wouldn't accept the separation, and, between comings and goings, he drove the car with me and my daughters on the bridge of Lagoa da Pampulha. In this homicide attempt, my entire face was cut, and my eyes were injured. I was admitted to the João XXIII Hospital and underwent two plastic surgeries on my face. At the hospital, I had an encounter with myself: "What man is this that I love, who mistreats me, but says he loves me too, and that I am the best woman in the world?" There I started to see myself and to love myself and was grateful for not having died. When I looked in the mirror, I saw that my face was all cut. Freddy Krueger was more beautiful than I was, I did not have the courage to look at myself.

During separation process, we went through financial difficulties. When me and my daughters would go to the Santa Casa Hospital or João XXIII for a consultation with the ophthalmologist and other specialists, we usually we did not have a penny in our pockets. During mango season, we stayed under those trees that are on the same street as the hospital to be able to feed ourselves, since sometimes the consultation was in the morning and in the afternoon. In 2003, when there were many campaigns to condemn violence against women, Record TV station found me. They found me, because I removed the cloth from my face and said: "I'll not hide from anyone again. Why should I live imprisoned, unable to speak? I know he won't give me peace, so I'll speak!" And it was just when I decided to speak, that he left me alone!

Soon, the NGOs found me, and I started to be invited to give lectures and talk about my story. I did not get paid for that, but I gained a lot of self-esteem, knowledge, and inspiration. I traveled to São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, Argentina, Paraguay, not to mention participating in videoconferences. Caritas Brazil, Minas Gerais Branch - Belo Horizonte, has always helped me a lot

13 Literally, "make note and write it down".

and remains an important partner. Many of my trips were made possible because of their support. This phase was particularly important because it was then that I started going out into the world and managed to get rid of pain, sadness, bitterness.

I tell my friends that when we have the courage to get things out there, it is a relief, you know?! It makes us feel lighter, because the more you get things "stuck" down your throat the worse it is. When you can talk, remove that knot, it is very good. That is why I tell my story; by helping those who hear it, I am also helping myself. I am sure there are many women who are beaten all their lives. We cannot let these be forgotten. I say you can always count on me. I think this is especially important!

#### 4. From the solidarity economy to public management

In 1999, I was able to take the Chef's course at SENAC<sup>14</sup>, which at the time accepted enrollment from those who did not have elementary or high school education. The course opened many doors for me, since I had the practical knowledge, but didn't have a certificate.

Between 2000 and 2003, in the services and programs of the protection network to confront violence against women, I learned about the Solidarity Economy. Then my career as an entrepreneur began and the increase in my self-esteem. I participated in a social group of women victims of domestic violence. In this group, we told our stories and thought about how to support each other to live away from the aggressor, since many of us were still being persecuted. Funny that term, aggressor!

We participated in work and income generation workshops at the Belo Horizonte Women's Rights Coordination - CONDIM / PBH. On 10 June 2003, my birthday, we formed the group "Trem Bom"<sup>15</sup>. The group worked in Gastronomy, we produced food from donations. We were given boxes of tomatoes, bell peppers, zucchini. Some was for us to eat, some we donated, and with the third part we made the preserves to sell, which I learned to do watching those cooking shows on TV. In addition to being healthy food, we generated income from what was left over and that we did not want to throw away. But, right from the start, we realized that the brand "Trem Bom" didn't sell much, so we decided to change the name to "Amigos de Xica"<sup>16</sup>.

At that time, Agenda 21 was in place, focusing on combatting misery and poverty, so I held some food recycling workshops in municipal schools within the state: Conceição do Mato Dentro,

14 National Service for Commercial Learning.

15 "Good Stuff", based on the common use, in Minas Gerais, of the word "train" as something that means anything.

16 Friends of Xica.



Alvorada de Minas, Timóteo, Coronel Fabriciano, a part of the Jequitinhonha Valley region and also east of Minas Gerais. Most people do not know what to do with husks, seeds, and other leftovers, it all goes to waste. They are throwing the best parts out... they have a high level of nutrition, and I went to show that to the communities.

My first job in the public sector, I do not really remember when it was. A councilman had given me a basic food basket<sup>17</sup> and I told him: "I don't want a basic food basket; I want a job". Soon I got a job at the Municipality of Ribeirão de Neves as School Services Assistant. My job was to prepare food for students in the municipal public school system. Food was prepared in a single pan. A social worker and I said: "Let's change that!". The children were part of Child Labor Eradication Program (PETI), were already living in extreme vulnerability, in situations of abuse and exploitation, or family instability, and without access to quality food. I was an obese woman and had high blood pressure, so I had a heart attack and I had to leave the post. I managed to stay on the job for just over a year.

At the end of 2009, I returned to Ribeirão das Neves City Hall to work as a Food Security Manager, after running for the first time for city councilor in 2008 with the Brazilian Socialist Party - PSB. A parliamentary amendment had been issued to build a school kitchen and a community kitchen for the citizens of the municipality to have access to quality food. When I was invited to be in this space, I was afraid of not being able to handle it, because I do not have the baggage and low vision. So, I needed a good technical team. I did not think that I wouldn't be able to count on that.

It was exceedingly difficult to adapt, because public administration is very cruel. I am very proactive, I see light-years ahead, I come with the problem and the solution. I gathered up the problems and went straight to the Mayor to discuss them, I did not know how to deal with that whole hierarchy. Soon the Secretary up and said, "Unfortunately, we can't work with Xica, she doesn't discuss things with us, she goes straight to the Mayor and he ends up signing everything." The Mayor ended up calling me over and saying: "Don't silly, you're hypertensive, you had a heart attack, go take care of your health". In 2009, I got paid R\$1.500,00; at the time, it was a lot of money, but I thought it was better to leave than accept the proposal they made me.

In 2010, there was a lot of campaign for women to be candidates. I was asked to run because of my history. I thought I could win and that I would create many amendments and change the situation. So, I ended up being a candidate for congresswoman. I thought the process was easy and

<sup>17</sup> Cestas básicas, or basic food baskets, are the essential food items for every Brazilian household for a month. The concept was first designed by the Getúlio Vargas administration in 1938 and today is calculated by the Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE). Most supermarkets carry a ready-made selection available for purchase.

that I would have many votes. Sweet illusion! As soon as I registered, I did not have any help and so I did not campaign. I came home, crossed my arms, but even then, I had 1084 votes, which weren't enough to elect me; I was an alternate<sup>18</sup>. I went back to my normal life!

After the election, I was invited to return to the post, but I did not accept it. I did not work in government for a while. Two deputies sought me out and told me: "Xica, you have to return to Neves to execute the amendment". I replied: "Back to doing nothing? That is not in my nature. I already have heart problems and I'll end up dying of it". They asked me to suggest someone for the position and I ended up suggesting my daughter, Paula Gabriela. She stayed there until 2012, but the Popular Restaurant and community kitchens were not built. With the change in administration, my daughter ended up being dismissed.

In 2012, I was invited again to apply to "plug a hole", this time as a councilwoman. Again, I did not campaign and had only 133 votes. Once again, I was an alternate. I had no permanent job, my income came from Buffet Amigos de Xica, which, in 2013, got a project approved at the *Instituto Consulado da Mulher*<sup>19</sup>. With the funding, we bought a freezer, refrigerator, stove, microwave, and utensils that boosted the project's work. That year, I just managed the buffet.

In 2014, I ran again as a candidate for congresswoman for the PSB. Eduardo Campos<sup>20</sup> had been moved by my story. He told me: "Xica, you are one of those who walks with me, where I put my heel, you put your thumb". I believed in the promises, but Eduardo Campos died. When I went to talk to the party's state coordination, the president said: "Everything Eduardo Campos promised you went with him to the grave." I got 2.392 votes in 119 cities, but I did not win the elections, I was an alternate for the third time. I continued with the buffet from 2014 until 2016.

In May 2016, I was invited to take a position at the Institutional Relations Municipal Secretariat at the Belo Horizonte City Hall. My role was to assist in the processes of mobilization and dialogue with people from the countryside and in the organization of events. I remember my contribution to an event of the Minas Gerais Association of Municipalities (AMM), we managed to gather 680 mayors in one meeting<sup>21</sup>. I worked as an advisor for Mayor Márcio Lacerda. I usually joke that the "company name" means everything, it wasn't Xica who was there, it was Márcio Lacerda. When I

<sup>18</sup> This was the second election she ran in, again with the PSB. Almost all alternates have, de facto, lost the election

<sup>19</sup> Social action by brand of kitchenware Cònsul. The institute aims to encourage female entrepreneurship by offering advice on the management of micro businesses and training for women to be efficient entrepreneurs. Source: <https://consuladodamulher.org.br/consuladodamulher/>

<sup>20</sup> Brazilian politician from Pernambuco, he was a federal deputy for several terms and governor of Pernambuco with the PSB. In 2014, his presidential candidacy ended with his death, a result of a plane crash.

<sup>21</sup> Minas Gerais has 853 municipalities.

said: “Good afternoon, we’re part of Mayor Márcio Lacerda’s advisory team”, people would nearly add a red carpet for us, they even served coffee in a porcelain cup. I was in office for six months.

In 2017, when Kalil entered, he called everyone in and said: “Everyone is dismissed”. I thought I was dismissed, but only later did I know that when he saw my CV, he did not fire me. They sent me an email, but I ended up not seeing it. In Ribeirão das Neves, the Social Development and Citizenship Secretariat, responsible for the Social Assistance area, invited me to work in that portfolio and I remained working in the City Hall there, unaware that I was still appointed to the City Hall of Belo Horizonte.

I was invited to two areas in government: “Basic Protection Management, Solidarity Economy and Productive Inclusion Management, and the “Food and Nutritional Security Management - Food Bank”. Of these, I had experience in solidarity economy and productive inclusion, but when I looked at food security, I thought: “I left this unfinished”. The initial proposal was to stay 101 days as a volunteer during the government’s transition period, and then be appointed. When I saw the situation of the Food Security Management, I found that nothing had been executed, from those projects back in 2009. How can this happen in a city that has more than 4.500 people starving?

In this administration, I had carte blanche with the Secretary, I didn’t have to go through the Adjunct-Secretary and has easy access to the legal office. So, I took my papers and went straight to whoever could sign them. After three months, an opportunity arose to go to Brasília, and we found out that there was a resource from the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) for the municipality and the registration of 105 family farmers. We signed an agreement to buy food produced by family



*Xica da Silva as Manager of the Food Bank visits the community garden in the municipality of Formiga, in 2018.*

*By: Personal Archive*

farming. Soon, the Food Security Management started to gear up. We set up a good work team and initially received about 600 kilos of perishable food. In June 2019, there were already 22 tons. We participated in the assembly of the Metropolitan Food Bank Network. In addition to buying food from family farmers in Ribeirão das Neves and in five other municipalities, it set up the “green basket”. Thus, all families that were served by the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS), received the basic food basket and also the green basket.

I also experienced many difficulties in the Food and Nutrition Security Management - Food Bank. Since that 2009 resource, which came from the parliamentary amendment, could not be returned to the portfolio because the planning team missed the deadline and the mayor didn’t sign in time, we went back to square one in the project to build community kitchens. In addition, some councilors saw me with discrimination and contempt. I started my work with a salary of R\$1.800,00 and then the Mayor increased it to R\$3.200,00, as recognition of the work that was being developed. This generated a lot of controversy within City Hall.

Ribeirão das Neves, which was known for the prisons, as the city that goes hungry, “the city of darkness”, started to be reported by Rede Minas, Globo, Record television stations, O Tempo newspaper, and even in the Super newspaper, highlighting the advances in the politics of food security. The municipality’s Food Bank has become a benchmark for the metropolitan region.

We did a good job in Food Security and Nutrition and Management, and this work was done as a team, with the cooperation of every employee: social workers, administrative staff, nutritionist, and the collaborators themselves who carried the food boxes. I’m especially thankful to the social worker and the driver for the Food Bank, Mr. Canarinho, because the sometimes the truck had no diesel and he’d say: “We’ll figure it out”. We took money out of our pockets and fetched four tons of food from Formiga; the surplus we sent to other food banks and vice-versa. Management was the space for realizing a dream and our work achieved 100% approval.

When I left that management, I was invited to take over the office of Public Policies for Women. This advisory body was linked to the Mayor’s Office. I took over the portfolio without any infrastructure and technical staff. They provided a small room, a broken chair, and a table that had to be propped against the wall. When it rained, the room got all wet. My role was to mobilize women in the municipality and reverse the scenario within parties and politics. During the time in which I headed the portfolio, we managed to hold a seminar on the subject. The hierarchical organizational structures were difficult to deal with, when there was any relationship problem, some employees went straight to the Mayor and said that I wouldn’t be able to manage the portfolio. When you arrive at public administration, they say to you: “Blind person, you’ll walk in this tunnel,



and you'll find a light". But they forget that halfway there is a groove, a hole, and if you do not lower your head, you will surely hit your head on a beam. They don't say that they just tell you to go.

After this experience in the Public Policies for Women office, I started to work on a voluntary basis in support of women's candidacies, as I believe that it is important that more and more women occupy these spaces. In Ribeirão das Neves, among the 580 candidates in the Mayor's base, there are 35 women, one of whom is in office and the other is a councilor. Some of them run just to fill the numbers. My job is to guide them; so, I have the opportunity to do for all of them what wasn't done for me. Most of these women are black. One of them said to me: "I'm going to make a straighten my hair to take a picture for the campaign, because it's more beautiful". I asked, "But do you feel beautiful with your hair the way it is?" She said yes. I said: "Then take the picture with your hair the way it is". Another one also raised the same question: "In the community, I'm like this, I like my hair up, but I think I have to change it to look more beautiful and tidier". When it came time to take the picture, they asked her, "But aren't you going to let your hair down?" She replied: "No, this is how people see me, so I'm going to take the picture the way I am now". The empowerment process is part of the job.

Unfortunately, hair was and is always problematic for black women. We have always been told that our hair is bad, ugly, and inadequate. My hair is very curly, but for practicality I have always used chemicals and straighten it with a flat iron. I am trying not to use more chemicals in it, not because I can't, but because it hurts the scalp a lot. And who says that just because I'm black I have to wear my afro hair? My hair does not define me.

Currently, the Amigos de Xica buffet is a little halted due to the pandemic. Now, I am part of Movimenta Mulheres<sup>22</sup>, a project in partnership with the European Union - Agenda 2030, which aims to qualify 20 women for job and income generation. This project was written together with the NGO Moradia e Cidadania<sup>23</sup> for the buffet to buy equipment and conduct professional qualification workshops. The participants have a history of domestic violence, and the idea is to contribute so that, through welcoming them, the conversation circles, and professional qualification workshops, they will be able to drive themselves, each at their own pace. Many seek me out looking for guidance on how to get out of the situation of violence, to help their mother, sister, friend, or daughter. Sometimes, some women come to me asking for a basic food basket and I answer, just as I said there back to the councilor: "What you want is a job, isn't it?". Sometimes, we have an event going on at the same time, so I ask: "What do you know? Clean the floor, chop vegetables, wash dishes?". And it is funny, some say they just know how to clean the floor or wash dishes, but over time we

22 Loosely translated, "Drive Women".

23 Habitation and Citizenship.

realize that she knows how to make a cake, a dessert, put a salad together, take pictures and post them on social networks. The other day I welcomed a girl, visually impaired, with no parent, for 30 days.

Listening and showing them their worth are fundamental practices in the process of welcoming these women. They need so little! Sometimes, it is a hug, a conversation, an encouragement. At times, I feel embarrassed and grateful hearing their testimonials: "I thank God and Xica"; "On the day in the Xica came to my house, I had gotten a rope to kill myself with"; "There were no beans at my house, look how I used to be and look how I am now"; "My is working in such a place"; "I want to work with you".

So, when I see these women putting on makeup and starting to value themselves, I get incredibly happy. In fact, on 30 October, the project ended, and I felt this anguish. "Oh my God, what am I going to do to keep these women meeting?" There are women who work in family farming, teachers, mothers with children in the penitentiary system, others who started talking to people, because they did not have the courage to open their mouths. These women meet at my house, my balcony holds about 25.

On the one hand, I feel fulfilled in being a mirror for them, an embrace; but on the other hand, I feel frustrated when I cannot help. One day I heard from a deputy the following phrase: "Xica, you are like a deluge, you bring everything to you, including the garbage". Listening to this kind of thing makes me sad, but it's what gives me the strength to continue and not stop. How do I say to these women things like, "Why don't you get a basket full of cake and will sell on the street to generate income?". Often this woman has neither a four- burner stove nor food to cook for her children.

## 5. Prejudice and discrimination

When I was in the public administration, I noticed, mainly from people who held prominent positions, odd gazes. I heard mumbling in the halls: "Wow, what is this woman doing here? Is this woman crazy? She can't hold her tongue, will she know how to behave in a meeting?". In many moments, I had to mold myself and put high heels on. Every time I heard phrases like those, I stood up a little taller, I joke that even a kick on the butt sends me forward.

If I were to expose the number of situations of racism or racial injury that I have suffered during my life and work trajectory, perhaps today I would be riding around in a jet with all the money I would've made from these people. If I were to take seriously everything I have heard and felt about racism, I probably would have fallen into depression, as I often have. There was a time, when I left the Ribeirão das Neves City Hall in 2012-2013, that I spent three months in the dark, without leaving home, combing my hair, or talking to people.



I remember that in 2013 I did not put makeup on or look at myself in the mirror, even today I am a little afraid. In that year, the staff of the Instituto Consulado da Mulher took me to Joinville to put the prosthesis in my eye. When I looked in the mirror and saw that my eye was not a hole anymore and had two eyes, I was empowered. When my eye was atrophied, it was worse, most places I went, I heard: "Poor thing, let her through, she can't see, she's blind". And I just looked at the floor, my head was always to the floor. Today, even though I only see 16%, I wear high heels and look up. And I must look up, because if you get to places looking down only, people will step on you and obliterate you.

I feel more discrimination in relation to my visual impairment. When we opened the Amigos de Xica project, people said: "Poor thing, let's buy from her, she can't see". At first, I cried a lot, got depressed, then I said: "You know what, let them buy it out of pity". When customers started to buy, they began to realize that my products were high-quality. I started to work with myself the aggressions that I suffered directly and indirectly. I do not see well, but I listen very well, I have an excellent perception of the world and people. In my opinion, being labeled as disabled is worse than suffering racial discrimination or being simple.

Of course, I realize that the absence of black women in positions of power and decision is due to racism. Society sees us only behind the scenes - in the kitchen, as a blesser, in social assistance, and in the care and cleaning functions. When you go to government Secretariats, you hardly see black people in sectors such as planning and finance. Out of ten people in bureaucratic or leadership roles, only one is black. In my first team, for example, of the ten employees of the Food Safety Management, I was the only black person. In the second, I think there were six black people out of ten.

*Birthday of daughter Paula Gabriela. From left to right, daughters Paula Gabriela, Paloma Gabriela, and Karine Gabriela. 2020. (Personal Archive)*



I am a black woman and I think the difficulties of black men and women occupying positions of power are due to the structural racism and patriarchy. Historically, we have not had the same opportunities to study and qualify professionally as white people have. For example, my family and black people around to me who were not able to study because they worked in the fields, places in which there wasn't much schooling. And when there was, it was certainly meant for white men. Therefore, we are unable to have the same opportunities as our white bosses.

I had the opportunity to continue my studies only as an adult. In 2018, I got the ENCCEJA Elementary School<sup>24</sup> and, in 2019, I finished high school and I passed the entrance exam for Gastronomy at UNA<sup>25</sup>, but have not been able to enroll yet. Recently, I attended a Basic Computing course and I want to take an Advanced Computing course and study English. I respect academics a lot, I am still going to college. Academia comes to organize the words, but I will never stop being Xica from the farm, who says "y'all" and "fixin' to". It is not a certificate under my arm that will tell me who I am. The diploma will not change my character or my nature.

In addition to racism, there is gender inequality, since men have always been in power, always rules. We women still don't feel the strength we have. We are 52% of the population and why don't we win the elections? Because we still vote for men. We need to be more daring when entering the world of politics and stop saying "I won't get into partisan politics, because it's dirty." But if we do not play the game to change this reality, power will continue to be exercised by men. We must be protagonists, instead of spending our whole lives clapping for and saluting men.

## 6.Dreams, perspectives, and appreciation for the path taken

I dream of having a socialization space, a community kitchen so that we can welcome women and train them to be their own protagonists. I close my eyes and imagine a great space, a large table under a tree, in front of a street where anyone passing by can have a glass of water and eat a piece of bread or fruit. Food, the kitchen, it brings people together and opens doors and perspectives. Everywhere I go, I like to take a thermos with coffee, a cake, some biscuits, and everywhere there will be someone hungry or in need of a good conversation.

I would like to be remembered as Xica: woman, black, mother of three daughters, grandmother, and friend. As a message, I would like to say to every woman to love herself before loving someone else. Listen carefully to yourself. Sometimes, we expect too much from others, but without knowing what we really want. Change must always come from ourselves; it must first occur in each one of us.

<sup>24</sup> National Youth and Adult Competency Certification Exam, Elementary School level.

<sup>25</sup> Una University Center

## 13

Magda Andrade Neves Vilaça  
 Jessyka Martins  
 Maria José Nogueira

MAGDA

ANDRADE

NEVES VILAÇA

### 1. Family and personal history: *ancestry and the absence of a last name.*

I am very proud of my ancestry. So, I'm going to tell you a little bit about my mother's family and a little bit about my father's family, from what I remember and what I heard as a child. My maternal great-grandmother was of Portuguese descent, very white, blue-eyed, and racist. And I do not know for what reason she was married to a black man. And then my grandmother was born. My grandmother had light-colored skin and curly hair, racist, and also, I don't know for what reason, she married another black man. Then my mother was born, also with light-colored skin and curly hair. I didn't know my great-grandmother. My mother says that she often laughed and joked around because my father is also black. She said: "Ah, if your grandmother ever saw your father, she would've been very mean, because he was black and

walked around in flip-flops." And my grandmother would say: "But, funny enough, my father was black!". Before, I didn't get it, this racism, all these references my mother and grandmother made of my great-grandmother, of how prejudiced she was about skin color. Only later did I create this variable. My perception was the same of my grandmother's racism, that when my cousins married black men, my grandmother wasn't happy. And she spoke openly that her great-grandchildren were going to be born all black and that seemed to displease her.

My maternal grandmother was widowed at 31, with four children - one was a few months old and died. Her husband died at the Morro Velho Mine, probably from pulmonary fibrosis, due to the dust from the mine. So, my grandmother stayed with her three children and went to work with a family, at the home of some French people, in Caeté. My grandmother worked in this family's house for over 30 years. This maternal grandmother of mine died when she was almost 100 years-old, in 2017.

My grandparents from my father's side died some time ago. And the knowledge I have of them is that they are all very remarkable. But my paternal grandfather is an extraordinarily strong reference in my life, he was an extremely sweet person, he called everyone "sweetheart". Where there was a group of people, young, adult, old, he was there in the middle. He would come and say: "Hey, everyone!". When my grandfather died, his burial was scheduled for 5pm, but he was buried at almost 8 pm. The house was packed, the church was also crowded, the cemetery chapel. The priest was unable to perform the mass with the body present. So, he decided to do it by the grave. He was buried with the cemetery spotlights on. He was a sweet person, very beloved.

My paternal grandmother is mixed-race, descendant of the people who were enslaved and of some indigenous ethnicity. I find it strange to speak of descendants of slaves! People are descendants of a free people who were enslaved and of indigenous people. And my paternal grandfather is a direct descendant of the enslaved people. They are from Cláudio, Minas Gerais. The town was formed from a quilombo<sup>1</sup> on the brook Cláudio.

They had 18 children, 13 of whom survived. My grandfather, in addition to working in the fields, was a pavement worker. Do you know this profession? It was those people who paved the streets with stone. My father is the second among the children. And studied only until the elementary school but didn't finish. From childhood, he worked in the fields with my grandparents

<sup>1</sup> Originally, quilombos were communities formed by enslaved persons who had runaway. They built their houses, farmed land, protected themselves, and formed families. Today, quilombos are formed by the descendants of those original individuals and others who are also descendant from enslaved persons. They suffer a lot of prejudice and from lack of resources, and often have to struggle to ensure their rights to their land. People in quilombos are known as quilombolas.



and his siblings. When he was 17, he worked in small foundries in the city, and it was then that he left home to try his luck. He had a very difficult life, he slept on the street. He went to Caeté to live with some uncles and try to get a job. There he started working at the Companhia Ferro Brasileiro and met my mother. They got married in Caeté, had my older brother, Ricardo, who is now 54 years old. I'm 46, Eduardo is 40, Marina is 37. When I was 23 years-old, my mother adopted Daniela, we adopted her when she was three days-old. Her arrival was an immense joy.

My father worked for a while at this company, then he went to São Paulo with my mother and started working at a company called Ottis as an elevator assembly assistant. After five years, he transferred to another company, called Elevadores Schindler do Brasil, a Swiss company. During that time in São Paulo, he developed a very strong ulcer. The doctor said he would only do the surgery if my father promised to move away, because that wasn't the place for him and so the surgery wasn't going to solve it. Back then, I had already been born (1974). In 1979, he resigned. But the company didn't fire him, they preferred to transfer him to Belo Horizonte. So, he worked another 30 years for that company and there as an assembly supervisor. When he left, the position was filled by a trained engineer, because my father's knowledge was all practical. Since then we have lived in Contagem.

### ***My name, my last name, a frustration, a dream.***

My last name causes me some frustration. The story of my name is: when my father went to the Companhia Ferro Brasileiro, he worked with staff who descended from French and German people, and the daughter of one of these owners was called Magda. My father thought that name was beautiful. When I was born, he asked my mother's name me that and she accepted it. I thought it was great, because my mother wanted me to call me Francislaine, so I thought I lucked out. I like it!

And my last name? When my father was registered, there was a mistake in the registry office; my grandfather was called José Neves Vilaça, so my father's correct name would have to be José Neves Vilaça Filho. I don't know why the notary wrote José Neves Filho. Sometimes, I've put together the documents to be able to add Vilaça to my name, because for me that's my grandfather's last name, you know? And because of life's eventualities, I haven't had the opportunity yet, but it's a dream. I want to add the last name Vilaça to my name.

### ***Vilaça, a last name that brings very special memories: the childhood of Magda Neves, in this book “Magda Andrade Neves Vilaça”, our tribute.***

I was born in São Paulo, I lived there until I was 5 years old, I don't remember much from that time. I remember things that my mother says, that still resonate today. She said that I weaned

when I was ten months old and I touched the bottle, I didn't drink milk from a glass, there was no way to make me drink milk. Till today I'm like this, I don't like milk or milk products, I don't like cheese, yogurt, ice cream... Once they lost me, I "ran away" from home when I was like 3 years old, I was lost there in the city and there they found me in a small house nearby with someone's daughters. But, from São Paulo, I don't remember much.

I have memories starting from the moment we came to Minas Gerais. We went to live in a neighborhood in Belo Horizonte, called Pirajá, there near the Sabará interchange, after the São Paulo neighborhood. I remember my mother making doll tea with the mothers of neighboring kids. My father bought land in Contagem and built our house. Then, we moved to Contagem. I remember the birth of my brother Eduardo and the birth of Marina.

I also remember that I was alphabetized twice, because my mother was going to put me straight into first grade, but only those who have birthdays until April 30th could enroll, and my birthday is on May 19th. So, I couldn't be enrolled, and my mother thought it best to place me in kindergarten. I was alphabetized using the phonetic method. Then, when I entered formal school, I was alphabetized again using the syllabic method.

To this day, I have contact with my childhood classmates, from school. My school trajectory was very remarkable in terms of friendship, and I still have many of them to this



*Magda, aged 2, in São Paulo.*

*By: Personal Archive*



day. It was a peaceful childhood. I never had an episode of domestic violence or history of abuse. I spent my summer holidays in the beginning of the year, ever since I was a child, in Cláudio. And July vacations in Caeté. I have always had a lot of contact with my extended family. On my father's side, I have more than 50 first cousins. I have cousins who are grandparents already; so, just cousins, uncles, aunts, children of cousins and grandchildren of cousins, there must be about 170 people there, more or less. And we don't distinguish between first cousins and second cousins, everyone is a cousin. The cousins' wives, the cousins' husbands, are all cousins. My mother's family is smaller, she only has two brothers, so there must be about 12 cousins, and I never lost touch with them.

### **Magda Neves Vilaça talks about family, racism, and sexism**

I didn't feel much racism, because the neighborhood where I lived in wasn't a neighborhood of white people or middle-class. So, I lived among equals. Until I left literally to the world, I didn't have this notion of racism. And when I traveled, I was always with my cousins, and we are all alike. And so, as a child, I didn't suffer, I wasn't aware of this issue.

My family was really patriarchal and sexist. But it wasn't a true belief in sexism, it was a structural sexism. My mother was a housewife, always had been. And my father always worked to support us. So, it was the father who arrived, and the dinner had to be ready, the house tidy. He wasn't involved, for example, in our school matters, in homework. This was all up to my mother. What my father was in charge of is that very traditional thing of the monthly shopping, paying the water, electricity, phone bills, taking care of the car. Buying clothes, shoes, pay for the classes when necessary. But he wasn't involved with the household chores and the like, because "it isn't a guy thing." My father had it well sorted what was for men and what was for women. But, at no point did he raise me for marriage. All his life he tried to pay for a good school, although he didn't quite understand what a good school meant.

I remember an episode that was very emblematic for me: I was about fifteen, more or less, and had spent the holidays at my grandparents' house. And we, the cousins, a group all the same age, all teenagers, had agreed to camp by the river in July. This was January. And I spent the entire semester saving my allowances, without buying a snack, doing a number of things to be able to go camping. And my mother, who is way more sexist than my father, started to give me grief: "No, you aren't going. It's too many boys together". So, when June came round, I started to worry, I needed to give my friends an answer. I needed to get more money and talk to my dad. And my mom pressuring me. My father came home from work, and I got the courage: "Dad, I need some money; I made plans with some kids from Cláudio to go to by the river, now in July. We'll be gone for a few days". My father said simply: "Okay." - without much ceremony. Then my mother said: "Are you going to let her loose, alone, with this bunch of teenagers by the riverside? Something

may happen and your mother (in this case, my grandmother), your whole family is gonna talk. "My father sat down, still, pensive, and said:" Funny, I get up early every day to work. I work, pay bills, buy food, pay for school, buy school supplies, nobody ever came here to ask me if I needed any help to support my children. So, why do people have the right to interfere in their education?". I remember that, and I realize that it was then that I understood what responsibility is. I couldn't betray his trust; I couldn't be ungrateful with the education my father gave me.

### **Childhood and adolescence: friends, parties, a father who read, and politics.**

I was a precocious teenager, because my brother is eight years-older than me and my cousins are also in the same age group. My brothers and my cousins were DJs, they played clubs in Caeté, where I went with my cousins who were two years-older than me. In Caeté, we went to the Ferro Brasileiro club, which was the company's club, predominantly for black and poor people, who were factory floor employees. And sometimes we could go to the Clube dos Funcionários, which was a club designed for administrative employees of the company. And in Cláudio there was a disco that was the Automóvel Clube, linked to the Rotary. One of my uncles worked at the concierge, so we also got in to part in the town's entire nightlife...

My father was always a newspaper reader, overly critical, and I get that from him. From an early age, I read a lot. I read the chronicles of the Women's section of Estado de Minas and "plagiarized" it in my school essays. I followed the Diretas Já movement, the death of Tancredo, the various economic plans (Sarney, Bresser, Real, etc.). When I was 15, due to a lot of influence, I witnessed the beginning of the country's redemocratization and got involved in politics. I started to work with politics, was an election worker for candidates and campaigned. Then I was a "carapintada". So, in my adolescence, there was this thing of experiencing very teens things, go to club, disco, dating; but there was also a lot focus on studying and this involvement in political issues.

### ***Where is Hell?***

I was born to a Catholic family on both sides. My problem with religion started with baptism. The priest didn't want to baptize me in Cláudio, where my godparents lived, saying that nothing proved that I hadn't been baptized already in São Paulo. My dad got agitated, asked why he would have me baptized twice. The priest then said that he would do the baptism in deference to my grandfather, "who was known, very devout". I went through with my first communion because I had to, because my mother put me in the catechism.

Religion for me is extremely complicated, it brings me up some resentment. I have always been very curious and questioned a lot. I remember the first conflict I had when I went to

catechism. I went to ask the priest where hell was: "Look, it's not up there, because it's space and such. And it's not down there, either, because there's the earth's crust. Where's hell, then?" And the priest, extremely polite, said: "Why are you so curious? Why do you want to know, are you wanting to go there?". That to me was... oh no! I became rebellious with that. I left the church after that sweet answer from the priest. When I was about 15 years-old, a childhood friend invited me to be confirmed and I went, much because of that's what everyone else was doing. So, I was confirmed in the Catholic Church.

Soon after that, my brother married an evangelical girl and snatched the whole family with that discourse. And we started to attend the evangelical religion. It was a strange thing, I got married in an evangelical church, more for the sake of convenience than being a regular attendant. But I thought there was something very strange, and I thought it was me, that I had a problem with churches, with religions.

I continued to call myself "without religion", with nothing. In the evangelical church, I started to confront what I had read with what was said, and I saw that that didn't work either. I started to attend the spiritist doctrine, I went to some lectures. However, I started asking things that had started to become bothersome, so I stopped going. I remember I had religion class at school, but it was much more focused on Catholicism. We didn't know the religions. It was a kind of indoctrination as well. I came to the conclusion that my problem is with the institutions. So, I have a problem with institutional religion, in fact, with almost all institutions. I was satisfied with the conclusion that my relationship with the sacred would not depend on any intermediation.

And I always had a very great admiration with religions of African origin, but always saw them as a cultural manifestation. I had a lot of contact with the festivities related to religions of African origin, the rites they had in the churches of the Rosário. To this day I think the demonstrations are extremely beautiful: Folia de Reis, the Congado<sup>2</sup>. In the street of my house there was a Candomblé center, and I went to all the celebrations. I felt part of it there, but much more culturally, than religiously. I felt good, like, my eyes were full seeing it, but it wasn't connected to a matter of faith yet. It didn't mediate my relationship with the sacred.

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2 The Folia de Reis or Reisada (revelry of kings) is a festive, catholic celebration commemorating the religious feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, which celebrates the Adoration of the Wise Men at the birth of Jesus. In this celebration, the participants visit the houses door to door while singing, remembering the journey of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. Its historical origin is Egyptian and was adopted in Europe by the Romans. Congado is a mixture of the parties brought by enslaved Africans with colonial Christian religiosity. Its origins go back to an African rite, in which the subjects walked in procession to the Kings Congos, in order to thank their rulers.

Until a friend of mine asked me to go to a Shamanic ritual, with the administration of Ayahuasca<sup>3</sup>. Then I went, started to use Ayahuasca and I think I understood a little of what was screaming at me, in terms of religiosity. In terms of the relationship with the sacred, it had much more to do with my grandmother's ancestry, who was mixed with an indigenous ethnicity, than with my African descent. Since then, I have been attending shamanic rituals of individual works.

One of my first academic works on philosophy was on religions. I studied, I did work with more than 20 pages of research, because I wanted to understand. I understand the origins of Catholicism, Protestantism, the Jehovah' Witnesses. I had contact with Shamanism, but without much knowledge of what it was. Today, I have a certain aversion towards the evangelical church. How do we Brazilians embrace a religion that has nothing to do with our origins? We have the Catholicism, that came with European colonizers; there are religions of African origin, which came from African peoples; there is the shamanism, which came from indigenous peoples. And I cannot understand how Protestantism was installed so strongly here in Brazil. We have no Anglo-Saxon background to justify it.

## 2. Schooling, university, challenges, differences, access.

I was a reader, but I was also a rebel; I was very restless and very troublesome.

I went kindergarten in a private school. Then I went from first to fourth grade in a public school. When I was in fifth grade, a state school opened close to my house and my mother switched me. It wasn't good. I remember they gave us sheets to sell votes for the June Festivities<sup>4</sup> and I didn't sell, I couldn't understand that I was selling something. For me, it was like I was begging. It was a strange thing to sell votes, it didn't get into my head. When the day came, I asked my father for money and handed over the sheet. There was a year that I asked my father the money and he said: "Look, is the last time I'm doing this. Next year you don't come to me with this". That stuck in my head, I thought "Wow, what am I gonna do if my father doesn't give me the money anymore?" and I don't know if he was serious or not. In the following year, the school handed out the sheets and I didn't get one. I was in the fifth grade. And today I understand that I was harassed by the teachers, because every day in class they said that there was a student who didn't help the school, that didn't get the things to sell and that student was me. One day, the teacher was saying that and I replied: "You know what, I'm not obligated to beg for you to have a party at the end of the year". Why did I do this? They called my mother in, told her how I must've heard that at home because I didn't have

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3 Tea made from mixing herbs found in the Amazon, used in religious rites of indigenous peoples in Brazil.

4 The festivities around the month of June celebrate Saint John and Saint Anthony and include typical food, clothes, and dances, although have small variations between regions.

the capacity to formulate an answer like that. My mother said: "No, she does. I didn't even know this thing was happening". At the end of the year, they bought some things for the school, some speakers and sent for me to sort of rub it in, you know? They said: "This is what is done with the money of the votes that you sell. And I said: "that's the least you have to do". Then, this time, there was no other way, I was asked to change schools. I went to another public school, a municipal one, where I went until eighth grade.

When I finished the year in that other school, my father decided to put me in private school, where my brother had already studied. It was called Colégio Brasileiro. I did the first year of General Education. In the second year, I started doing Data Processing and I didn't like it. I moved to Administration, I didn't like it. I moved to Accounting, I didn't like it. When I went to change majors for the fourth time, the educator called my father in and said that I was no longer able to change, because it was already the middle of the year and I had already done it three times. For the remainder of the year, I left school and started working at 17, at Emoreira Perfumaria. In the following year, I figured out that I wanted to do become a teacher, so I joined the Fundação de Ensino de Contagem, FUNEC. When I was in third year of the teacher training, I had a fight with the school principal because of political issues, two months away from graduating. I left school again and stayed away for a while, but I kept working. I went from Emoreira to Extra. Then, to a plastic bottling company - and there I met racism. So, I got married and decided to resume teaching once again. But when I resumed the course, the duration changed to four years, so I had to do the third year all over again and the fourth.

I had been married for a year when I met someone else and decided to separate and go to live with them. I told my father: "Dad, I'm going I'm separating." And reading the newspaper he was, reading the newspaper he remained. I was in doubt whether he heard me or not. I said again, "Dad, did you hear what I said?" He put the paper down and said, "I knew it, because you weren't meant to be married." And he went back to reading his newspaper again. Although my parents' relationship has been an extremely traditional one – it is still, they've have been married for 55 years - I think that because my father works, he's traveled a lot, he's coexisted with many people, I think that he saw in me an ideal of female fulfillment, like the strong women he knew; like, for example, Magda, daughter of his former boss.

In 2001, I passed the university entrance exam for Psychology at Newton Paiva<sup>5</sup> and it was a telenovela-level drama, I didn't have money even to enroll. If someone asks me today how I paid for the five-year course, I can't explain it. For a long time, during college, I was the class representative. So, I scheduled test week "every other day". Then, on a "no day", I tutored my classmates on the

<sup>5</sup> Newton Paiva University Center.

next day's exam. I remember that I charged ten, fifteen reais per student. There were days when I had 18, 20 students to tutor. So, I remember that in a week, I got the money to pay the enrollment fee and a monthly tuition fee. Afterwards, I made a mess but figured out how to pay. And from teaching my colleagues so much, I studied a lot, wrote papers, did proofreading, reconfigured papers to ABNT standards, loads of things.

When I got into university, there were no quotas, just the FIES<sup>6</sup>. But I didn't get it. So, affirmative policies, they're very important! I think Brazil has a historical debt to the black population. It isn't by chance that we have - I work in the prison system – a prison population that is 85% black, poor, and illiterate. Much of the periphery residents, too. Every affirmative policy, not just the quota policy, comes to correct a historical deficit, a historical debt. I think it's very important and necessary. It's an attempt to socially rescue what remains, what has produced this sub-citizenship in Brazil, mainly that of black people. Because we also have affirmative policies for LGBT, for women, for the disabled.

When I graduated, I earned a distinction and was awarded a graduate degree in Psychoanalysis and Mental Health, my field. I graduated in September and in January I started working at the CRAS<sup>7</sup>. In May 2008, I

<sup>6</sup> The Student Financing Program is a Brazilian federal government program to finance private higher education to low-income students.

<sup>7</sup> Reference Center for Social Assistance (CRAS) is a public unit of social assistance policy, locally based, part of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS). CRAS are located in areas with high levels of vulnerability and social risk.



*Magda and her parents, photographed at her graduation ceremony in Psychology, 2006.*

*By: Personal Archive*



was approved in a public exam to work for the state and got another postgraduate degree at PUC<sup>8</sup>, which the state paid for. In 2013, I got another degree in Human Rights, Criminology, and Public Security, which ended in 2015. From 2016 onwards, I was taking individual Master's classes at CEFET<sup>9</sup> and at the João Pinheiro Foundation. There were two at the Foundation and one at CEFET. And in July of last year (2019), I was approved for the Public Security and Citizenship Master's at the State University of Minas Gerais; but, because of the pandemic, it was frozen and resumed now at the end of July 2020.

### Magda Neves Vilaça and her first experience of racism at work

I had a childhood friend who worked at a plastic bottling company and she spoke highly of it, that it had excellent working conditions. She was promoted and appointed me to take her place. When I went to do the interview, the HR staff found me very competent in terms of communication, agility, knowledge. But the owners of the company were of German descent, and it was a family business. There was no company representative when I was hired, they were taking a trip around Europe. When they returned, the owner's discomfort when seeing me as a secretary at the front desk was very clear.

Neither he nor his wife ever hid it. There came a time when it became so unbearable for them that in a matter of months I was promoted. The goal was to get me out of the front of the house, the reception, greeting people. Then they sent me to the finance department. But that was so uncomfortable that it created this strange environment. I was fired not even two months later.

## 3. Trajectory in the Public Service

### Magda Neves: Teacher.

In 2000, I started working at city hall as a teacher. To this day, I have a love-hate relationship with public service.

I taught for about 15 years. I taught at all levels of education, from kindergarten to post-high school, which are technical courses. I started when I was teaching, teaching in kindergarten. After graduating, I went to work at city hall, under contract, in elementary school and young adult education. After I moved to Psychology, I went through a selection process at Funec<sup>10</sup>. So, I usually say that I'm a child of Funec. I worked with many of those who were my teachers, teaching high

8 Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais.

9 Federal Center for Technology Education of Minas Gerais.

10 Teaching Foundation of Contagem.

school Philosophy and Sociology and technical courses in Computer Science, Nursing, Pathology, Chemistry, Industrial Chemistry, and Workplace Safety. In the technical courses that the institution offered, I taught Interpersonal Relations and Psychology. I taught at Pronatec<sup>11</sup>, and also post-secondary Mineralogy course at Cecon<sup>12</sup>. Even after I was approved in the state's public exam for public security, I continued teaching at Funec at night.

### *It was SEDS, not SEDESE.*

One day, a friend called me and said: "Magda, you owe me 60 reais". I said: "What for?". Her: "I registered you for a public exam". "What public exam?". "Oh, I dunno. Working with young offenders." Since I had worked at CRAS and during college, had worked in PAI PJ<sup>13</sup>, had done a three-year internship at Galba Veloso Psychiatric Hospital; at the Raul Soares Institute for mental health; at CERSAM<sup>14</sup> West and the former FEBEM<sup>15</sup>, I was used to this social area, so I didn't care much. When she said "SEDS"<sup>16</sup>, I understood "SEDESE"<sup>17</sup>. I wasn't very motivated to do it, because had I always had a love-hate relationship with the public service. Until then, I had only worked under contract and had many political disaffections. And then I went, I took the exam and I only found out where I was going to work on the day it was made official. On the day, I got there and found that it wasn't the Social Development State Secretariat. It was the Social Defense State Secretariat - and I went to work within the prisons.

I went through with exam that has thirteen positions open, I passed in third and I really wanted to work close to my home, but it wasn't possible. Because the person who got second place chose the only penitentiary in Contagem, which was Nelson Hungria. So, I accepted a position at the Inspetor José Martinho Drumond Prison, in Ribeirão das Neves. I worked there from November 2008 until November 2011, when my probationary period ended. After suffering a severe bullying episode, I was transferred to the Nelson Hungria Penitentiary.

And I suffered a lot when I went to work in public security because it's an extremely sexist, hostile, and aversive environment. And me, always questioning a lot, too much of a human rights

11 National Program of Access to Technical Education and Employment, created by the federal government in 2011

12 Educational Center Conceição Ferreira, private higher and technical education institution in Belo Horizonte.

13 Integrated Attention to the Judiciary Patient Offender with Mental Health Illness Program, by the Court of Justice.

14 Mental Health Reference Center, institution of the municipal public network.

15 Social Defense State Secretariat, focused on public security.

16 Social Defense State Secretariat, focused on public security.

17 Social Development State Secretariat.

activist. Public security, until today, is no place for women, let alone women who question. Because of the defense of human conditions and the defense of feminist ideals, I was harassed. I was unable, in the first years, to adapt to the reality of the prison system. The first thing I did when I joined the prison system was get sick. I was unable to leave to go to work in a place where a series of human rights violations were taking place. I felt powerless and I couldn't even question what was happening. This generated many conflicts; my probationary stage was very traumatic.

I was transferred to the Nelson Hungria Penitentiary through an agreement. It was impossible for me to continue there in the other prison, in the face of so many conflicts that I created with my critiques. So, I came to Nelson Hungria in 2011 to work with a manager I knew, Danúnzio, who in 2009 had been a temporary director there at José Martinho Drumond. We had a kinship; he liked my work. I also had an admiration for him, for the way he dealt with the inmates. He didn't relinquish discipline and certain practices, but could coexist, respecting each other, and he understood my work.

Shortly thereafter, there was some turnover at the Resocialization Directorate, which was the directorate I reported to directly. A social worker became my director, Judsônia, who I also knew already, she also lives here in Contagem. She worked with me in Ribeirão das Neves, we carpooled. And she knew my way of thinking, my way of working, so I didn't have any big problems at Nelson Hungria, like I did at Drumond - and I was also more adjusted to the state.

At Nelson Hungria, I had a bigger scope. I started to work with the civil servants, in addition to my work with inmates: emergency care with civil servants in distress, mental breakdowns, and emergency care. This buzz started going around. Help one here, put out another fire out there. One day you arrive, and you have a civil servant with a gun to their head trying to commit suicide. Another day, a civil servant with a knife in his hand saying that he is going to take the bad spirits out of the PCC<sup>18</sup> prisoners inside the pavilion. Then, a series of mental distress events began to emerge, some cases of suicide, others of alcoholism, and I intervened, guiding them Civil Servant Healthcare. Informally, I became a reference point for civil servant care. It's a prison complex, a very large unit; at the time, there were about 650 civil servants.

In 2016, Judsônia, who was the Resocialization Director, left the unit and the director invited me to take her place. But it's a very interesting thing because this invitation came a lot due to a lack of choice. They recognized my ability, but they had a problem with my self-assertion, with my questions and with my stance in the face of arbitrary issues of security, of attitudes. So, during one period, between April and November 2016, I was like Interim Director - there were some political

issues, and they didn't appoint me. I did the Directorate work, dealing with partnerships, organizing the unit's workflow, handling all the matters relevant to the function; but there were political issues within the Social Defense Secretariat that prevented my appointment. In November, the unit underwent a new intervention, and the General Director was removed. Another one arrived and then I came across issues related to racism and sexism again.

This Director who arrived invited me to continue on as a director, but I refused because I didn't know him and I believe that we should only work with people we know, regardless of ideologies, even to protect ourselves. From that refusal, he started to harass me, to bully me morally abuse me. There were moments, for example, when he came into my office with two men from the GIR, the risk intervention group, armed. He made jokes, saying that I was a black woman with an upturned nose, short hair and upturned nose. Behind closed doors, he called me Michael Jackson. He did everything to transfer me out of the unit. At the time, the Deputy Secretary, who knew the whole situation, refused to accept my transfer. I also didn't want to leave. I worked the 15 kilometers from my house. When the Deputy Secretary stepped down, he managed to transfer me; and sent me back to José Martinho Drumond. I had to wage a war with the state; I filed a moral harassment case with the State Comptroller General and managed to get back. He transferred me in July, the hearing was in October, and I managed to return in late November.

It was an exceedingly difficult time, including when I was in management. It's very difficult for prison officers to deal with a woman as a boss. It was very exhausting, I learned a lot about management and public security, but I also saw that it's very difficult for women to occupy a management position in a predominantly male environment. I had this whole preparation of what was required for the position: the training, the necessary postgraduate degrees, the other subjects that I had done in the master's degree, focused on management. And the experience too; in 2016, I already had eight years of public service in the area of public security. And I already knew the unit, the workflow, the inmates, I was actively participating. So, the management itself, the administrative processes, they weren't a challenge. The challenge was dealing with the gender issues inherent to the public security environment. I was replaced in the Directorate, at the time, by a penitentiary agent with no training at all. But he was a man.

18 First Capital Command, criminal organization based in Brazil and present overseas.

### **What did Magda not say? What required silencing?**

I learned to shut up. Now, now I learned. I think it's maturity, too, both on the and in age. It brings us a more strategic awareness of how to deal with issues and the management of public affairs. At the beginning, there was a strong impetus, which is very much a young person's thing, this thing of wanting to make it happen, of never being quick enough. Today, I feel more focused on academic issues, to marry the academy with practice; and much more strategic, to read reality strategically before acting, comparing it with what I see in the academy, in research, in the readings I do.

I learned to observe a lot. And to read the institutional reality. Many things happened in the state and the institution; Nelson Hungria, all the time, is in the news, and unfortunately in a negative way. And since 2017, we've gone through six administrators already. The interesting thing is that after I left this position, it was never again occupied by a woman - not only this one, but all other positions within the institution. And it was never again occupied by people with an academic background or solid training. I learned that there are issues in public administration that are so extremely political, that technical knowledge is thrown out, often due to political factors. Since I've been following this since 2011, I can see a direct relationship between the precariousness of the work and the level of the administration turnovers that have happened over the years.

### ***Meritocracy? What about the weight of gender and skin color?***

When I worked in Education and Health, I saw a certain meritocracy. It's a controversial concept. I don't even know if I agree with this concept, because I don't think meritocracy exists in our society. One example: as much as a woman and a black woman work hard, no matter the skills and training they have, for the black woman she will always carry the weight of her skin color. So how are we going to talk about meritocracy, given that the factors that matter have nothing to do with merit, competence, skill, or academic background? Today, I am the Union Director of the SINDPÚBLICOS<sup>19</sup>, representing analysts, aids, and administrative assistants. And, in conversation with other directors, following other careers, I realize that, perhaps, in other departments, we see something close to this, but it's still quite precarious.

I don't see meritocracy within the prison system. By 2014, the end of the PSDB administration, we still saw a more technical criteria for the appointment of new positions. Afterwards, things started to get off track within the administration, until it reached the point where it's today. I'm telling you about the reality of the Public Security Secretariat.

I am a psychologist, I am a technician, an analyst within the system. I observe that inside we have a very large number of female agents with a very solid background, with great competence and skill for management and coordination positions. They also don't stand a chance. There are a number of things that are not valued in this regard. I think someone who has an academic background, who has experience; who takes into consideration the profile of the prison population that is black, poor, and illiterate; who knows where these people came from and why they are there; it makes all the difference in the management and building of policies for these people. When you know where these people come from, you can talk to families and prisoners. They see trust and reciprocity, they don't feel that whoever is there is just an authority figure, but someone who isn't far from them.

Women, black or otherwise, within public security, are taken aback, and especially when they enter a prison unit for the first time. The impression I have is that people (men) look at us as if we were a steak. They don't look to us for the ability, competence, the work. She's a woman, she's "screwable". It's so much sexism. I find it insufferable. When it comes to black women, it's even worse. It's a daily struggle, from the time when we open the gate to leave the house until the time we get back home. A black woman, who works, studies, drives her own car, goes everywhere, has no child - and I have a number of non-standard aspects to me that bother people. But I spend more time at my workplace than at home. Now that's easier, but it's not easy. Regarding gender, I'm a free woman. I assume a different sexuality, which also bothers people. It's a lot of molds being broken to be in public security. And, if you look at these issues, it's indeed unbearable for an extremely sexist and corporatist environment to maintain a woman like this in a management position.

### **The burdens and benefits of this black woman in a management position**

The benefit is the work we can do. In my field, what matters to me, in the public service, as the name says, is to be there to serve our public, who is the inmate and, consequently, society. So, the benefit is to be able to have a dialogue and promote social reintegration policies, because what society expects from the prison institution is the return of this individual to society in conditions that do not reoffend. So, we are there with a socializing role. The more dialogue with this public, the easier and better the policies are for them.

The manager is a public servant like any other. The only difference is that we are in a position to organize the workflow. But I am as much a public servant as any other colleague of mine, whether a manager or not. People were incredibly surprised that, during the entire period that I was in management, I went to work in my own car, I didn't use the state car. I went through the

<sup>19</sup> Union that represents the civil servants of the state of Minas Gerais.



entire search procedure<sup>20</sup> like any civil servant. Being in a management position does not alter the person's character. If you organize in service of the job the forms of search, nothing is fairer than you having to undergo it.

And the burden, in the case of public security, is that whole range of adversities that we have to deal with because we are women and black. In an environment that isn't only masculine and corporatist, but hostile. An aversive environment like this is a sickening environment. The burden of this position comes from the environment's own characteristics, which is a bully by nature. And, for the state, the only difference between the public servant and the inmate is that the servant has a MASP<sup>21</sup> and the inmate has the INFOPEN<sup>22</sup>. We are just a number, and we get the same disrespectful treatment.

#### **4. Gender and race identity? Magda, free black woman.**

As I said before, when I was a child, I didn't experience racism much, because I was among my peers. I had this experience when I went to work at that company.

I always considered myself a black woman, but I had some problems within the movement. Before, I already noticed it, but when I started to take part in things, to get to know the issues, I started to realize some things that shook my identity a little. That was when people started to, in a way, talk about my hair and my nose. I hadn't paid any attention to that! It made me feel a little off, because when I was little, people joked a lot about this thing with my upturned nose. And after I got older, several people started asking me, and even today they ask (but today I know how to answer); people ask me if I got a rhinoplasty, a nose job. I didn't even know what that was, I didn't understand it very well. It seems that society has a stereotype of the black person that is awfully specific.

The hair didn't bring me any identity problems, because people always thought that I was doing to do something to relax or straighten it, they didn't bother me much. People thought I straightened my hair to reject something related to my race, but, in fact, this hair is from grandmother. And I started to notice a number of things: that at my graduation, at a private college, it was only me and one more black woman. I observed these spaces. In the day we took office<sup>23</sup>, there were also very few; in the Master's, even less, fewer women - we are fifteen students, four women and only I'm

20 Anyone entering a prison unit is subjected to a search of their person and items.

21 Registration number for state civil servants.

22 Number that identifies individuals incarcerated within the prison system.

23 People who are approved in a public exam take office in a ceremony. Public exam positions have a probationary stage but are tenured.

a black woman. When the subject comes up and I say I'm black, people say, "But you're not that black". There is no such thing a "more black" or "less black"! It's a matter of ethnicity, I'm a black woman. There is no skin tone dispute. Black is black, it doesn't matter. There is a rejected place for us, socially. And there is also a cost to leave this place, for those who dare to enter an environment that wasn't socially designed for us. These are complicated issues for women and black women. And since I work in public security, I think it's a double dose.

#### **Magda inside movement(s)**

Because of my involvement with civil servants, I was invited by the current administration of the Minas Gerais Public Servants' Union, Sindpúblicos. We represent the administrative servants of the prison system. We support civil servants, participate in public hearings, articulate with deputies, seek out public policies. There was a time when it was easier. Now it's more difficult because of the whole situation, not just the state of Minas Gerais, but of the entire country, a weakening of unions.

I participate in some groups. There is one by a professor at UFMG<sup>24</sup>, who maintains a multidisciplinary group on prisons. There is a group of women in Betim, about black feminism. There's also the Autopoesis group where we discuss various topics about the sacred feminine, from food safety issues to other existential questions regarding women. All these groups focus on discussions about the condition of black women, youth, black adolescence in peripheral areas. In some groups, they're occasional participations. In others, I get more involved.

There's the group on prisons, which is abolitionist. When I joined it, they really resisted me, saying: "How can a person who works within the prison system be part of an abolitionist group?". Then, I reminded them that the anti-institutionalization movement was started by people who worked inside the mental asylums. It was difficult for me to be accepted there. Everything is a struggle. You have to go slowly, positioning yourself, explaining.

24 Federal University of Minas Gerais.

## 5. Black women, problems, and challenges: *knowledge x survival*

The biggest challenge for black women is the lack of opportunity. And it's a general opportunity, you know? The black woman has great strength, because we fight since we're little. It's lack of access to quality education, access to knowledge. I believe that knowledge transforms, but it's very difficult for you to have to fight for survival. The moment arrives when this girl has to choose between knowledge, study, and survival. Sometimes, she's not even really aware of the choices she's making, because there are issues of survival, she has to work. Many have children early, because there are, for example, of girls 14, 15 years-old going to healthcenters to ask for birth and the doctor say that she isn't old enough for it.

So what is missing is an opportunity for social development; but it begins with empowering these families with affirmative policies and the continuing those policies. Then there would be a chance to really redeem this historical debt that Brazil has with more than 50% of the population. We need women and black women in the judiciary, in the legislature, in the executive. In other words, women and black women with representativeness, in places where we can actually create policies, having felt ourselves what lacking this policy means. Because there won't be as long as there are white men speaking for us; there is no empathy that supersedes experience.

I am also a juror, I've been in the Juror Court since 2012. I clearly see the difference in the behavior of public defenders and jury in front of a black defendant and a white defendant. Or in front of a woman defendant and a man defendant. And a black woman defendant. This is very clear. So, I think we have to occupy our spaces. I am aware that it isn't easy; and that there is a whole social structure aimed at preventing this from happening. But if we don't take our spots, we will always be in a condition of submission and without being able to speak. Because people speak for us. I know many upper-class people, white people from different classes, who have great empathy, sympathy, an engagement, even in the movement, but all this capacity for empathy will not replace everyday bodily issues.

### **Magda and feminisms: They are there because that's what is left of feminism.**

Sometimes people question this thing about black feminism a lot: "Isn't it all feminism? Isn't everyone in the same boat? We live in a society that is patriarchal". But no. The feminist struggles have points in common, but also have points that diverge. So, when we talk about feminism, it's about the place that women occupy in the job market, in the academy, and a meritocracy that does not exist, theoretically. When we say black feminism, we are saying the following: that when women

achieve advancement in academy - and we have already achieved a lot, since we are already the majority in universities - we see the few women who are in the positions of management; and the few that are managing are white women, while there's a black woman cleaning her house. And it has nothing to do with the type of work. I think the maid, the cleaners, the general service workers, the doormans - they are all highly worthy and necessary jobs. But these women are not there by choice, it's because that's what was left of feminism. While this white woman goes to work in a bank, there is a black woman who leaves her child at daycare, or with their grandmother, or with their siblings, or on the street, to take care of the son of the white woman who is working in posts that are a little better, like in the academy, or in public service.

So, there is a difference. Racism exists in all social classes. We can talk about a "social whitening" when there is an ascension; but this is often illusory. People think that black people who have money are not discriminated against. Yes, they are! And it they aren't only discriminated against in that environment, no. That person is socially discriminated against. A black man in a luxury car, for example, is much more easily mistaken for the driver than for the owner of the car. So, it's not just a financial issue, it's the issue of racism. The question of feminism needs to encompass the issues of racism, class, and there is a difference, yes. Because the reality of the black woman is quite different from the reality of the white woman. From the physical stereotype to job opportunities, access to school, access to education. However, feminist the white woman is, she will not understand what it's to be a black woman without studying the periphery. Sexism and patriarchalism have a different impact on white women and black women. The blonde is "hot and dumb", the black is "hot and tough". But tough isn't exactly a compliment. From



*Magda acting as union director, in a public hearing, representing the demands of the prison system, 2019.*

*By: Clarissa Barçante/Almg*



behind, it means that this woman often has to cope with work, support her children alone, take care of parents, grandchildren, live a difficult life...

**A message from Magda Neves Vilaça: *we have to scrape together the rest of our strength***

I speak a lot, but at the same time I'm not very good at speaking. I am good at answering. I think I really wanted women to have even more strength, you know? I know it's difficult to say this during this moment we are living, but we need, especially now, to not give up. I know that it's very frustrating to watch the entire dismantling of public policies and the social and cultural backlash that we are experiencing. But it's at this moment that we have to scrape together the rest of the strength that we have in our guts and react. Because I'm not seeing a favorable prognosis. If we grow faint, it'll be even worse. More than ever, we will need to join forces and raise awareness of as many women as possible. And bring men, too, to understand our struggle. I don't think we have to do this alone. And when I talk about men for our fight, we have to raise them from inside the womb. Because we educate.

Life is full of difficulties; every day is a problem to solve. We were born fighting for survival. And we will have to fight to leave a better world for our children. And also leaving better children for the world. So, there will be no way, we will never rest. We mustn't forget that legal frameworks aren't enough to guarantee our rights. We have to be vigilant and make them count every day, because we just need to blink, have a crisis, have something happen, so that we lose, in an instant, things that took us decades to achieve.

**Cleide Hilda de Lima Souza**  
Maria Clara Mendes  
Matheus Arcelo Fernandes Silva

# 14

## CLEIDE HILDA DE LIMA SOUZA

### 1. Family origins

My name is Cleide Hilda. I currently have five siblings, but there used to be six. My parents were born in Conceição do Mato Dentro, in the Serro region, more specifically in Dom Joaquim. They came to Belo Horizonte, right after the wedding. I was born in the Santa Efigênia neighborhood, in Belo Horizonte. I was raised in the East region; when I was three years-old, my parents bought land in the Casa Branca neighborhood, which currently is the São Geraldo neighborhood.

When I was little, I carried plenty of water cans on my head. It was my job to fill the water can<sup>1</sup> before going to school. Sometimes the bell would ring, and I was still going up the hill with the can full of water on my head. I washed a lot of clothes in the lake, not just my family's, but other people's clothes also, to contribute to the household expenses. I started working as

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<sup>1</sup> A Brazilian staple, clay water purifiers are still present in most households. They use a ceramic filter to further clean the water, now from the tap, and are made of clay to keep it at a cooler temperature.



a child. I remember that my first job was at the house of my mom's close friend; I was the same age as her children, and we went to the same school. My job was to "take care" of those kids, but I think what we did was more of a mess, can you imagine a child taking care of other children! There were two fountains where we got water, and I loved to bathe in them. I have always been very responsible, since I was a teenager.

Even though I worked a lot during my childhood, I also played a lot around the neighborhood. There was a lot of brush, flowers, water here; I even swam with a jararaca snake that was crossing the river. In the neighborhood, there was a quarry, we were almost bitten by snakes, because they used to stay on the rocks. I had a beautiful childhood from that perspective of playing and having fun. We played hide-and-seek, catch, ciranda, rouba-bandeira, finca, flying kites, we rode around in a go-kart. There was that game with an apple, where we had to hit our "boyfriend's" mouth and I liked to do pirouettes in the middle of the yellow flowers. There were many adventures.

My father worked construction, but due to a fall on the job, he fell ill at 36; and then he had to take time off. My mother washed clothes; I have a clear memory of her with the bundle of clothes over her head to deliver to customers. Once in a while, I went with her. We went through some really hard times, there were a lot of financial difficulties. All the children started working at a young age, and it was from working that we managed to edge out of that misery in which we lived.

My mother cared deeply about her children's education. This incentive was due to the lack of opportunity she had to study. The only elementary school in the countryside was on the farm, and women weren't allowed to study. Even so, she managed to study until the second grade.

We went to elementary school at a public school, then we went to private school, because we couldn't get a place in public school. But it was from there that a more political and critical awareness of society began. During the military regime, Portuguese and History teachers taught with the doors closed, because the school's principal was in the military.

## 2. Schooling

My mother always encouraged us to study. As a result, my brothers and I managed to have a profession. I have a brother who is a business manager; the other has a bachelor's in Accounting; some sisters trained to be schoolteachers and me, with a degree in History from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais. But I say that the trajectory in the black movement was the school of my life, it was where I recognized myself as a black woman, I embraced my blackness, ancestry, and my hair texture. During this time, I founded the Black Women Collective which later turned into Nzinga - Black Women Collective of Belo Horizonte.

From the insertion in the collective and in dialogue with other black women, we began to realize that academic training was necessary, concomitantly with activism. Because there was a gap between the "thinking" women, who drafted proposals, and the people, who only "did protested". Then we began to strengthen ourselves so that we could also occupy the space within the university.

Nzinga even paid a prep course for me for a month; then I managed to get a job and kept paying, and so I passed the entrance exam. Those undergrad years gave me some trouble, the professor said: "You wreck everything!". I said no, but actually, I already had some baggage, a theoretical background, and a political discourse. I didn't care; I just really wanted to get my degree.

At graduation, I was the class's orator, I was beautiful in an afro outfit. It was chaos because I ended up talking about something they didn't really imagine. I said the following: "I am leaving here, and I owe you nothing. You are the ones who owe my people, because if there was an institution that signed on to the slave trade and the enslavement of black people, that was the Catholic Church. I learned all the 'histories' of the world, especially of Europe and Asia, but not a line was taught on the history of Africa. Therefore, you continue to owe me.". I was the first woman in the family to have a college degree, that was a crowning glory for my relatives. My father made a point of saying on the bus, " My daughter graduated!".

I didn't get a master's degree, just a postgraduate degree in public policy. It was not for lack of opportunity or competence, I just didn't have time, due to work and activity in movements and activism. I didn't even have time to have other children, I only had one girl. Every time I thought about getting pregnant, I got involved in more tasks, movements, and fights. It was impossible to be here and there, with a bump, coordinating elections. I made it through the first stage of the master's degree selection at Unicamp<sup>2</sup>. After a nine-hour trip, I had to write 85 pages. I actually managed to write beyond the stipulated number; but unfortunately, there was no time to make the necessary cuts and adjustments. I have two years until I retire, so I intend to get my master's then. I hope to be calmer, healthier, and with my head working, so that I can ensure my quality of life and of reading, because, as they say, "those who rush, eat raw".

In education, apart from my mother, who always encouraged us, black women were the great influence in my life. It was the formation of my identity as a black woman. And soon I started to see the world a little differently. There were other influential people in my life on the racial issue, such as Marcos Cardoso, Gilberto Leal de Salvador, Sueli Carneiro, Edna Roland, as well as other references from the black movement.

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<sup>2</sup> State University of Campinas.

### 3. Starting activism and religiousness

At the end of the 1970s, as a result of my mother's work and influence, I began to participate in popular movements, neighborhood associations, and the basic ecclesial community. We trained with Frei Betto, Leonardo Boff, I got to know these leaders up close, including Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner. In 1980, he came to my community, I read a message and gave him a gift. There is even a photo of me at that time, scrawny.

I was always a little more outspoken, I liked to talk, to perform in the theater. I played soccer in the neighborhood field, we played championships against Alto Vera Cruz<sup>3</sup>, we once had to run away while they threw rocks, because the girls didn't want to hand over the cup.



*Cleide Hilda and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. 2006.*

*By: Personal Archive*

My mother even participated in the neighborhood newspaper in Contagem, in the ecclesial communities' movements and in the creation of the neighborhood association. The São Geraldo region has always been rich in terms of popular participation. Many people and leaders from outside came to the community; even President Lula was here to inaugurate our first PT nucleus. I also participated in the student movement and the Brazilian Union of High School Students - UBES; in the 1970s, 1980s, we fought for free bus fare and the student card. Popular education in under Paulo Freire's<sup>4</sup> perspective also was and continues to be a base and reference point for demands to this day.

At 17, 18 years-old I joined the Workers' Party - PT and in the party's second I was already Secretary of Organization. I confess that, at first, I didn't even know what that was. But I

was always a very forward looking, communicative young woman, I even won a "PT Congeniality" trophy.

The insertion process in the activism also influenced my construction process in relation to religiosity. My parents were Catholic. After a while I learned that many people in my family attended Umbanda already. My uncles, my mother's brothers, had an Umbanda terreiro; but it was all very hidden, due to the fear of persecution. When I broke with the Catholic Church, I was first, briefly, with the Kardecist Spiritist religion. Later, I went to drink at the fountain of Candomblé, due to the influence and training that the black movement gave me, the Nzinga group of black women, and so many other women here in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, and Brazil.

We were a very strong group, we had a different reading than the one presented by white feminism, that didn't look kindly on us. We discussed the specificities and issues related to black women. Soon, we broke with white feminism and started to organize black feminism. We wanted to talk about our lives, who left at five in the morning to work; that several of us were domestic workers. I was never a domestic worker, but I worked family homes when I was noticeably young. Our lives were different, we worked between 10 to 12 hours a day, we had triple shifts, we didn't have the same political or intellectual training. Thus, white feminism couldn't contemplate many of our issues; in addition to all these, we were also victims of racism. So, when you make this cross section - black women - there's a gap that separates the white woman when it comes to reading of the world and life experiences.

The origin of the black woman is matriarchal, we are daughters, granddaughters of great matriarchs! The vast majority of black women are housewives, raise their children alone, they are the ones who care for and make the family move forward. It was like that at my house, it was my mother who pushed us forward and that happens in the great majority of black families. In many places I go, I ask people if they know why the world is round, and I say: "It's the shape of a belly, the world is female".

Our gaze as a woman is not horizontal, you look ahead and around. You take care of yourself, your mother, your child, your neighbor. Anyway, we have this training, to look at the world as a great female. The first human skeleton found was of a woman in Africa. So, there is nothing that proves otherwise, but this is difficult for many people to break away from.

I was born carrying water from the mine, my mother used to say: "Cleide, go get water for coffee". And I'd go with the bucket, wait for the mine to fill up to get the water out. In the meantime, I sang, not knowing that I was praising my Orixá. My mother raised us with a lot of freedom; but at the same time, she always put us under her wings to protect us.

<sup>3</sup> Low-income neighborhood in Belo Horizonte.

<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire, educator, philosopher, and Patron of the Brazilian Education. Author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), he is considered one of the most notable thinkers in the history of world pedagogy, having influenced the movement called critical pedagogy.



I had many opportunities that a lot of young people in my time didn't have. The social movements gave me the opportunity to go see much of the world and Brazil. Today I could be a woman full of busted veins in her legs, with seven kids and married to a sexist, ignorant guy, who might even hit me; but my training didn't keep me from that.

My youth might have been the moment in my life when I was at my most radical. I know I was impossible; I didn't give anyone a break; even though I'm in the left, I didn't let anyone off the hook. It's not that I'm no longer that person, but you mature and have other narratives, other ways of responding; the social organization empowers you. For example, you don't go to a meeting on your knees, as we have been many times. I belong to the generation that achieved the quotas and the Racial Equality Statute. I discussed the Statute for Children and Adolescents. I participated in every Conference you can imagine, from education to culture. And the cultural field has always interested me a lot and will also mark my professional career.

In this sense, I have a passion for Art History, as a possibility of human resignification. All this cultural area has always attracted me a lot and it was through it that I got into all this, from doing theater on the street, in the church, in the community association. Culture has the capacity to transform people and resignify points of the lost identity or that were never recognized. You return to that place where you have never been, but that is part of your ancestry. You resignify all that and you transform yourself.

#### 4. Personal relationships and motherhood

My ex-husband is a musician and I liked to hear him play. I met him at an afro parade in which I was participating as a dancer. I thought he was gorgeous, fell in love, and when I like someone, I go after them, I don't wait. When we met, I was taking the university entrance exam, I remember he picked me up at the door of the prep course. From there, we built a relationship and got married. In fact, I married him. I say that, because I think I was too independent and forgot that the other party also had to commit. I took on all the functions of great matriarch of the house.

Then I decided that I didn't want to be married anymore, I think because I stayed with him for a long time. I could have married others. In fact, my mother always said that she hadn't raised me to marry. We had a daughter, Luana, and I think I only had her, because I couldn't handle having more children. I think I was selfish for thinking so much of myself and my activism. My sisters helped me a lot, because I always had a remarkably busy schedule. In my last semester at university, I was about to give birth to Luana; my sister left school to help me take care of my daughter, because she knew - because of my schedule - that I wouldn't be able to handle it.

I got married, got pregnant, had my daughter Luana, she has fair skin. I lived in Serra, a white bourgeois neighborhood below the Serra slum, I lived next to Minas Tênis II<sup>5</sup>. It was difficult for a black woman to live in a place set-up for white people only. When I went out with my daughter for a walk and sunbathing, I was sometimes approached; they asked if I was her nanny. I had to be the nanny for the bourgeois residents of Serra. Imagine, a black woman living in the bourgeois part of Serra! For these and other situations, I ended up leaving that place that oppressed me, that treated me with racism. My husband, who was a musician and was raised in this environment, until then did not realize that there was racism. He learned with me, with my friends. I returned to my origins when I returned to my neighborhood, where I arrived at the age of three and am until today.

When Luana was born, I worked at the Municipal Chamber, I was a Parliamentary Advisor. At that time, my life was very turbulent, and I raised my daughter with few strings, a lot of freedom, and independent. She's already been to Venezuela, she sat at a table with Nicolás Maduro, she's been to Paraguay and Uruguay. When I look at her, I realize that she is much more empowered than I am, because the most I got to be was Undersecretary of Racial Equality, in the state government, and Secretary to Combat against Racism in the PT. Not her, Luana went ahead and ran in the primary for mayor of Belo Horizonte - but there was a negotiation and then Nilmário<sup>6</sup> stayed as a candidate and she, his vice-mayor, in a political articulation. I feel really good, because my daughter is doing great.

I also need to say that I had many platonic loves; although married, I loved each one in my own way. I have always been passionate about



*Cleide Hilda and her daughter Luana, candidate for deputy-mayor on Nilmário Miranda's ticket. Belo Horizonte, 2020.*

*By: Personal Archive*

<sup>5</sup> Sports and social club for people with high-income.

<sup>6</sup> Nilmário Miranda is a Brazilian politician and a long-standing member of the Workers' Party and was imprisoned by the military dictatorship between 1972 and 1975. Born in Teófilo Otoni, he has made his career in Belo Horizonte and has been a state and federal deputy for several terms. He ran for mayor of Belo Horizonte in 2020, with Luana de Souza as his running mate.



life; without love, we don't live. Love brings joy, it brings scents that remain in the memory. I have always been very dreamy, that's why they were platonic loves. Anyway, life is also for those who "love and make fools of themselves".

## 5. Professional trajectory

I have always worked my whole life, whether at a clothing store, selling dead chickens, live chickens, I did everything. I remember that, before graduating, I was a Parliamentary Advisor at the Belo Horizonte Municipal Chamber. I worked for four years, at first, as Chief of Staff for a councilor. But, at the end of his term, I was pregnant and finishing my History course. There was a incompatibility in the relationship due to racial issues, which made me resign. After much reflecting, I realized that there was too much talk and little action.

He was a genuinely nice person when dealing with issues of social movements, he had a history of fighting the dictatorship. But unfortunately, when you touch on the issue of race you frighten white people, it's an issue of power. You're great until you are seen as a threat. We ended up breaking up our relationship for a long time, then we reconciled.

After this experience as an advisor, I became a teacher. I had a brand-new baby, my sister set her life aside for a little while to take care of Luana for me. And I went to look for a school. I started working as a teacher at Júlia Lopes de Almeida State School and at Amélia de Castro Monteiro State School. Then, I worked at Walt Disney State School, where I had gone during elementary school. However, I was unable to work long there because I won a grant from the Ford Foundation to attend a conference in Durban, South Africa.

It was the UN's 3rd International Conference against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances, and I wasn't going to miss this opportunity. They were gathering representatives of the entire black movement in Brazil and the world. I remember that we were inside the plane and the flight attendant asked us to move forward, otherwise we would throw the plane on the ground - because everyone went back to have a samba. At this conference, we managed to have a huge march denouncing racism in Brazil, religious intolerance, and all other forms of discrimination. We were about 500 delegates from Brazil, a lot of people. It was an overly exciting movement, from which key documents emerged for the advancement of racial agendas.

We went on to pressure then president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, all the way from Africa. We held a huge march on the sly, the police all on the street. The march was published in several newspapers, FHC immediately created the Palmares Cultural Foundation and signaled the creation of a council and a working group. But we knew that that wasn't enough to solve the issue,

the formulation of reparatory policies was necessary. Many treaties were signed at the convention, and then the thing was putting some of those demands into practice. This whole movement also influenced President Lula, who soon after ended up winning the elections.

I saw a lot of good things in my almost 40 years of activism. We held the 1st National Black Organizations Meeting in 1992 and created the Black Organizations National Coordination (CONEN) in 1995. It was then that we started to have a different view on the importance of the state in implementing reparatory measures and creating of racial quotas, which we previously opposed. Structural changes were needed, which should see consequences in the next 70 - 100 years and, in fact, they have been done, there are positive results. I'm from that generation of the black movement, which saw a lot of things being accomplished, but also a lot of setbacks.

Going back to that moment when I worked in schools, I taught History and was able to develop wonderful projects. Today, I meet students who say that I was important in their lives: "You took us out of the classroom, put us in the halls to tell a story". I took a lot of cool people to tell stories, to hold graffiti workshops - the school was all graffitied, they even graffitied the teachers' lounge.

I remember a student of mine, that the mother straightened her hair so much, her scalp had sores. In the school quadrilha<sup>7</sup>, nobody wanted to dance with her. This episode reminded me of myself a little, because that's how it happened to me. In addition to the boys not dancing with me, I had a big braid and the teacher said that my head was not shaped to put on a hat. So, I was never chosen to dance the quadrilha. I always wanted to and didn't understand that I was already a victim of racism. Among black girls, few managed to be chosen.

When I saw that the student also had no one to dance, I studied with them the issues of racism, the beauty of the black woman and everything you can imagine, I brought people from outside. But the students remained very cruel to her. I ended up getting very close to her and said: "Let's dance, I will be the man and you will be the woman". The other day, I dressed up as a man, it was a huge deal at the school, because the boys loved it, they laughed so much, and she was all girly, all cute in a hat. We were big hit: I went in my father's green pajamas, and she danced, happy as could be.

One day I was walking down the street in bus and who do I see? This student, with a bun like the one I used to wear. I suffered a lot from the racism that students brought from home. I cried almost the whole way. It was a great joy to see the transformation she went through, to see her being able to express her racial identity.

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<sup>7</sup> A Brazilian adaptation of the quadrille from the 18th and 19th centuries, the quadrilha is danced during the June Festivities, all over the country.

I have always been overly concerned with these issues, because the vast majority of students in peripheral schools are young black kids and it's a place where there's a lot of pain. Through the classes it's possible to combat racism; you can form conscientious citizens, but it's a long process. And you realize that society is very cruel. I had several examples of students who committed suicide because of trafficking; there were times when I arrived to teach and everything was closed, because someone was "tied to a sheet", they owed money to drug trafficking. There were also students who were drug dealers and wanted me to accept money to hold the school parties. I said that if he wanted to participate in the party, the only contribution was the box of chocolates. And even for those who couldn't afford it, I bought it; even with a teacher's salary, I bought chocolates from half the room.

In my classes, there were practical workshops on how to get the smell off your feet. For the girls, I taught how to use pads. So, I wasn't just a History teacher. Even with so little time, this experience brought me a way of seeing the world a little differently. I was shaped that way and I realize the importance of popular education. I think I extrapolated my place as a History teacher and became a Life Storyteller for those children. It was a beautiful period in my life.

As an activist and manager, I was also president of the Black Culture Reference Center Foundation - FCRCN, an organization where I learned to write projects. The Foundation had, in addition to its governing body, partners and people who helped, ended up staying and joining one of the projects. All these projects aimed at fighting racism, with quilombos from the Médio do Jequitinhonha, with youth, children, black culture, and others.

### **Trajectory in management**

While I was teaching, I also worked at the Belo Horizonte City Hall's Culture Secretariat and taught at night at the Walt Disney State School. In 2000, I helped to create Belo Horizonte's cultural centers, it was very cool. I coordinated several beautiful projects, such as the Black Circuit, the Sociocultural Interaction, and the Black Art Festival - FAN. And in the process, I learned to write projects. I wrote the second FAN project. But I didn't have the opportunity to be a general coordinator.

I had many problems within the Secretariat because of institutional racism. All the times in which I thought it would improve, that I was going to get promoted, they got a white person instead. There were several times when I had everything they wanted, a degree in History, experience in education, I worked with the periphery and youth, but there was always a white woman who took my place, with no experience at all. That's what I call structural and institutional racism. Everywhere I went, I lived and fell victim to institutional racism.

There was one day when I freaked out at the Culture Secretariat. I took a course on quilombola projects and communities in Brasília and disappeared for seven days. When I returned, I was reprimanded, because I hadn't given notice of it. I argued that I was entitled to a few days and needed that time. I ended up venting about the opportunities that were denied me, reinforcing my life story.

I left the Municipal Culture Secretariat in 2005. I ended political relationships as a Parliamentary Advisor, at the School, and at the Culture Secretariat. After this rupture, I went to work at the federal government as an Advisor Specialized in Racial Equality, which opened my resume to many opportunities and experiences. For example, during the Barack Obama administration, I went to the United States on behalf of the Lula government, to discuss the issue of racial equality in Brazil. It was a very interesting political exchange. We talk about the health of the black population, because we have public health in Brazil, and the United States doesn't.

Then, I started a post-graduate course in Administration at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), focused on human rights, because of a project that the Collective of Black Entrepreneurs and Businesspeople were working on together with FGV. At that time, I was in a party dispute to take over the PT's State Secretariat for Combating Racism. I won the elections by six votes, without the party structure helping me. The other candidate had the whole party machine, but I had the base, the people, the black movement, and people from the periphery. And what happiness, I was shaking, it was the first time that I actually put my name in a election within the party and we won, it was wonderful.

Upon assuming this role in the PT, I also went on to act as Parliamentary Advisor to Nilmário Miranda. I laid out a condition: "I'll do it, but my agenda is the racial agenda". He agreed. And when the party won the elections and took over the government of the state of Minas Gerais, I was unanimously appointed to the Racial Equality Undersecretariat. I was the only Undersecretary for the state government, mainly from the human rights portfolio, for which there was no contention; choosing me was a consensus.

It was a four-year term, but without any resources. The only resource we had was for the 3rd State Conference on Racial Equality. It was a success, we involved almost the entire state, with over a thousand delegates, it was the largest conference by the Human Rights, Social Participation, and Citizenship State Secretariat (SEDPAC). The results were extremely positive, with greater presence of activists than politicians. In addition to the Conference, we did a lot, but without resources and support. Because, in addition to having to move the policy forward, we also had to write projects. Sometimes it was exhausting to keep track of so many schedules.

But I suffered discrimination even from the transportation sector of the state government. There was never a car for me, the driver always took me last. There was a case where I missed a meeting with the United Nations (UN) because of the car's administration. To them, our Racial Equality portfolio was not important. I fought inside the car, called, complained. That day, I came back crying in the car, because I had missed a really important meeting. Not because of the driver and but because of the transport management. My direct supervisor at the time did nothing to help.

At SEDPAC, my entire team and I suffered with racism. I fought a lot, suffered moral harassment, but I thought: "I have to go on, I have to see it through". Our projects were put in the drawer, sent to legal, weren't forwarded. Simple things, like, "Chico Rei Day"<sup>8</sup>, which was a law that came from the Assembly; I couldn't get it approved, because it wasn't a priority. In addition, several bills that could contribute to guaranteeing the rights of the black population were left in the drawer. The only financial investment came from an amendment that we got in the PPAG<sup>9</sup>, for R\$ 200.000<sup>10</sup>; a hundred or so were allocated to CENARAB<sup>11</sup> and almost 100 towards another institution. The rest was all done without a budget and, when there was some financing, I was unable to process it so that the money would actually come to the Secretariat.

It was a process of institutional racism that my team and I experienced in practice. In the smallest things, we ran into limitations. We drew up a plan that was left on paper, because there was only one lawyer. We almost legally lost the creation of the Traditional Peoples and Communities Commission. After completing a large meeting of communities and traditional peoples, it was the creation of a joint commission and the creation of the Racial Equality Plan for Traditional Peoples and Communities. If it weren't for the legal sector of the Agrarian Development State Secretariat (SEDA), we would have been dead on arrival.

Another episode was the celebration of 20 November<sup>12</sup> at the Government Palace when a document creating of the Traditional Peoples and Communities Commission was delivered. I was probably the only Undersecretary for Racial Equality at that time in Brazil, and I didn't have the right to go on stage, they didn't invite me. I didn't understand it, nobody understood it, and when

8 Chico Rei is a legend passed in the oral history of Minas Gerais as a king from the Congo. Enslaved and brought to what is now Ouro Preto, he managed to buy his freedom and of his brethren, who still saw him as a king. They established a community and held lavish parties, which some argue is the origin of the Congado festival. However, there are no written historical records of his existence.

9 Pluriannual Plan for Government Action.

10 In 2021, U\$ 37.198,92.

11 National Center for Africanness and Afro-Brazilian Resistance.

12 National Black Awareness Day.

asked, I replied: "We're still invisible to those with power and they will never think that we have the capacity and the competence to occupy any place, no matter how brilliant you are".

Upon leaving the state government, I worked in two consultancies. The first, for a project called "Periphery Reconnections", by the Perseu Abramo Foundation<sup>13</sup>. After that experience, I worked on another project with Geraldinho, at Cabana<sup>14</sup>. Then I went to work at the State Environmental Defense Association - AEDAS, where I am today, working with families affected by Vale's crime<sup>15</sup>. This is the place that I occupy at the moment, it is a wonderful, extraordinary project, and we realize how perverse capital is.

## ***6. If I am, it's because several were before me: the construction of the individual and collective identities***

I always say that I had two abortions in my life. The first was breaking with the traditional model where a black woman has to behave and fit a certain mold: straightened hair, pressed clothing -and I broke that right away. The second was to break with the Catholic Church, not the people, but with the dogmas and Christianity. I became very critical of the Catholic Church, in view of its collusion when it came to slavery.

These breaks were not easy. Breaking with white aesthetics is difficult, but when you occupy that place it's already a big difference, because you occupy it with more strength. Of course, sometimes I get on the bus and, depending on the way I'm dressed, there are still looks. But if I didn't have them then, now I always have an answer ready to give. I'm not afraid to go anywhere. If I'm invited to the Palace to talk to the governor, I will speak with them on the same level, tête-à-tête, no butterflies. Today, I have no problem being in any environment because I have more answers to give than questions that can be asked.

There are many studies and diagnoses on the relationship between gender and race. When we imagine the place of black women, they are ranked last. When you think of a social, economic, labor market, education pyramid, even if you have knowledge, capacity, training, she will still be in fourth place. In first place, the white man; second, the white woman; in the third, the black man and, in fourth, the black woman. This means that we deal at the same time with racism and sexism. Any change in this structure of relationships will generate other changes. That is, if you do not fight

13 Created by the Workers' Party (PT), to develop political, research, and cultural activities.

14 Cabana do Pai Tomás Neighborhood Association, west region of Belo Horizonte.

15 In 2015, a dam controlled by Samarco Mining S.A., which was owned by mining companies Vale and BHP Billiton, breached, killing 19 people and destroying the surrounding ecosystem, on which thousands rely on. In 2019, another dam, solely owned by Vale, breached, displacing and killing hundreds.



against these two things, you do not promote transformation, not only for black women but also for white women, who suffer from the same sexism.

There are studies that show that even though the white woman has the same knowledge and training as the white man, she doesn't occupy that place; we, black women, much less. Sexism is perverse for both genders, not only for women, but for trans people, for the LGBTQIA+ community. Anyway, sexism is an enormous perversity, and it kills. And black women die more; there are data that indicate that it's black women who are dying more from femicide. Domestic violence is much more prevalent among black families, especially when we factor in the economic situation. Many of these deaths are due to racism and sexism, prejudice and discrimination; then they prefer to kill. Of course, the man doesn't want a black, empowered woman; she's going to be in competition with him. They cannot imagine that perhaps a woman is much more capable than he is in a given situation.

In this sense, the issue of self-esteem also comes into play. It's not every day that we wake up with good self-esteem. You can wear the best clothes, the best shoes, have the most beautiful hair as can be. But if you're not emotionally well, it doesn't matter so much. And there is also another expectation that's very cruel, that of always being well. I have had many occasions when I wasn't well; but I needed to be. I had to get up, take a shower, put on my heels, put on my lipstick, put on my afro. We don't have much time for low self-esteem. Black women, even when they're beautiful, they don't get a boyfriend. There's plenty of discussion about this, about the loneliness of the black woman. It permeates all these dimensions that I have pointed out, of racism and sexism.

When I started to experience all these discussions, I started a small little Cleide, which is natural in the growth process of any human being. The issue of racial and gender identity strengthened me, made me a strong woman. I'm a wasp nest, I'm not afraid of anything. I've become this woman due to fighting, due to the spaces that collectively I conquered – it's never an individual space, that fight is only possible if the construction is collective. I had no individual merit, such as "because I'm a badass". No, it was a whole process built collectively my whole life. I have people I honor, for having passed through my life, and some remain.

And in this sense, my mother is the great inspiration, because it was her who brought me as well as several of my brothers, to this place where I am. With them we became politically and critically aware. In addition, I learned from Frei Betto and Paulo Freire, from popular education. So, if I am, it is because, before me, several were. And as I am a woman from the orixá, I am a seed of this process that worked. If it weren't for the ancestral force too, I wouldn't exist. I have had many reasons not to exist. Ancestry and religiousness give you a new meaning; I discovered that I do not walk alone, I am not alone. I think I plagiarized Bethânia's song, "I don't walk alone".

## 7. Legacies

I think we end up being an example for a lot of people. Not only for the family, but also for various collectives. Not just me, but several from my generation, we have paved the way for many things. We achieve the quotas; we approved, even if "toothless", the Racial Equality Statute and created the Racial Equality Undersecretariat. And there is still a lot of challenges ahead.

This place that I occupy is very good, of having many answers. It is also tiring. Sometimes you are unwell; there are times when you are a little sick and fragile, mainly due to the country's political and social situation. Or due to unemployment, like what I experienced. Even when facing these adversities, I always have to be ready to speak. So, this place of leadership is very tiring and lonely, you come home with a lot of anguishes.

Public management at times is a place of great loneliness, due to the wickedness of racism, as I said. Sometimes you "belong too much" to the movement to be in a place that is "of government"; for others, you "belong too much" to the government for a place that is "of the movement". It's a double representation, which brings suffering. The movement doesn't understand that what was planned didn't happen not because you didn't want it to; but because other people didn't! I'd like to have stepped down from SEDPAC with many Racial Equality Councils, with an approved Racial Equality plan, among other things.

I remember when I went to an event with almost 3.000 people to talk about black beauty. The next day there was going to be a demonstration against the killing of black youth. On that day, there were only 30 people in the square, it was painful. For those who are on the front line, it's painful, the people think: "What are we doing wrong? What do we have to do to get it right?"

In the early 1980s, we were against the quotas, because there was a fear of forming a black elite that was inconsequential and irresponsible with its people and origins. Today, I am afraid that we are forming a white and a black, university elite that has no recognition for the historic struggle. I always say that at black movement meetings. We have to be able to reconstruct this conversation, which is an achievement in terms of public policy. We lost many black men and women to illness, emotional issues, depression, the isolation that racism causes, to win this fight.

I think I want to be remembered for the good things I did, but also for the things I couldn't do. For my fight and history, for my commitments and demands. I was always very demanding of myself and whoever was working by my side. I don't know if it's quality or it's a fault, but I'm like this, I think it's due to the black woman that I could and I had the opportunity to be.



Cleide Hilda de Lima Souza, 1980s.

By: Personal Archive

I'm grateful for life, for the challenges, and for the courage. Because you can die without having had the courage to do anything, not having lived. Even to wash clothes, you have to have courage because the clothes have to be washed well and well placed on the line so you can look at it and be able to say: " Look, everything's clean."

In my childhood, there was a dirt yard to sweep. When mom was about to come home from work, I wanted her to arrive and find a squeaky-clean yard, coffee ready, because it was a way that I had to please her. She liked to have coffee, to smoke a hidden cigarette, I knew she would like what I did. It's this place of wanting to build while pleasing, and also being pleased - because when she thought it was good, it was everything.

I think it is this legacy that I leave behind. To live with courage is an exceedingly difficult thing for black men and women, to survive every day. So, if we know our history and understand it, our identity and our legacy stay for eternity.

# 15

## DIVA

## MOREIRA

Diva Moreira  
 Maria José Nogueira  
 Jessyka Martins

### 1. Family, childhood, and ancestry: *to understand me, you have to understand my mother.*

I was born in Bocaiúva, north of Minas, in 1946. Daughter of a domestic worker who worked in a pension and had been a rural worker. I can't tell my life story without talking about my mother. If we are dealing with ancestry, and this must be relevant to white people, for us, black people, is even more significant, because there are many people, like me, daughters of fathers who abandoned their children. The maternal figure, the protection, the influence, and the maternal example were decisive for me. To understand me, you have to understand my mother.

We went to Belo Horizonte in 1950. What work did a black and illiterate woman have at that time? It was just manual labor, housework, providing services for a white family. It was always like that: white male bosses, white female bosses, and the black maids. I went to a house, in the

Serra neighborhood, which was inside Contorno Avenue<sup>1</sup>. I like to talk a little bit about geography, because Belo Horizonte is extremely marked by the exclusion of the black population. I lived below Contorno Avenue because I worked for a white family. And living there helped me access school. It was a family that had no interest in seeing the maid's daughter studying: "A black person, it's enough to finish elementary school". So, when I finished elementary school, I started working as a nanny. A black person having finished elementary school is good enough. If that mentality still exists today, imagine back then? It was exceedingly difficult, studying in secret, in the dark, I couldn't use electricity. It was a dangerous place, including because of sexual harassment. It was one of the hardest periods of my life. I was sad. You know that thought: " Oh God, I could just die early, it would be so good to be free of it all". Because we, of course, were not aware of the fight. I wasn't aware of the political solutions to the problems.

As for my grandparents, I have a more positive memory of my grandfather than of my grandmother. Poverty sometimes makes us a little tired, a little rough, my poor grandmother. She was very impatient. There were a lot of people at home and there was me, who went there on vacation, to avoid confusion at the family home in Belo Horizonte. My grandmother wasn't an example of a patient person. She was of indigenous descent. And my grandfather was of African origin. He was considered to be a person who mastered occult, magical knowledge. For example, he was able to dominate venomous animals. He had prayers that he said when a cluster of hornets was arriving, and the hornets went back. It was a lost memory that I'm very sorry for. He certainly knew many herbs, many teas. And this group died very young. Life expectancy was very low at the time. Still, I remember them much older. My grandfather was much older than my grandmother, he died long before her. On my father's side, they are white people, with whom I had no relationship. When I was a little girl, my mother used to say: "Let's go and visit your father". I arrived, she told me as for a blessing<sup>2</sup>, I did, it was a ritual. When I was a little older, I couldn't handle it anymore. He promised to help me study, but he never gave me a pencil.

1 Belo Horizonte is a planned city. Its original limits lie within the Contorno Avenue, which literally translates to "contour" or "surrounds".

2 "Tomar benção", literally, "to take a blessing" is something children did with grandparents and sometimes god-parents. These would then say "God bless you" or even make the sign of the cross over the child. It's still relatively common, especially in the countryside, but falling into disuse.

## ***Divina Moreira, Diva Moreira: Divina didn't catch on and ended up being Diva***

My name has a history which I like. I was born in June, which has the June Festivities<sup>3</sup>, São João festivities, and, in the northern region of Minas, Divino festivities<sup>4</sup> are common. There, my name was Divina, in the baptistery. It was Divina here, Divina there. But I was only actually registered to enter elementary school. Until then, I had no civil registration, which was nothing new at that time. Even today, millions of people are undocumented in the country, imagine back then. So, what happened? The staff said: "Shall we write in Diva?". Because there were already a lot of people calling me Diva. Divina didn't catch on, it ended up being Diva.

### ***"Putting Diva on the couch": racism causes unthinkable pain***

I had difficulties with my mother because racism causes unthinkable pain. For example: I lived in a house where people were racist, they treated me differently. Then I started to harass my mother, it's crazy! We were harassed by the whole group. I internalized my inferiority, that being black wasn't good, and I started to antagonize her. It was the intersection of various discriminations, it wasn't just racial, it was social too. Even today, being a maid's daughter isn't easy; imagine back then? I remember that I went to rake the leaves and did it as quickly as possible to be able to go back in the house. Being the daughter of a maid was something marked by the stigma of inferiority, failure, poverty. So, I started to antagonize her. I only managed to overcome it when I was 15 years old. It was one of the most unforgettable and remarkable moments of my life, I'll never forget it. I was looking for transcendence. When people don't see a collective way out, when they don't have a revolutionary theory to explain it, they keep looking for a transcendence in the field of spirituality.

Not far from the house where I lived, there was a group of Logosophy. I went to a session, and I felt: "This isn't my place, this isn't about me, it isn't a space for black people". I went out, it was night, and a fog was falling, I didn't have an umbrella or anything, and it dawned on me: "Imagine that I'm against my mother! This is crazy! I can't anymore". She was extraordinary, she never complained. She never said to me: "Come here girl, come here, you good-for-nothing. You're on the wrong side, what's this about? Against me, your own mother?"

An analyst's couch may explain my hostility to her, "Why was I put in the world? Why did you bring me here? Why am I in this white house and not in my place of origin?". Talking about it raises an interesting question for me. Maybe, I identified in her the sources of my suffering. This interview may not be valuable for your records, but it is to me.

3 Festa Junina.

4 In English, this is known as Whitsun or Pentecost.



## 2. School, university, and training: *I lived in a world of white women and men.*

The name of my elementary school was very funny, in the morning it was “Augusto de Lima”, the course for the kids. At night, it was “Adalberto Ferraz”. And it was a school where I was discriminated against too. I almost stopped going during elementary school. The public it had is something that intrigues me today. That school had black children, daughters of domestic workers. There were the kids from favelas, because they were remarkably close, the favela of Pendura Saia and Pau Comeu. Along with us, they had upper middle-class girls. I remember a classmate who was from the Nunes Coelho family. Her father, at the time, was a state deputy. I have a hypothesis: There were two Catholic schools nearby, whose clientele was white. I imagine then that these were non-denominational, non-religious families. Who preferred to put their sons and daughters in a public school rather than a religious one.

When I entered elementary school, I was already a literate, I knew a lot. At this point, racism was something that structured relationships. And I'm not talking about my view of today, where everything is racism. I remember a time when one sister of the pension's owners commented with the other: "Wow, look at her school clothes, all nice". The other said, "Well, the mother cares a lot for her and she's black!". The coupling of racial belonging in a negative way happens all the time. You will look at the nice clothes, which my mother had just dried on the clothesline, ironed, and put there. And you are going to associate that outfit with blackness?

The next step was junior high. My mother's bosses didn't want me to take the entrance exam, because I had to pay a fee. They said, "Oh, Jesus, you're going to lose your money." My mom entered me, and I passed. There is a writer from the United States, James Baldwin, who said that black people have to do twice as much as white people to be recognized half as much. So, I got that in my head. I have always sought excellence, but it is exhausting and causes some setbacks in people's lives. One of these was to have an extremely tense woman's body. It is a very strong emotional drain you to have to prove, all the time, that you deserve to be there, that it isn't a favor that they are doing for you. I was always a minority wherever it was. I remember only two black boys at Colégio Estadual<sup>5</sup>. And so, I lived in a world of white people all the time. This is called structural racism.

You see, I'm a 74 year-old woman, you are a young woman of 30, Jessyka [referencing the researcher, who is also black]. You talk about experiences similar to mine, and more than 40 years

separate us. This is structural racism. If there was no change between my account and your account, I regret to inform: we live in the state of Minas Gerais, which is structurally racist.

### **Identity and Racism: *the wheel didn't turn because it was broken in one place.***

I realized that I was black and discriminated against since I was a little girl. In elementary school, I was discriminated against and started skipping classes. Look at the phenomenon of skipping classes, dropping out of school because of racial discrimination. Once, we were in a circle during recess. Next to me was a white kid. I had to take my hand to him for him to hold and he wouldn't accept it. And the wheel did not turn because it was broken in one place. Then, of course, everyone looks and sees a black girl, with the hanging hand, and the white kid beside her. But for him it was a victorious act. He knew from a young age that he would be victorious in life. That wheel that didn't close marked me a lot.

### **Hair: “Polish chicken” - can you believe it?**

You don't have any idea what the hair issue for blackness is [addressing the other researcher who is white]. You think you're a free woman with that hair now, don't you, Jessyka? Your hair gave you trouble, didn't it? It gave Jessyka trouble, who was born more than 40 years after me. It gave me trouble. I went through that straightening paste scheme, that hideous business. One fine day, I arrived at school with hair that must have been a little out of straight hair aesthetics. Then the teacher rewarded me with a nickname. She called me "Polish chicken". Can you believe that? And, since several classmates started to call me "Polish chicken", what did I do? I didn't go back to that school anymore. I left for school and went to some friends' house who were neighbors and stayed there playing, until school time ended, and I could go home. What happened to me is what happens to 90% of black kids, maybe even more. So, we are in this area, between failure and success - which is extremely tenuous. Depending on any little thing, you can go one way or the other. It's one thing to be aware of discrimination and difference. I've had it since I was a little girl. The hair, the color, racial discrimination, social. Discrimination for not having a father, that was very strong during that time. One thing is this type of awareness, which is very basic, precarious, very primitive. Another thing is political awareness. It's a jump, it's fantastic! This is the role that I think is decisive, very important, of black political and social movements.

<sup>5</sup> One of the most prestigious public schools in Belo Horizonte.

### ***From Serra to the João Pinheiro Foundation, via a tenement***

My mother was very wise. I wasn't even 17 years-old and she thought it was time for us to leave, I was no longer able to live in that house. We left to have our home, our independence. We went to live in a tenement, near the Dominican Convent, it was a transformation from water to wine. Because, at that time, Liberation Theology was starting in the Catholic Church. I was there, in that totally different, super chic environment. From the point of view of a black girl, who is coming with her housekeeper mom, who lives in a tenement, that was the most wonderful thing. I started to participate in the youth group. In 1967, I took the university entrance exam. I was motivated, surrounded by people, because in the Dominican Convent there were the student youth group, university youth group, and the Catholic Workers' Youth (JOC). I had the support of the Church (at that time in the Benedictine Monastery) and spent months on end studying to pass the entrance exam. I didn't have to worry about food, because we lived a very poor life when we went to live in the tenement.

My mother got a job as a cleaner at the Institute of Education. It was in the Magalhães Pinto administration, and he didn't pay the civil service for months; he only paid twice a year, as I remember. We had to rely on the landlord's understanding to pay the rent late. And the understanding of the grocer, who sold on credit. It was damn scary. It was difficult to run out of food; it wasn't a metaphorical difficulty, it was concrete. My mother washed and ironed clothes to have a more permanent money and the respect she had was remarkably interesting, the way she valued the issue of study. She never said: "I'm sorry, things are though, and you have to stop studying and start working".

In 1967, it had only three years since the installation of the military dictatorship, when I joined FAFICH<sup>6</sup>. I don't remember racial discrimination at university, it a left-wing group that I spent time with. There was the student movement, but I took little part in it, because I felt that the student movement was white, the racial issue wasn't addressed and that wasn't my world. On May 1st, 1968, there was a magnificent demonstration by men and women workers against the dictatorship, at the Health Secretariat, where Minas Centro is today. There I met the person who would be my boyfriend, father of my daughter, from the Communist Party. We left there by a tear gas, running, while other types of bombs were dropped by the police, who were also grabbing the leaders. And it was from there that I joined the old Partidão<sup>7</sup>. I was already dissociated from the Dominican Convent, my path was becoming different, and I started my activism in the Partidão, the struggle while being clandestine.

<sup>6</sup> Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences at UFMG.

<sup>7</sup> Literally meaning "the big party", nickname for the Communist Party in Brazil.

I left the Journalism course in 1970, there weren't a lot of Journalism majors at the time, but the job market was already very competitive. I thought: I'm going to live in Rio, who knows, maybe I'll have a better shot? I went, saw that this wasn't where I wanted to live and came back. In 1971, a friend told me about the Political Science major. I thought the idea of political journalism very appealing, and I took another entrance exam. I did what I could to prepare because I came from another field. I passed. This is what I always say: I was a successful woman in life. I'm very aware of this. I'm a victorious woman. I took the course and felt that I learned a lot, despite being a political science very much based on North American authors and functionalism. There was no mention of Marx. If there was, it was to say that he was totally wrong.

### ***A parenthesis: I had white boyfriends, I had black boyfriends***

I realized that black women were also discriminated against in the affective field. I knew that, and I think it made me withdrawn a lot from men. I had white boyfriends, I had black boyfriends. Then, I met Zé in 1968, comrades in the Partidão. We are friends today because he is Ana Tereza's father. I have two daughters, one biological and one from the heart. It was great, but there were differences in class and education between us that interfered in the relationship. He was union leadership; I had another mindset, and I was reading, studying, researching.

In 1973, he was arrested and spent almost three years in the political prison of Linhares, in Juiz de Fora. It was an exceedingly difficult period, I'd visit him, of course. When he goes out of prison, we got back together. We formalized our relationship in a get-together with friends, a priest came and blessed us, that was in 1976. We participated in workers' protests, with leaflets against the wage crunch and the military dictatorship, and complaints in the workers' press. As I had studied Journalism, I was in charge of writing the texts and interviewing people. We had a little worker press newspaper, it was called União Sindical.

Ana Tereza was born in 1983. Soon after, we separated. It's as if I wanted to end that relationship with a daughter, because I was already 37 years-old when she was born. My adoptive daughter is more recent. She's lovely, so beautiful. And in this affective daughter story, I received as a gift a wonderful grandson and son-in-law.

### 3. Professional life

In 1974, I went to work at the João Pinheiro Foundation and stayed there for 14 years. Thinking about this time at FJP, one thing that deeply bothered me was when I went out to do interviews in the ministries. In general, with a partner who was white. What happened? I'm not exaggerating. I would get there with this colleague and greet the person. It was incredible: I arrived and left, the only moments that the person looked at me quickly, was in the arrival and departure. But it was the whole time looking only at the white colleague. And she, it was the history of whiteness, with no racial awareness, she never realized that. I left feeling awful because the guy ignored me the whole time. There was never that thing of looking at me, explaining, then looking at her, and going back a little. Ever. I was and wasn't there. But in spite of the pain of discrimination, I didn't let that annihilate me and, in general, I felt good again.

I remember that, once, an opportunity arose for a position to coordinate a certain team. And I was someone who read people's writing. Everyone gave me their writing to read. I did a thorough review, discovered commas in the wrong place, lack of logic, of consistency, everything. So, I had a big head. When an opportunity came up, people were brought in from outside and I wasn't invited for the position.

But there was an extremely positive aspect at the Foundation at that time. In the midst of the dictatorship, it was an extremely autonomous space. To give you an idea, I started the issue of mental health at the Foundation in a totally independent way. I arrived there exactly when Fhemig<sup>8</sup> was being built. And they gave me the part that had to do with the State Psychiatric Assistance Foundation (FEAP). I always thought: "We can't do it by halves. We have to do something that's robust". I got to studying it, I didn't stick with the formula they gave me. That's when I discovered Erving Goffman. Changed my life. I was so impressed with the book *Asylums*<sup>9</sup>, that I said: "We could study more about psychiatric hospitals. We cannot stay just in the Fhemig's organizational little model, we can go deeper". And then the João Pinheiro Foundation, through Diva and Goffman, inaugurated an extraordinary stage in the history of psychiatry in Minas Gerais.

We also included the racial issue in the Foundation. People thought it was silly, done by people who didn't want to face bigger, more important jobs. Even with that track record, we faced

8 Hospital Foundation of Minas Gerais.

9 *Asylums: Essays on the Condition of the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, printed in Brazil with the title *Manicômios, prisões e conventos*.

it, we made the documentary *Dandara*, a black woman, can you believe it? That was even awarded by CNBB<sup>10</sup>.

After the João Pinheiro Foundation, I started working on creating an institution for the the black movement, which was Casa Dandara. I had realized that during that period I had undertaken several battles: in defense of children and adolescents, mental health, the working class, women. I was almost 40 and had done nothing for my own people, how was that possible? With the experience I had, it was time for this militancy. I left the João Pinheiro Foundation in 1988. It was a gamble with complete financial risk. My family went through financial difficulties again, but nobody complained. Truly wonderful. I worked for Casa Dandara full-time for a long time. It was like that for eight years. During this period, I lived on scholarships from foreign foundations, especially Ashoka, of which I'm a part today and it helped me a lot. I did research projects, got some funding for a while. Then he ran out of money again, and so it was. At Casa Dandara, our concern was to combine politics with culture and affection: the encounter and the celebration. It was a very rich experience, at Casa Dandara.

In 1996, Célio de Castro wins the elections for mayor and says he's interested in calling me to be a part of his team. I was out of the country at the time, but to speed things up I sent a brief proposal to some people, so they could talk to leaders of the black movement about creating an organ, which later became SMACON - Municipal Secretariat for Black Community Affairs. A non-discrimination space at City Hall to make a difference for our people. Célio was extremely open and fought for the approval of the bill in



*Diva with former mayor of Belo Horizonte, Célio de Castro – in whose government she headed the Municipal Secretariat for Black Community Affairs – SMACON (in Portuguese).*

*By: Personal Archive*

10 National Conference of Brazilian Bishops.



the Chamber. I stayed in City Hall for four years, until the end of 2000, when the Secretariat was extinguished.

### ***Diva Moreira and the passage through City Hall: racism and sexism mark this episode***

At Belo Horizonte City Hall, the mayor was delighted with our work, but this gave us a lot of internal problems. I was the only black secretary at City Hall, working on an issue that no one believed existed. There was a regional administrator who came looking for me one day to convince me that she represented the mayor and that everything we were going to do at the Raimunda da Silva Soares Vocational School, at Pedreira Prado Lopes<sup>11</sup>, which was in the area covered by this regional administration, had to be sent to her before, otherwise I would be disrespecting the mayor. Of course, I refused and was angry because there was no basis in what she was saying. And as she insisted on, what happened? It was the first time in my life that I put my foot down. I was so outraged that I said: "We won't we be able to do anything at Pedreira without going through the regional? Well, something like that impossible, we have autonomy there". She replied: "You don't, it's regional". Then I punched the table! This woman was one of our opponents and certainly helped in the destruction of the Secretariat. The mayor had given the Pedreira Prado Lopes School to us. That was too much. In particular, the staff in the Social Development Secretariat didn't get it. At the time, we said: "The mayor is betting on the secretariat, let's make the school a model in terms of public management, in terms of government action".

And there were sexist issues, of course. A black woman talking to white secretaries, wanting more resources for the Secretariat. I arrived at a meeting and, disrespectfully, one of them was reading something and he kept reading. Heard something that displeased him and that had to do with the low budget of Secretariat. He was outraged and gave a rude reply with his finger raised in my face. Repeating: finger raised.

### ***Going up the slum hill: it was an extraordinary dedication, something that white people didn't do, of course!***

A few white secretaries liked us, and I'll explain that. We were able to get into slums and get out, easily, but they were afraid. So, they'd asked us to send someone with their team to go up the hills. We had a core of respect between the Secretaries because they knew: "with the SMACON, we can go to the slums and the criminals can't attack us." We needed to legitimize the existence of the Secretariat, so our dedication was extraordinary! Sometimes we left the slum at eleven at night. It was an extraordinary dedication, something that white people didn't do, of course! There

11 Oldest slum in Belo Horizonte.

was no Saturday, no Sunday, nothing, there we were. At the entrance to the Pedreira school, there was a garden full of flowers. I defended the idea that public policy had to be founded on ethics and aesthetics, that our suffering people deserved the best. So, the difference we made had to do with the need to respect black people and fight institutional racism at City Hall and to legitimize the Secretariat, which was born under attack and never had internal legitimacy.

With the extinction of the Secretariat in December 2000, I felt defeated, enraged. I left Belo Horizonte City Hall and was unemployed, until someone found out, went to a person in the PSB<sup>12</sup>, and invited me to work as a human rights advisor to one of the party's deputies, Edson Rezende<sup>13</sup>. I went to work with him, and the experience was great, very enriching; they were very considerate of me. I liked what I did, despite the suffering on visits to inmates. We also saw to police officers who reported the case of an unfair charge that had been made against one of their colleagues. I think it's important to register this, because the image of human rights became very distorted by the right, and this had a negative impact on police headquarters, with the rhetoric that "human rights is for criminals." We showed, at the time, that human rights were for everyone.

I started to be one of the oldest people on the teams. I was in the job market with a group that was much younger than me. That's how I started to have friends who treat me with the greatest affection and consideration, there are young people who could be my grandchildren, due to the large age difference. I didn't work at the Legislative Assembly for long because I found out about a program focused on Race, Rights and Resources in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin. I participated in the selection process and was approved. In August 2001, I was in Texas taking part in the program. It was an extraordinarily rich experience, very interesting. It was there when 9/11 happened, and the official versions awakened feelings of patriotism that I had never seen before, even in Brazilians who lived there. From the University of Texas, I was approved at another selection for a summer program on racial issues and moved to the country's capital, Washington. I was at a think tank, the Woodrow Wilson International Center. It is an extremely conservative group, right-wing, but it was another opportunity to delve into the racial issue, and in the meantime, I could count on the scholarship money to survive. I stayed there until the beginning of 2003, when I returned to Brazil, once again unemployed.

12 Brazilian Socialist Party.

13 Medical doctor, university professor, and Brazilian politician - he was a city councilor and state deputy, each time for two terms. He also chaired CEASA Minas (the Minas Gerais Supply Central pulls together horticultural suppliers to sell in bulk).

I feel like a very blessed person, and I always thank God, my spiritual people, and to life, "which has given me so much"<sup>14</sup>. One day, I bumped into a former co-worker I hadn't seen in years, Zé Antônio, and I said I was unemployed. Guys, he knew that Roberto Martins, whom he had known for years, was looking for a black woman to refer to the United Nations Development Program, the UNDP. I was there for about three years, it my last professional experience. I befriended several people, worked on racial and gender issues, got to know a little bit about the inner workings power relations in the federal bureaucracy. The salary was great, but it was the only place I left with a bittersweet feeling. My mother had had a stroke and had to pay 24 hours a day-caregiver costs. Again unemployed, I entered a debt spiral that I have not left to this day.

***Among us, downward mobility is much more frequent than among white people.***

So, this is it: there is this up and down, because professions are reserved for white people, graduated from top universities, with time and money to prepare for civil servant exams<sup>15</sup>. This is what individualist ideology calls merit. That is why we fight for affirmative action, in universities and public bodies. Another way of accessing spaces in the labor market, especially in the private sector, in companies, is by referrals, the famous "who you know". We know that black people came from poor families and their networks don't have the same capillarity and influence as those of white professionals.

I don't remember how I found out about this course at the University of Texas. The internet already existed; I must have received some e-mail. At City Hall, of course, I knew Célio de Castro, from the battle over health reform in the country that resulted in the creation of the SUS<sup>16</sup>. When the Secretariat was extinguished, I also went back to square one. Later, when I left UNDP, I didn't fall "up", I fell down. My contract was terminated in 2006. It was a traumatic termination, compounded by my mother's death. I felt very wronged, and with the help of a friend of the black movement, I looked for people to write a letter of denunciation, I had the support of national leaders of the movement, but it didn't help. You see, when I left UNDP, I already had a commendable professional experience. I was 60 years old. I looked for friendly people who taught in private colleges, since many needed people with a master's and PhD to improve their score at the MEC<sup>17</sup>. But nobody

14 Reference to the song Gracias a la vida, written by Parra Sandoval Violeta, and sung by Mercedes Sosa.

15 Civil servants in Brazil are mostly hired by way of public, anonymous exams. The system favors those with better access to education, prep courses, and time to study, although it does stem corrupt hiring practices such as nepotism

16 Sistema Único de Saúde, or Unified Healthcare System, Brazil's public healthcare system.

17 The federal Ministry of Education.

suggested me for anything. Until I managed to retire due to age, in 2006, I went through a lot of financial constraints.

Last year, another blessing happened in my life: I was approached by a retired teacher, Walter Andrade Parreira. He told me: "I know you from your book, from your battle in defense of inmates in psychiatric hospitals, we are creating a course and we have built a discipline for you". Can you believe this happened to me? A white guy, who he didn't know me, he knew about the book, he knew that there was a woman named Diva Moreira, but he didn't even know how to find me. He called me, a long and wonderful phone call of recognition and appreciation. Speaking of my importance in the history of Psychology in Brazil. I've never seen such recognition. Then what happened? This person invited me to teach at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Department of Psychology. I was over 70 years-old and went to teach at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, which I found totally unusual.

Then there was an impressive episode of racism by a white friend. There are very offensive things to black people, but for white people they are like nothing. I said to myself: "I'm going to warn my friend, who also teaches precisely at the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, that I'm going to be there. She's gonna see me and think it's weird, so I'm going to tell her." I had this consideration. I sent her a What's App message saying that I was going to start teaching. She asked me, "For the first semester undergrads?" It's exactly what you're thinking. A woman with my career, my experience, all that baggage, and this friend of mine thinks that, if I'm there, I should be teaching the initial classes. Not that this is a dishonor, but her question was disastrous. So, the professional life of black people in a society of white hegemony is this. Life is up and down.

***"The problem with the poor is that they have has poor friends", and that's right, he is absolutely right.***

About the downward mobility of black people, I remembered something else. In our case, in general, we are the wealthiest people in the family. So, what ends up happening with our money? It must be distributed. Distribution isn't of the income which, unfortunately, doesn't exist in our country, distribution of my retirement and of the wages from whoever's working. I also remember a phrase from Amartya Sen that I find remarkably interesting: "The problem with the poor is that they only have poor friends", and that's right, he is absolutely right. Our family is poor and friends in general. Or you have friends who aren't poor, but you do not have the freedom to say to them: "Can you lend me some money?". I sometimes borrow money, but it sucks to be in debt. When I pay, the person says, "No need." These are situations that we shouldn't have to go through, but of course we do, because that is also something that's specific to the situation of black women on the rise. We experience a pendular situation, sometimes it's fine, sometimes it's tough.



## 4. Affirmative policies, movements, and the quota policy

I fought for affirmative policies, for quota policies, I defended them fervently. I wrote about it, criticized white intellectuals, many of them of foreign origin, who were against quotas. I questioned, I participated in arguments in the lectures I gave, and in my writings, which I'm recovering - I'm writing books, plural. I'm not writing just one.

Back then, this is what I said: "We would not be demanding affirmative action policies if there had been actual universalist policies. In theory, everything was wonderful. Those who argued against the quotas said that we were violating republican principles, as if we lived in a wonderful republic. I entered university at a time when there were no quotas. But for me to have entered, how many, just how many black people were left out? I left university in 1970. Fifty years ago. If there were more Divas Moreiras in colleges, at that time, fifty years later or thirty, forty years later, what a difference it would make! I became this kind of exotic being, because of a racist society. If not for that, my career wouldn't be so rare. We would have more black women who worked in the Minas Gerais society, like me. But why did I become such an exotic piece? Because we live in a racist society.

Quotas at universities opened processes for a series of changes in Brazilian society. We have black people in the academy, not in the number that would be proportional to what it should be, but we do. Today, we have black people in Science, Technology, Medicine. There is a black director at the Faculty of Medicine, in over a hundred years. Look at the immobility of Brazilian society! Therefore, there is a need for affirmative action policies. We didn't have comprehensive, universalist policies, on the contrary! We had deliberate policies to exclude the black population from the modernity project of the state of Minas Gerais. The negative social indicators of the black population are far from unintentional. Like this: "Oh, my God, did this happen? But I wanted it the other way". No. It happened like that because the elites of Minas Gerais planned it that way.

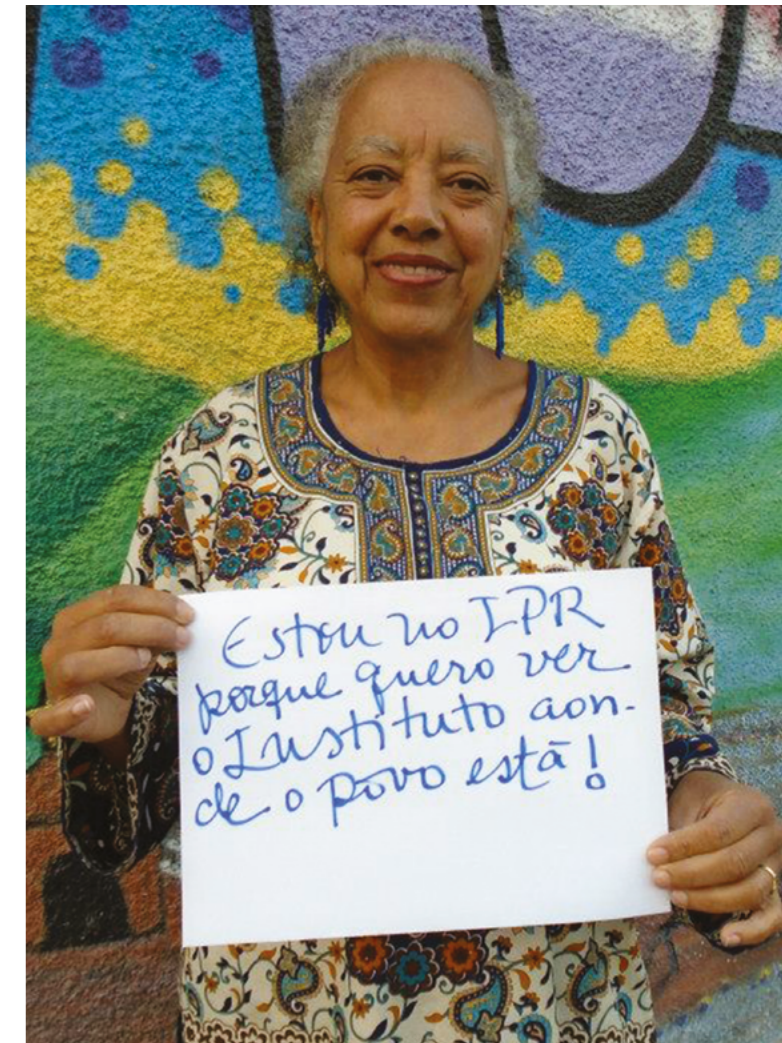
You will read in my book, soon, how this was planned. The exclusion of the black population from the modern Minas Gerais project, hygienic. In Belo Horizonte, the situation was even worse in terms of exclusion, because the capital was created at a historic moment of influence of the ideology of eugenics, of scientific racism. The efforts of black social movements have borne much fruit. All that we have achieved in Brazilian society was the result of our struggle. Today's kids talk about "kicking the door down" and rightly so. Speaking of the consequences of these battles, today we have companies with scholarship programs to offer opportunities for trainees, including in the most scientific one<sup>18</sup>. This would not exist if it were not for the fight for quotas in universities.

18 Bayer and Procter & Gamble offered trainee opportunities for black people in the second semester of 2020.

They triggered other consequences that changed the face of this country. Today, black presence in universities already exceeds, by a small margin, 50%. See, we talk about the rigidity of the racial structure in Minas Gerais and Brazil, but I'm happy to see that. Because there were people who died before me without having seen any of this!

### *We have to organize our people for deeper transformations*

I think that social movements are decisive in the history of achieving our rights. For example, when I arrive at the Youth Reference Center, I'm delighted. It is full of groups of young people holding meetings, taking dance classes, theater, circus, hip hop, capoeira. In other words, what I have seen there is a black protagonism that I didn't have in my youth. I went decades without hearing about black theater. Did you know about TEN - Teatro Experimental do Negro<sup>19</sup>, created by the great Abdias do Nascimento? And now? It is full of black theater. I'm finding all of this spectacular. Seeing black women getting organized, there are groups of black psychologists, architects, and so many teachers! I'm delighted. So, this question of the articulation and visibility of our struggle has attracted an extraordinary number of people to the movements. These people take the issue of racism to their territories, to quilombos, to terreiros. It is a very rich, historical moment, despite the statistics of police violence and the climate of hate in which we live in since 2018.



*Diva supporting the campaign for the Pauline Reichstul Institute, a non-profit that focuses on promoting social justice. Belo Horizonte, 2014.*

*By: Personal Archive*

19 Abdias do Nascimento (1914-2011) was a black Brazilian politician, university professor, activist, and artist – including acting, poetry, and playwriting among his work. He organized the National Convention of Brazilian Blacks (1946), the First Congress of Brazilian Blacks (1950), and the Third Congress of Black Culture in the Americas (1982). He founded the Black Experimental Theater, the Black Art Museum, and the Afro-Brazilian Research Institute. In 2010, he was an official nominee to the Nobel Peace Prize.



The issue of education, for me, is fundamental. In educational training, the kids have read extraordinarily little, they have to read. And today, editorial production on racism and the history of slavery has been expanding. Books by black writers have been reissued and others translated into Portuguese. There are more black publishers in the country. In the past, in Belo Horizonte, there was only Mazza publishing<sup>20</sup>. Today, there is Nandyala publishing. That is, this black protagonism, which can be seen in all areas, is because we are in the fight, we are not just standing around. Frei David<sup>21</sup> was one of the pioneers and stoked the flame of quotas a lot. Then, of the vacancies in the job market. More recently, he was more daring and challenged the São Paulo Stock Exchange. Because you going to train a black group that will be extremely frustrated if they're unable to find a space in the job market. The issue of organization is especially important. But, for me, it is particularly important to face the problem that is the most serious, the most crucial: police violence. Yesterday, I received a message from a father whose son is devastated, a black son who is a musician, an artist, and was rudely approached by a military police officer. He sued the policeman, but the judge found the case for the attacker. And he ordered him to pay compensation to the policeman of more than 30 thousand reais. The father called me desperate, and I said: "Before, we had nowhere to turn. Today, we have the OAB<sup>22</sup> Racial Equality Commission, their work is free, just go for it". There are people from the Public Defender's Office of Minas Gerais who are also aware of the issue of racism.

So, there are several issues that demand the construction of collective subjects and the constitution of new types of institutions. We have to organize our people for more profound changes. How to defend the SUS, which is a magnificent experience? How to defend a good quality public school? How can we prevent our children from being expelled from school because of institutional racism? How can we prevent our women from dying from domestic or police violence, negligence in medical care? Data on maternal, neonatal, and perinatal mortality due to obstetric violence are higher among black women. How to prevent this without organization, without the construction of new actions and institutions?

20 Publisher Mazza was founded in Belo Horizonte by Maria Mazarello Rodrigues, who was also one of the founders of Editora do Professor and Editora Vega, in the 1960s and 70s. She did a master's degree in Publishing carried out in Paris, and through Mazza publishes black authors and authors and books that address themes surrounding Afro-Brazilian culture.

21 Frei David Raimundo dos Santos, president of Educafro, established more than three decades and one of the protagonists of the struggle for quotas in universities.

22 Order of Attorneys of Brazil.

## Black feminism and white feminism

When I joined the feminist movement, I wasn't aware of this racial transversality. But I always had that sensation, that feeling of an impasse. White feminists didn't accept that the racial issue was exposed, because they only perceived the gender oppression that equally affected black women and white women. When we reached another level of organization for black feminist women, we left the white women movement. Because we started to realize that the racial issue wasn't accepted and was even a factor of constraint. Black women said: "Do you know why are you in the feminist movement? Why you're in the streets tearing up your bra? Because there are black women at the home, taking care of your children and your house".

This was very clear in the case of domestic workers. You saw how a part of the middle class turned against Dilma when the Statute for Domestic Workers was approved. Even those white women bosses, who had the purchasing power to pay all the rights provided for, they weren't used to it. If they didn't have to pay, it would be much better. I know maids, my friends, some of whom are my tenants. There is one who works in a house, must be for 30 years, they never paid her any benefits, only the salary. I told her: "this is absurd", but it's no use. All of them are hampered by a disrespect for their rights. That's why there's a need for political awareness. I'm a Marxist, I don't believe that we'll have a spontaneous perception of the class struggle, of the struggles against racism. If you have no organization, you won't advance.

### *I silenced some things: we were afraid of not having the opportunity if we complained*

I silenced some things so as not to be annoying, talking and complaining all the time. And, sometimes, we were afraid of not getting the opportunity if we complained. I told you about my trips with the white colleague at the João Pinheiro Foundation. I silenced myself, my colleague never knew that. Why did I silence myself? Because of economic issues within my family, to help people, to have a little more money, to have a margin, which was travel money. Today, I'm mindful. There are such simple but important things. You don't know how care I take, for example, with the way of placing the chairs. If I'm sitting in a place and a person is turning more towards me, but there someone next to them, I invite that person to sit next to me, to avoid this.

We are invisible, our invisibility is so great, so I had to silence myself, because otherwise I wouldn't have traveled, I would have been seen as "annoying" and would have been very isolated. There wasn't, among white people, this kind of awareness. We've grown up when it comes to racial awareness. White people also grew up, but not as much as we have. Professor Aluísio Pimenta was president of the João Pinheiro Foundation and Minister of Culture. He liked to say that if he was



*Diva at the Church of Jesus Crucified, participating in Rosário festivities. Belo Horizonte, 2016.*

*By: Personal Archive*

invited to a roundtable, he'd say: "I don't accept sitting at a table if there are no women at my side". He was aware of the gender dimension, but he wasn't aware of the racial dimension. Have you ever wondered if white people, when they were invited to something, asked: "Look, is a black woman being invited? I'm a man, will any trans women be invited?". That would make a colossal difference. I don't know if it was just my impression, but I have had a keen eye regarding the images of the guests in the social media events. I'm seeing a lot more black people in those today. I think there was a boost after the murder of George Floyd.

The issue of racism has a devastating impact on the black population, but I don't believe that the white population is safe. Don't white people go thinking that "it's all right with me"; it isn't, surely it isn't. I can see that Black Americans, men and women, have advanced more in the studies on whiteness, from the point of view of Psychology. The black woman boss arrives to meet with her subordinates, speaks but isn't heard. She may ask, "What did I just say?" And people can't answer her. They unplugged themselves. They have their headset on, but didn't hear what the black woman said. What does that mean for that person? I think that Psychoanalysis and Psychology owe us studies on this. Last year, I started teaching at a private college and I touched on that. I took advantage that they gave me the opportunity, that they created a discipline for me, I very strongly put the racial issue forth. There were

students who left really impacted, it hurt, to have a lump in their throat, there were people who cried. It's a process.

I'm going to say something partly discouraging for us, who have a historical perspective and have adopted hope as a transcendental political value, we cannot lose sight, but racism is a construction. It's a secular construction, it's almost in the DNA. Perhaps, if it were, biologists could program new DNA. Both so that black people aren't born with an inferiority complex and white people aren't born with a superiority complex, because both dehumanize.

### ***What is the meaning of my life? Who can give meaning to my life?***

The religion phenomenon has always touched me a lot. Many decades ago, my brother became an initiate at Candomblé. I'm also close to Candomblé and advise the CENARAB, which is the National Center for Africanness and Afro-Brazilian Resistance, which brings together the people in religions of African origin in Brazil. I'm not initiated, nor do I intend to be, but I feel very connected to religions of African origin, and I recognize their role in black resistance throughout the period of enslavement and beyond. Therefore, I can understand why they are the target of so much hatred, of so much religious intolerance in Brazil today.

Regarding other religions, first I would like to say that I consider myself an internationalist person, the world is my limit. Anywhere in the world, and I have visited several countries, I have never felt bad. I lived abroad and heard: "Do you miss Brazil?". Me: "No, I'm fine". If I feel welcomed in that place, then it's fine with me. This worldview helped me to develop a great respect for all religions, for all connections with the sacred. Of course, for some, I have to say that I have my package of prejudice too.

I went to India once, and I was in a city on the day of Lord Ganesha's feast. It was great to be with everyone, they gave me food in a newspaper, and I ate well. It is a bit like Saint Paul used to say: "I'm a Greek among the Greeks, a Roman among the Romans". I'm easily adaptable and the religious phenomenon enchants me a lot. First, in our case of black people, I wonder this about the enslavement period in our country: religions, the phenomenon of faith, of the sacred, were that minimum opportunity for transcendence. Because their immanence was brutal, it was cruel. I have a friend who is a militant atheist. One day she said to me: "You wrote about the black woman, that people can replace God with Buddha, with Allah, with I don't know who. Why not replace God with evolutionary processes?". So, I thought of a slave or a slave being led to the gallows and holding the hand of evolutionary processes... Ah, that's unthinkable. They would be holding the hand of their Orixás, of Saint Ephigenia, Saint Benedict, or Our Lady of the Rosary. Yesterday was the day of Our Lady of the Rosary and I posted this on my Facebook page. Our Lady of the Rosary



of Black Men is a fantastic tradition in the country since the 18th century. Even though I'm out of Catholicism, I haven't the slightest connection with the Catholic Church, I have to respect this popular Catholicism. I go to the festivities of the Rosary communities, and I get there is the Guarda de Moçambique, it's Congado<sup>23</sup>, I don't know what else. They'll greet me: "Hail Maria!", "Hail, Maria!", I reply. I even won a huge rosary from the class, I have it at home. I think that the religious phenomenon is fundamental for us to be endowed with a transcendent perspective, with a utopia, because the lefts stopped offering our people a utopia, as they made a pact with the center, with the right and everything remained same thing for most people.

### **5. Black women, challenges: *the only condition for accessing universal basic income is to be alive.***

You be aware of some issues that are crucial. One of them has to do with robotics, automation in factories. What are we going to do with the exponentially growing disposable population? Who knows this population? I'd love to not know. Is it the blue-eyed white guy? The redhead? Is it the brown one? Is it me?

Another issue, which I think we need to embrace, is the issue of universal basic income. Not the universal basic income for the poor, but the universal basic income that doesn't discriminate. There are authors arguing that if Bill Gates got in line to get universal basic income, he'd be accepted: "the only condition for accessing universal basic income is to be alive". There's no social worker going in a house to stare, " I wonder is there's something hidden," seeing income, receipts for expenditures... it's a humiliation for people. A person who receives a monthly income for life due to age or disability, hearing the question: "How many people live in your home?" won't be forced to lie, saying that they live alone to get that crappy little income, like the BPC<sup>24</sup>. Basic income is essential, because there isn't and there won't be paid work, with a formal contract, for the majority of the economically active population. If we, black people, in periods of high employment rates in our country are still left behind, imagine now? The Brazil will have the lowest growth in the world in 2021. How is the life of the black population going to be?

<sup>23</sup> Congado is a mixture of the parties brought by enslaved Africans with colonial Christian religiosity. Its origins go back to an African rite, in which the subjects walked in procession to the Kings Congos, in order to thank their rulers.

<sup>24</sup> Continued Installment Benefit.

### **Divas, Divina, Shiva: several names and a surname.**

What are my legacies? Which ones would I like to be remembered for? This varies according to the public. For the so-called crazy people, I'd like to be remembered for the battle for the humanization of psychiatric hospitals. In relation to black women, for the work at Casa Dandara, which is a fantastic experience. I received an extraordinary message from Adelson, a boy who was set to have everything to go wrong if he hadn't gone to Casa Dandara. Why do I say he had everything set to go wrong? Black boy, expelled from school, nobody wanted to help him. And he ended up in the hands of Casa Dandara, in my hands. When a documentary about me was posted on Facebook, he sent a beautiful message of recognition. He sent it because he's abroad, so amazing. Some of the people who used to teach capoeira for us are away from Brazil, some students also made an international career with capoeira, including Adelson. He made trouble and we had the greatest patience with him.

To tell you the truth, I had several arms, like Shiva. I will be remembered depending on the field people are in. I will be remembered in different ways given the messages I receive: "I don't know you, but you are a reference in my life". Black, adult women, such a beautiful, moving thing that nourishes us. This love and affection help me live. The dimension of my speech, my history, my theoretical production that has been spread throughout this Brazil, thank God. I have been saying that I cannot die for now and that I have to take care of my health. I have to take care of my blood pressure, as I still want to leave books as legacy. I have many writings, totally disorganized. I'm thinking of leaving a series of books published. One hand from Shiva will write a book about something, another will write a book about something else, and other areas. I have a very good command of writing, which was identified when I was about 12 years-old, in a psychometric exam at the Institute of Education. I had the opportunity to take a very serious psychotechnical, with a dedicated psychologist, who did much more than her duties required. And in that period, the verbal domain was identified. I want to make use of it and write. Also, I took Latin and Logic. Logic gives us a keen ear... Like someone who has ear for music, I have listened to the logic of the person speaking. For example, to realize that the person said one thing, but is deducing another. I think: " Wait, that isn't in the guy's premise." My legacy will be to take all the experience that I have accumulated in various areas over the decades. In all of them I've become – then I add quotation marks – a "specialist" in practically everything that is in the field of social policies and racial issues. I'm invited to speak in the area of mental health, health in general, education, violence, human rights. There is a young Brazilian researcher in France doing a study on black women in the fight against the dictatorship. In her book she has Diva's experience. There are multiple experiences, there will be multiple legacies channeled into a single river, which is the liberation of the black people. That, to me, means the liberation of humanity.



Is it possible to think of a new world, of a fraternal, just, egalitarian society, with black people left behind? With the indigenous people left behind? The only people I didn't work for were the indigenous people. But I'm friends with a spectacular indigenous leader, Ailton Krenak, and I gave him the task of prefacing my book. I didn't have the experience and don't even know how to talk about the indigenous peoples, then the choice of Ailton is a small way to pay tribute to the first inhabitants of this country, victims of a systematic genocide since always.

I believe myself to be a successful person who has worked out in life. A black woman who worked out. I want to leave this legacy in several areas of knowledge, for the fight against racism.

I really like revolutionary poetry, but from time to time, I like softer poetry. I have opened my speeches, often, with a poem by Bertolt Brecht: "We asked you with insistence: never say - That is natural...". So that all people can have doubts about the reality that is there and not think that it is natural, that it was a work created by God, that there is no way to change it. Yes, there is a way to change. If each one of us makes the even smallest effort, in their place of work, in the municipal, state council, wherever they participate, in their house, in their family. In whatever space, you can and should make a difference, even if it is small, without losing la ternura without losing la esperanza.

# 16

## SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

The particular memories brought up by each of the biographies of this book unveil, as a whole, a small part of the social memory of the Brazilian black women. The similarities that we observe in them show that their paths are the result of their social relations and are thus crossed by race, class, and gender markers, portraying the life and work experiences of other black women in the country.

The purpose of these concluding remarks, even if partial and incomplete, is to indicate the main regularities observed. To understand how they witness the coping with difficulties and obstacles that, despite their specificities, corroborate the existence of structuring factors of discrimination against black women, not only at work and in the context of public administration.

Before focusing on the research's general objective – to understand the impact of black women within public administration in promoting



diversity, highlighting their contributions to the state and society in general and, above all, in the construction for public policies aimed at the black population – we need to understand the conditions that enable the trajectories of these biographies. It is important to note that we seek here to highlight the regularities of these itineraries, journeyed in the context of a society structured for their failure, biased towards a regime of racial inequality. A regime that, although veiled, develops even after abolishing the enslavement of the black population, entails a policy of whitening and of social hierarchy throughout the 20th century, and prevents that population from accessing quality schools and universities; finally, it stifles the arrival of black women in socially valued positions in the labor market, including work in public administration.

We also look for the conditions or events that made them able to overcome such structures. In other words: how do these black women break with the path of structural immobility, one that tries to keep them in conditions of submission and subordination at all times? Following the script of our investigation, we start with their origins.

### 16.1. Social and family origins

In the stories of the women biographed, we read how the social origins denounce the family's vulnerability in providing the living conditions and access to the initial processes of fundamental schooling. In overcoming the various limitations, the role of characters who become central to these stories is highlighted: mothers and grandmothers, obstinate in achieving better living conditions for their daughters. They are the ones who come from the initial resistance strategies, within the family context. Such strategies renovate the resources and the resistance that are placed in motion by previous generations, who acted in the promotion of liberation projects for black people since the colonial period.

The biography of these characters, mothers and grandmothers, are characterized by the interviewees from the various forms of violence suffered, which include from being victims of the practice of “donation”<sup>1</sup>, common in the period after the abolition of black slavery, to their precarious and overexploited inclusion in domestic work:

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1 In these cases, poor black women were compelled to be “donated” to other families, usually white, due to poverty and family difficulties. These are processes known as “adoption in bad faith”, in which “the child is taken to be raised”, to provide her with “a home”, but in reality they hide the opportunism of acquiring girls and adolescents, usually black, for the exploitation of their work. According to Rousiley Maia and Daniela Cal (2012), this “care in exchange for work” has instrumental value for the employers, in the sense that it would free them from carrying out domestic tasks with no social value. In addition, for domestic work, it was also common to add to the responsibilities of girls the care of children and babies. Finally, in addition to the girls doing the housework, in some cases, there is the expectation that they satisfy the sexual desires of the men of the house, meaning the workforce and bodies are understood as private properties – a mentality that survives in the 21st century.

My mother was born in 1938. She is the daughter of a northeastern retiring father, who came from the interior of Pernambuco in the arara-pau. At that time, in the great droughts of the Northeast, families were in the habit of donating their children to other families, in an attempt to ensure their survival. My grandfather did not accept that situation and ended up running away, very little boy. He walked around several places until he arrived here in Minas Gerais (Patrícia).

My mother is a very suffering woman, she did not know her father and mother. She is an orphan and came to Belo Horizonte at the age of six. [...] She lived in the back of a church, in a male orphanage. She remembers that she lived in the back of this church with a lady, who she called her mother, and it was this lady who cleaned the church, that is, she was the cleaning lady<sup>2</sup>. [...] It was donated, by a priest, to a family from the Belo Horizonte elite, who lived on Avenida Augusto de Lima and were one of the owners of the Yacht Club (Iara).

My mother arrived in Belo Horizonte at the age of seven. She came from a very poor family, who experienced the issue of drought, and my grandmother sent her daughters to work with the family. She tried to protect them from violence, from hunger. [...] When my mother arrived in the capital, she went to work in a house of a very wealthy family, who had many children and much of the land in Belo Horizonte; she was small and had to do all the work (Larissa).

This first marker brought from the mothers’ biography, the need to work from childhood, is repeated among part of the biographies. Still children, they help with the house chores; many woke up early to finish chores before going to school.

Several times, my mother had to cook on the wood stove because she had no money to buy gas. Sometimes, even to go to school. So, I got up early, five or five-thirty in the morning, to be able to cook yam or cassava. They were cheaper foods that we used to eat to be able to go to study (Cleide Barcelos).

The work to help with homework, pedagogical tasks, here is configured as a necessity, which remains in the path of women, already teenagers and adults – the vast majority of which go to school or university after work. There are serious reports of child labor, in which help with domestic tasks becomes an obligation to bring financial resources home, as in the examples below:

At six, seven years old I remember that we woke up at four in the morning to go to the sugar cane mill. I have already guided a lot of oxen in the field. Until I was ten, eleven years old I guided the oxen full of cane to take to the mill for us to work. [...] [Also] we worked as babysitters for the bosses’ children. They sent a “knight” who said: 'Dona Juventina, today we want one of your daughters to be with the farmer's son' and I was one of those daughters” (Xica).

During this period, we needed to help the family, each one had to do something. I helped take care of a baby, the son of my first elementary school teacher who was a neighbor of ours, and the family belonged to Raul Soares. So, I helped take care of my elementary school’s son. I was already in the range of seven to eight; the kindergarten, I remember, was 5, 6 years old (Maria do Carmo).

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2 After many years it was discovered that the cleaning lady was, in fact, her mother, and the priest, her father.

One of the characteristic elements of the biographies is the struggle of mothers and grandmothers to ensure conditions for social mobility of their daughters and granddaughters. They worked to create conditions so that the following generations could break with their own trajectory, marked by subordination. Then, they build for their daughters, according to Macaé's words – “emancipation plans”, which prove to be the main strategy to overcome the completely unfavorable situations experienced by families:

My mother designed a study path for her daughters (Nila).

My mother always thought it was very important for us to study. She always says: "It is women who will change the world". For this reason, she has always looked for good schools, as far as possible. [...] How many crowded buses my mother took so I could finish studying (Larissa).

My mother encouraged us a lot to not depend on anyone. She said: “Do not depend on anyone, much less on men to survive, to buy a shampoo, an absorbent. So, study, make a public contest” (Patrícia).

Despite all the difficulties we had to study, my mother tried to put me in private school whenever possible. But then it happened that there was no way to pay, that whole thing. So, I changed schools a lot during my student life, but always with this perspective that I was going to go to college. I think that made all the difference. I keep reminiscing about the people I lived with, who had the horizon of graduating from high school, at most. And for me, it was not enough (Daniela).

[My mother] recommended: “You women are going to study, you are going to get a job, because the day you get married and the man raises his hand to hit you, tell him to 'leave empty, send him away, because you can survive alone, you don't need it'. And he added: “You lost respect, send it away!”. Today, I speak to her: “Mother, I am working on preventing domestic violence and I always remember what you said to us” (Cleide Barcelos).

Education is the way perceived by mothers to overcome the social destinies imposed on the black population and, therefore, the central object of their plans. In addition, the role played by the cognitive differences that many of these mothers had was also relevant. In view of the limitations that affect them, they promote access to books and knowledge, which are fundamental resources.

When I was already in elementary school, my mother had studied up to the third grade, in the countryside. When I was young, she went back to school. At the time of my high school, he passed a contest at the Federal University of Minas Gerais for the position of Operational Assistant for Miscellaneous Services. He managed to have a public job that provided better financial support for our family. After joining UFMG, he decided to study. He took the Nursing Assistant course and then the Nursing Technician course. With that, he was able to have a mobility career in the administrative technique at the university and, when he retired, he occupied the position of Nursing Assistant (Yone).

My mother, Maria Antônia Cesária Evaristo, is a teacher trained in high school teaching. He studied with great difficulty. We found a picture of her in elementary school; is the only black girl in the class. She did her teaching in Pará de Minas, the only place where she was accepted – because, at that time, even though my grandparents were paying for their studies, some schools did not accept black people. My mother persisted a lot and we all studied. All have higher education, and two, master's degrees. We fulfilled the script that my mother planned for us, to have our work, to own our nose, to touch our life (Macaé).

The father figure has less watertight characteristics in the studied biographies. In part of them, the mothers' struggle for the education of their daughters takes place against their will; in others, however, there is not only the promotion of studies, but a role played in the formation of an early political conscience in a large number of the daughters is also evident:

My father also only studied until the fourth year of Primary School, but he loved to read. He read books and newspapers every day, including Sundays. At that time, there was *Jornal Diário da Tarde* and, on weekends, the *State of Minas*, which we read together. He is responsible for my reading habit. I was talking about something I never forgot that if I could have, I would have studied Geography. To this day, he reads a lot and has a knowledge of the world, a political position he has built for himself (Patrícia)

In a way, we also follow my father's tradition of engaging in the anti-racist struggle. For us, this has always been a fundamental debate. My father, Osvaldo Catarino Evaristo, was self-taught, he learned several things on his own: he read a lot, painted and made sculptures. He participated in free arts classes within the municipal park and also wrote in the *Estado de Minas* newspaper. (...) He was a militant of the black movement in Belo Horizonte, participated in the José do Patrocínio Cultural Association, one of the first black associations here (Macaé).

My family, especially my father, but my mother too, was very engaged in knowledge, reinforcing the need to study. And it was, very markedly, verbalized in relation to the color of the skin. My dad didn't say all the words about the issue of racism, or structural racism, but he said, "You need to think you are beautiful and you need to study. Because you need to be better than anyone. Competition is given and you it will be very charged". He was trying to tell me that I was going to face a series of racisms throughout my life (Iara).

## 16.2. The school trajectory

The school trajectory is marked by intersecting dimensions. At school, structural racism, previously not explicitly perceived, is now lived and felt, and demands other material efforts: not only to buy books, tickets, snacks, but also to “adapt” your clothes and hair – expensive investments, made in precarious situations. The difficulty for black and poor children to enter public school, explored in the chapter by Macaé Evaristo, among others, constitutes an important limitation to the process of democratization not only of the education system, given that it restricts access to other social spheres. Maria do Carmo's testimony brings important elements in this regard:



At that time, we took the entrance exam; the poor had to go through this process, and you had to study hard, because otherwise you wouldn't get scholarships. So, since that time, you had to prove that you were good. And, many times, we didn't have the money to be able to take the exams. Sometimes, when you stood out a little, there were teachers who helped you in that direction. I remember my little brother wanting to take the test and cry, because there was no way for us to pay. I did it with the help of a teacher. A black teacher, who was a pianist at that time, in the 1960s. It was thanks to her that I was able to take my entrance exam. It is always a story like this, of helping one another [...]. I remember that, when I switched to scientific, I used to go to the radio a lot to be able to order books [...]. There were those books that you never could afford to buy [...] I always struggled, like so many colleagues from my time, we ran a lot after the loss. If you wanted to win, there had to be someone who looked just like you or someone who discovered you were talented. [...] And we needed a lot of help to be able to study. So much so that only I, among the brothers, managed to take a higher education course (Maria do Carmo).

For several of these women, a study placement was only available at night, as imposed by the institutions, revealing a masked racial segregation, following the example in the story of Patrícia Santana: “When I turned 13, I was mistakenly transferred to the night shift. It wasn't supposed to be at school at night when I was 13 years old, it was supposed to be in the morning”. Another example of racism in institutions is underlined by Maria do Carmo:

When you grow up, you will see that it is not so. You realize that the form of treatment has a meaning [...]. I was crazy about doing ballet and playing the piano. Then I received every way to give up: that my hands were small, that I couldn't play the piano; that piano was expensive; that ballet was only for the children of those who could. [...] These are childhood dreams, which later on, throughout life, you will see retaliation [throughout life]: [...] “Look, this is not your place” (Maria do Carmo).

Despite being a fundamental lever for social mobility, the school is also a traditional space for the maintenance of structures. The stories indicate the loneliness of the black child when accessing schools, which is another marker in the path of black girls:

Like my mother, my school experience was very lonely, from the point of view of the black presence at school. Most of the children who attended school were from white families. Being a black child at school is difficult. You will be called “brillo-pad hair” (Macaé).

I realized that I was black and that I was discriminated against since I was a little girl. In elementary school I was discriminated against, and I started skipping classes. Look at the phenomenon of skipping classes, dropping out of school, because of racial discrimination. Once we were in a circle, at the time of recreation; next to me there was a white kid, and I had to take my hand so that he would hold mine and he didn't accept it. And the wheel did not turn, because it was broken in one place. Then, of course, everyone looks and sees a black girl with her hand dangling and the white boy there beside her. For him it was a victorious act. He knew from an early age that he would be victorious in life. This marked me a lot, this wheel that did not close (Diva).

I remember a student of mine, that because her mother smoothed her hair so much, her scalp hurt. In the school gang, nobody wanted to dance with her. This episode reminded me of me a little, because that's how it happened to me. In addition to the boys not dancing with me, I had a very big braid and the teacher said that my head was not shaped to put on a hat. So, I was never chosen to square dance. He kept dying and did not understand that he was already a victim of racism. Among black girls, few could be chosen (Cleide Hilda).

The stories highlight the important role of women teachers - especially in their identification with those who were black:

I loved the first-grade teacher. It was a white teacher who received all the children at the door of the classroom and gave them a kiss and a hug [...]. I also remember another teacher who I had a great admiration for, Portuguese, black and married to a school interventionist. She was responsible for my taste in reading, she encouraged me to read (Patrícia).

However, a feature also evidenced was the positioning of some teachers, in contributing to the naturalization of racism among children:

In general, the teachers did not make any intervention. And when they did, they said: “Why are you thinking it is bad? You are really denying it!”, Legitimizing the executioner. It is a difficult process for a child to operate this, to manage to elaborate these situations (Macaé).

Racism at school is related to the formation of women's self-esteem, their identities. One of the most symbolic dimensions of racism, in addition to the color of the skin, is black hair. In the school environment, hair is related to very peculiar experiences, which deny the human nature of the black person. Transforming hair in an attempt to belong to the ideal of whiteness implies introjecting racism, making natural curly hair “less than”.

During this period, I smoothed my hair and the strands started to fall out. With that, my mom took me to get a haircut. But the person who cut it did something that made it even stranger than it was. And after the cut, I went to class, but when I got to school, the teacher was the first to joke about my hair, and it was devastating. After that episode, I left class and shaved my head, and I spent many years wearing shaved hair (Larissa Borges).

The school is the door of social insertion to the world of work, and as such, the stereotype will be reflected in the work environment. The adoption of the white beauty standard is a condition for social acceptance and insertion in educational organizations and in the labor market, as we will see below. Appearance becomes yet another resource of power and domination, which undermines the black phenotype - a theme that appears in all the biographies of this book.

### 16.3. University education: the dream, profound racism, and transformation

The desire and goal to study was present in all the narratives of women in the biography: the dream is expressed at the early arrival at primary school, in getting the best grades to feel a sense

of belonging and to show their value, in becoming the leader of the class and have an impact on the students. The university is the place of arrival in a school trajectory. For many, university was a universe to be discovered, given that it was not something lived by their neighbors:

Before going to college, I was determined, because of the need, to go to cane cutting in São Paulo, where we had several acquaintances (Maria do Carmo).

Arriving at the university was a game changer for me, due to everything it provided, and I enjoyed everything: debates, courses. I was a Sociology monitor of the basic cycle, a good academic opportunity. Then, I became involved in the adult education project at the Faculty of Engineering, which had scholarships, all to complement the income (Patrícia).

The course itself, served me little; so, I went to do an internship, scientific initiation, several extension projects, to try to understand how Psychology could help me beyond what was being presented to me, beyond Freud, Skinner and Lacan. And it was very good, I think it made a big difference a formation that went a little beyond the curriculum (Daniela).

At the end of the 3rd year, I was going to take the entrance exam, but there was not much reference for courses. As a black teenager, we were not encouraged to think about entering university, the course we were going to take. I didn't have that stimulus and I didn't have any family reference. [...] In 1981, I joined UFMG. I started studying at night and started to open paths. At university, everything was very different from what I lived. [...] For me, it was remarkably interesting and challenging, because I liked to read, but Durkheim, Marx, Weber was a type of reading that I didn't have (Yone).

The narratives also bring the feelings of doubt, and present the moment of the black woman coming to know the ideas protected by the glass domes of the white middle class:

Being in a public college was the most phenomenal thing in the world. I didn't want any luxury! [...] I had a friend at the university, Cris, who said he wanted to be a doctor. I didn't understand what it was like to be a doctor. When I entered college, I didn't know that there was a master's and doctorate. My question was to form quickly and start working, because I was always very aware that what I lived was already a lot, in terms of power (Daniela).

In the accounts of most of the black women biographed here, accessing higher education meant being the first or the only of a generation. In that sense, the diploma symbolized the arrival of the whole family, of a whole lineage devoid of this conquest – because that was the place of the boss, of the whites.

I was the first woman in the family to have a college degree. That was a glory for my relatives, my father made a point of talking on the bus: my daughter is graduated! (Cleide Hilda)

I entered university at a time when there were no quotas. But for me to have entered, how many and how many black people were left out? I left university in 1970. Fifty years ago. If there were more Divas Moreiras in college, at that time, fifty years later, or thirty years later, what a difference it would make! I became this exotic being because of a racist society. Were it not for that, my trajectory would not be so rare. We would have more black women who worked in the mining society (Diva).

In my generation, I was the first person to enter university. The first to graduate, the first to get a driver's license, the first to enter graduate school, the first, first, first! This ends up being a brand that I carry, for better or for worse. My achievements were victories for my parents, but also for the family. When I graduated from high school [...] I remember the whole family was there. [...] At graduation, the same. In the master's and doctorate, the closest family nucleus was there with me. For my family, it has always been a source of great joy to see a daughter, a niece arriving at this place as a doctor (Yone).

I was the first of my family to attend a public college, I was so lucky. At the time, it had to be a public university. It had no FIES [public funding]; the private university was too far away for me. I joined UFMG in 1999 and there were no quotas yet. [...] In my room, we were four black students, without any racial debate, throughout my course, very different from what it is today (Daniela).

However, in addition to intellectual capacity, there are many obstacles to obtaining a diploma. After accessing the university, a lot of investment and strategies are needed to survive and complete the degree:

I moved to São Gabriel, a neighborhood that is difficult to access and I was already in higher education, at night, very heavy and difficult. I had to work during the day to pay for photocopies and tickets (Patrícia).

I was studying, attending college, my course took many years to finish. As I had no money, I did one semester and locked the other, and I went on internships (Larissa).

How did I pay back then? [...] Taking a loan from the bank. They endorsed me to be able to get a loan from the bank. [...] The clothes I had were the clothes I got to be able to go to college. Then, when I was in college, sometimes they shared a snack with me. Then they discovered me going on foot and said: no, we will help you to go by bus (Maria do Carmo).

The confrontation is not only against their own insecurities, but also against the naturalization of the expectations of the socio-racial group to which they belong, as exemplified by Nila:

When my sister and I went to the cram school, some people said: "Look, this is not for people like us, who were born in this neighborhood. We have to work. Such a person earns very well, works in the bakery. I stopped studying. Are you going to take the entrance exam?!" (Nila).

Many of the women in this biography engage in political movements, especially the black movement and the black women movement, which is a process that took place along with the university and this transformative experience:

It is one thing for us to be aware of discrimination and difference. I've had it since I was a little girl. Hair, color, racial and social discrimination. Discrimination for not having a father, that was very strong at that time. One thing is this kind of awareness, which is very preliminary, precarious, very primitive. Another thing is political awareness. It's a jump, it's fantastic! This is the role that I think is decisive, very important, of black political and social movements (Diva).

For a black woman, the affirmation of the identity is a complex process, the beginning of which can occur within the family itself, constituting the first cognitive formations about people, the community and the world. Some families deny racism, as a way to break with belonging to group that is placed lower in the social hierarchy and achieve some social mobility. However, social and interracial coexistence, in places predominantly occupied by white people, such as the Brazilian university environment, reveals racism in a shocking way for many of them: “I identify myself as a black woman, and what made me one was racism. At school, it was there that I was told I was not white” (Nila).

Daniela and Magda touch on the theme of colorism, or the fluid place occupied by black women of mixed race, given that their stereotype disappoints the expectation of a black woman:

I always considered myself a black woman, but I had some problems within the movement. I realized it before, but when I started participating in things, getting to know the subjects, then I started to realize some things that shook my identity a little [...] when people started, in a certain way, to talk about my hair and my nose (Magda).

I am the only child of a black woman and a white man. This is something important in my trajectory, because the place of miscegenation confused me, a lot, about the relevance of the racial agenda in my life (Daniela).

When approaching this identity, the managers express the pain of the awareness of this place, but also of their encounter with their self-esteem, their empowerment process, the joy of being freed from the stereotypes of whiteness:

My sisters and I stopped straightening and went to the black salon to make different cuts. We started to like it and we no longer saw hair straightened. Shortly after, I started to participate in the black movement and found a space to reaffirm everything we were already living alone. They had the braids, the buns up and I had the chance to be like that too. In the workshops, we talked a lot about self-esteem and the importance of coming out as you are (Patrícia).

When I baptized [in candomblé], I had to spend some time wearing only white, Ojá on my head, being a guide, contraegum, a lot of things. And there I go to the Legislative Assembly, where I work, all stuff. It didn't get any better for me, but if it were a while ago, maybe I would be embarrassed. Today it gives me satisfaction and pride to say: "I can be in this space. I deserve to be in this space, and I don't want to hide anything." But I also understand that it is a privilege, because if I had another training, I couldn't do that. [...] I couldn't even go with an account of my guides to work (Daniela).

The development of this process intersects with their background and formation for their professional life: it has to do with “learning to read the environment”, being on the lookout for any opportunism, defending oneself with words and intelligence, and defending ones who are close. In the context of this discussion, the condition of black women relativizes the idea of a universal feminist agenda capable of covering the needs of white and black women at the same time. The

following narratives summarize this perspective, reaching the work sphere, which we will discuss in the following section:

Sometimes people question black feminism: "Isn't it all feminism? Isn't everyone in the same boat? We live in a society that is patriarchal". But not. Feminist struggles have common points, but they also have divergent points. So, when we talk about feminism, it is about the place that women occupy in the job market, in the academies and of a meritocracy that does not exist, theoretically. [...] The few who are managing it are white women, while black women are cleaning her house. And this has nothing to do with the question of the type of work. I think that the maid, the cleaners, the general services, the ordinances all work highly worthy and necessary. But these women are not there because of an option, but because it is what is left of feminism. [...] Machismo and patriarchy have a different impact on white women and black women. “Blonde is hot and stupid”, “black is hot and warlike”. But warrior in that sense is not exactly a compliment. Behind it means that this woman often has to cope with work, support her children alone, take care of parents, grandchildren, live the difficult life (Magda).

I started identifying myself first from the literature, when I read Conceição Evaristo, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison... I remember when I read *The bluest eyes*, I said: "people, she is close to me!". I was reading women who they spoke of complexity, of the intersection of gender and race, and of the relationship with black men as well. It's as if I was discovering my community. Then I discovered bell hooks, it seems that I am a friend of bell hooks! which is not far-fetched by academicism, is supercritical for talking about her experience all the time. But when she speaks, I think: "this is it!" they brought a feminism closer, which is black feminism. But I also don't think black feminism is universal. There must be black feminism and everything! (Daniela).

## 16.4. Professional life

As we have already argued, the outline of these professional trajectories implied, almost invariably, a reconciliation between work during the day and school at night. The vast majority of women in this collective biography forged their first professional experiences combined with university and continuing education. In addition, the double or even the triple journey is present, as the efforts are not only theirs but also of other women in the family – sisters or mothers – to ensure the care of their daughters and sons. Finally, most of them are involved in activism, precisely to fight for better living conditions and dignity for themselves and their peers.

We also highlight the fact that they have various degrees: all have bachelor's, and several have masters' and doctorates. They have accumulated diverse and vast professional experiences. Therefore, if we consider their individual attributes, which are the foundation of the idea of meritocracy, access to jobs in public management should not have demanded such unusual paths, told in the stories. However, not even having extra qualifications necessary for the job or, often, superior to that of their professional peers, freed them from suffering discrimination in employment and everyday constraints in labor relations.



These situations involved, for example, prejudices and stigmas associated with being women, such as those recounted by Magda and Patrícia:

It is very difficult for women to occupy a management position in a predominantly male environment. I had a whole preparation with what was required for the position: the training, the necessary postgraduate degrees, the other subjects that I had done in the master's degree, focused on management. And the experience too; he already had eight years of public service in the area of public security. I already knew the unit, the workflow, the prisoners, I was actively participating. So, the management itself, the administrative processes, they did not pose a challenge. The challenge was to deal with gender issues inherent in the public security environment. I was removed from the board at the time and replaced by a prison officer with no training whatsoever. A man. [...] Within public security, men look at us as if we were a "steak" (Magda).

I decided to apply for the school board, along with another classmate, a black teacher. It was a very difficult process, we suffered racism and all forms of prejudice and discrimination. About this colleague who applied with me, even the fact that she had five children was taken to the debates: "How would a mother of five manage to be a school principal?" (Patrícia).

It appears as a common feature the naturalization of "being a woman", reported by Patrícia, of her attributes and her (in)capacities to work. As a result of the stigma attached to the feminine, the most socially valued jobs are "naturally" associated not with that gender, but with the masculine. The biographies also frequently report the failure to recognize their potential, which is reinforced by a common practice in work relationships, in which a man stealing credit for an idea<sup>3</sup> given by a woman, as in the following retelling:

We are talking and the men pass over. First you speak, nobody listens. Two minutes pass, a man speaks and: "Wow what an original idea!". Or the person comes to tell you the idea that you yourself gave, as if it were hers, finding the best (Macaé).

The absence of legitimacy in spaces does not happen just because they are traditionally male, but also because they are white, leading to the need to work harder and better to obtain that legitimacy. The narratives also make it evident how common these situations are and the way in which not only men, but white people in general, seek to occupy spaces in the organization. White and male domination in daily work takes on various forms of manifestations and privileges, with their ways of acting being normalized:

[I was] a black woman talking to white secretaries, wanting more resources for the secretary. I got to a meeting and, disrespectfully, one of them was reading something and reading stayed. He heard something that displeased him, which had to do with the secretary's short budget. He was indignant and gave a rude reply, with his finger raised to my face. I repeat: finger raised! (Diva).

<sup>3</sup> This practice is sometimes referred to as *bropropriating*.

[When I took over the city hall] there were cases of saying that "a black man's place is in the slave quarters", that "a woman's place is in bed, in the kitchen". All these ingrained concepts and prejudices emerged during this period and, mainly, by traditional families. They always asked: "where's the mayor?". When they saw me, I was a "black stump", they said. They also said that I "would only take office if there were no men in the city" – for that, it was necessary to call the police reinforcement (Maria do Carmo).

When I arrived, I was welcomed by my technical colleagues, many already knew me because of union action; but I had a very strong rejection of the professors. In addition, the presence of white people in places of command was much greater. They were used to doing things the way they wanted. In personnel management, a large part of the activities was standardized; many did not like it [for me to apply the rules], they thought that I wanted to rule and not that it was the norm. My reading of this behavior was that, as they were mostly men, white and wealthy, they always commanded. And suddenly, a woman, black and poor, arrives to send (Yone).

The white and masculine prerogative is related to another important aspect, that of being at ease with regard to their appearance. The narratives show how black women feel more pressure aesthetically and in terms of attitude and posture; and, therefore, how arduous and exhausting this awareness and construction is for most of them:

In my professional career, I have had three promotions in three years. It was all very fast. But I started, in this ascension movement, to live a lot of conflicts. People said that I was very angry, that I was very nervous, very much, very much. "You are competent, but ..." and I didn't understand what that was. So, I started reading the management book, how to avoid conflicts, those self-help things. And I still didn't understand. That was when I took on [another] position [...] [and] I took the place of a white woman. When they went to give the news to her, in front of me, she looked at me in a way ... like: "I can't believe you're the one who will replace me". I think she was offended. The way this woman looked at me gave me a very literal feeling that several of the conflicts and malaise that I was experiencing had to do with being in places that I did not attribute to myself. That people did not want to be subordinate to me (Daniela).

Thus, the daily experience of racism in the management environment is deeply marked by the issue of black corporeality: "Black bodies do not belong in the landscape" (Macaé). Being "the only person without a leadership position in the department" (Nila) is trivial. Invisibility and non-recognition of their professional status are thus manifested both in explicit and veiled forms. "Absence in the landscape", version of very low or stereotyped expectations: these explicit racisms are some of the examples in the narratives below.

Society sees us only behind the scenes – in the kitchen, as a healer, in social assistance and in the care and cleaning functions. When you go to government departments, you hardly ever see black people in sectors like planning and finance. Of ten people in bureaucratic or leadership roles, only one is black. In my first team, of the ten employees of the Food Security Management, I was the only black (Xica).

I was the only person without a leadership position in that department [...] In many moments, I had everything they wanted: I had a degree in History, I had experience in education, worked with the periphery and youth ... but there was always a white woman who came into my place, with no experience at all (Cleide Hilda).

They didn't think I was there because of technical competence, but because I was a party member. They were very strange when I said that I was doing a doctorate, they were scared: "what, do you do a doctorate?" (Yone).

When I took on the position of Superintendent, I had several agendas in the Administrative City, received many authorities and, with some of them, racism was latent. [...] I arrived at a room, went to the table to open the meeting and one person asked: "When are we going to start? Will the Superintendent come?". Even though my name, "Iara Viana", was written on the agenda of the meeting, in the invitation email [...], I arrive, introduce myself, "My name is Iara Viana, I am Superintendent...", [even so] they question: "Will the Superintendent come"?. They were recurring questions, materializing institutional racism. (...) [Later], when I had my speech finished, people had the need to come and say: "Wow, how well you speak, how nice, I was delighted to hear you speak". As if the expectation was so low, that any sentence I spoke correctly would be big news. It goes like this: "It is so impressive that you are in this place and can even speak well". As if they could not walk with their skin color, gender and speaking well – this is unacceptable to racist eyes (Iara).

The excerpts above point to the existence of varied impediments not only in access to work and reaching higher positions in organizations, but to an integral and non-violent exercise of their functions in daily work. Such barriers are constituted, in large part, of visible and concrete practices, added to those impalpable and naturalized by institutional racism. These barriers are configured in such a way that the more prestigious the positions they intend to occupy, the less likely they are to occupy them.

Institutionalized racism is realized in the very mechanisms that exist to react to it, such as complaints and judicial processes already formally embedded in legislation, so that they are not taken to the extreme:

People report; we started processes of racism. But, at the time, the authorities' "perception" was that racism was not configured. It was easier to put it as a slander, or to file it, "to leave it alone" (Maria do Carmo).

The racist nature of bureaucratic structures is also involved in decisions about the fate of public services, and it is evident in emblematic experiences lived by women, the occurrence of sabotage to the policies to combat racism proposed by them:

I faced a very emblematic situation. One of the things that we conducted as public policy was the composition of a set of theoretical and literary works called the bundle of African and Afro-Brazilian Literature, starting in 2004. (...) There are two questions about this bundle: the first, is that they arrived at many schools and the principals said that they wanted to return, because their teachers would not read that type of material. Or they were dusty in a corner of the boardrooms, and their place should be the libraries. We found out that many were boxed (Patrícia).

Coping with racism is different in bureaucracy. Because, in the bureaucracy, racism and machismo are not just hitting you; are reaching thousands of people. [...] For example: a public contest was held for the teachers of the UMEI's (Municipal Units for Early Childhood Education in Belo Horizonte, some built on the peripheries, inside the towns and favelas). The first ones approved were people with better training, who come from public universities. So, the first UMEI's early childhood teachers, who passed this contest, were white women, who, for the first time, are going to be teachers of black children. In this context, the first major dilemma was a drama regarding the number of gloves that teachers needed to wear: "How am I going to take this child?" It is obvious that you need gloves to change a child. But the problem was so oversized that it was necessary to provide an infinity of gloves! We were not living in a time of pandemic, we had nothing; there have always been community schools and there has never been such a debate in the educational environment. But it was the first time that there were non-black women taking care of black children. Then, the situation gained relevance, because it was about touching the black body, the hair of black children. Our hair and skin were said to be dirty things. It is this level of confrontation, which happens when we are doing public policies, that affected me. We need to do a reprogramming so as not to get into depression. And, sometimes, we really go in, get sick, because it is very hard (Macaé).

In minimal things, we ran into limitations. We drew up a plan that was left on the table, because there was only one lawyer. We almost lost, legally, the creation of the Traditional Peoples and Communities Commission and the creation of the Racial Equality Plan for Traditional Peoples and Communities. If it weren't for the legal sector of the State Secretariat for Agrarian Development (SEDA), we would have died on the beach. Another episode was the celebration of November 20 at the Government Palace, when a document was handed over for the creation of the Traditional Peoples and Communities Commission. I was probably the only Undersecretary for Racial Equality at that time, and I didn't have the right to go on stage, they didn't invite me. I didn't understand, nobody understood and when asked, I replied: "We are still invisible to the power and they will never think that we have the capacity and the competence to occupy any place, no matter how bright you are" (Cleide Hilda).

## 16.5. Within the bureaucracy: performance and construction of racial and gender equality policies

Many of the managers biographed in this book belong to the generations that followed the women who worked and fought for access to school and university. This awareness is, in part, responsible for trying to circumvent the habitual experience of these aggressions ("racism, black people take a dose every day", according to Macaé Evaristo). They also take advantage of opportunities for voicing, for creating fundamental actions and policies. To position and legitimize their voice from the explanation of their abilities; to find ways to base their demands on the public agenda – neglected agendas for racial and gender equality, which probably would not have found expression had they not been within public management.

Indeed, the creation of public policies with a racial perspective is evidence of how these women circumvented the restrictions to build a space of freedom and constituted themselves as subjects capable of directly influencing the definition of their social destinies and the black population.

The projects and policies created by the women biographed, or to which they contributed, involved issues such as: education policy, including education for the poor and traditional peoples, black history and culture, racial equality, promotion of women's autonomy, prison system and public security, food security, rights of the LGBTQIA+ population, among many others. They are themes about the periphery. The working environment in which these projects are implemented and that is occupied by black women, at least for part of their careers, did not include institutions seen as central to the traditional society, the mainstream.

In the case of education, there are women biographed who worked in peripheral schools, attended by a majority of black children, with mothers who are heads of family. Spaces often characterized by violence, public insecurity, and precarious structures. In other cases, their work involved rethinking the culture of a city or state to include the point of view of a population that still occupies a subordinate social place, such as black youth.

All of these situations included environments, organizations, and policies that demanded sensitivity to the problem – that they already had, because of their own life history or that they acquired, given the context in which they acted. This characteristic was fundamental to the role they played. From their narratives, it is possible to see that their time in these contexts contributed to reinventing and reinforcing unique and, at the same time, comprehensive points of view, of society and institutions, including those of the public administration itself. They were fundamental for expanding access to rights and citizenship; they contributed for the state and society to expand the fulfillment of their constitutional, and above all ethical, attributions in relation to the mitigation of social vulnerabilities, not only ones of socio-racial and gender origins.

Most of these managers enter public administration in order to fight against racism through projects and public policies to combat socio-racial inequalities. But the significance of participating in public management is amplified, as it also has effects within them. Firstly, it means, with the affirmation of their bodies, destabilizing the landscape built in the image and similarity of whiteness:

We were five black women, with black skin, in the Racial Equality Secretariat. In the Undersecretary of Policies for Women, there were four others. Two colleagues wore dreadlocks. Sometimes it coincided with the others going with their hair down and people passing through the corridors of our floor, in the Administrative City, watched. Superintendent, black and with black hair is a lot of transgression for colonized minds. It is a model that clashes with the conceived idea of a manager: straight hair, high heels, makeup. We had a different profile. This profile of ours was a teaching process for white people, that black women can also be managers (Yone).

They also include to act on epistemic racism within public organizations; to contribute to denaturalizing unequal relations; to convince regarding the importance of facing racism and

affirmative policies; deconstruct racist routines; help white people to assume their role in the anti-racist struggle; integrate knowledge and overcome limits. With this, they seek to invert:

[...] The speeches constructed of equality, in a logic of exclusion from differences, as if all people were the same and we did not need specific actions for the black population [...]. My great wish was that, in fact, we could break the silence of this discussion in schools and offices, break epistemic racism. [...] Make people understand that we need an affirmative policy because it works in the logic of reparation, the guarantee of human rights, that these subjects are human and that social indicators show the inequality to which these populations are subject. This speech needed to be reiterated over and over again during the day. [...] White people have to deal with the processes of deconstruction and confronting racism and thinking about politics, since structural racism prevents the functioning of society, both for white and black (Yone).

Their trajectories provide them with the support to build their forms of resistance to racism. Their experiences in activism contribute to integrate knowledge and blur limits; they use the baggage brought in from the social movement to help translate the demands of the segments they come from into public policies, as Larissa Borges explains:

I realized that [public management] is a different place from militancy, which requires technical knowledge, political knowledge, requires articulation and, also, a wit to integrate various knowledges and limits. This decision was consolidated when thinking: "How can the baggage I have from the social movement help to translate our demands into public policies? Can I really collaborate on this translation?". I feel that this path was very positive (Larissa).

The accounts below exemplify this aspect:

The incarcerated people come from clusters and were not reached by the State, being subjected to a situation of fragility. How did crime come into your realities? Or are they people who have had all the opportunities and made their choices? I realize that the involvement with crime and the consequent incarceration are the consequences of a set of factors that we need to tackle in order to reap different fruits. If we act only on the surface, I will not get anywhere (Cleide Barcelos).

I think someone who is prepared, who has an experience; that takes into account the profile of the prison population, which is black, poor and illiterate; to know where these people came from and why they are there; this makes all the difference in the management and the construction of policies for these people. When you know and know where these people come from, you can talk to families and prisoners. They see trust and reciprocity, they do not feel that whoever is there is just an authority figure, but someone who is not distant from them (Magda).

At the entrance to the Pedreira school, there was a garden full of flowers. We defended the idea that public policy had to be founded on ethics and aesthetics, that our suffering people deserved the best. So, the difference we made had to do with the need to respect the black people, to fight institutional racism in the city hall and to legitimize the Secretariat [...]. A few white secretaries liked us, and I will explain. We were able to get in and out of favelas, in a good way, while they were afraid. So, they asked us to send someone with their team to go up the hills. We thus had a core of respect among Secretaries (Diva).



## 16.6. What if it were different...?

Racial prejudice, in a country that claims to be a socio-racial democracy, appears subtly, and naturalized by the people who reproduce it, but also by the ones who suffer it. The women, having the clarity about the ethnic and cultural identity of their actions in public management, contributed to denaturalize unequal relations. However, as Larissa Borges expresses

If we didn't have to face racism, how much better our life would be! Because we would spend energy on other things. But before we can do anything else, we need to face racism to survive, face machismo to survive. In addition to all things, we must first ensure that we survive, both materially and symbolically. Because there is a symbolic violence that tries to destroy me all the time, so you have to deal with it all before, to do other things afterwards. White people, when they arrive at the race, we are already tired. That is why there is so much inequality. If we didn't have to face so much inequality, we would be on another level (Larissa).

As we have seen, the biographies told in this book show different mechanisms that are articulated in the domination matrix, to use the concept by Patricia Hill Collins (2019). Institutional racism helps us to understand that what is at stake in the case of black women, in the words of Jurema Werneck (2013), is one of the modes of organization and operation of the patriarchal racism heteronormative to reach communities, giving priority to the interests of people with lighter skin and neglecting and the needs of the ones with darker skin.

It is anchored in the “narcissistic pact of whiteness”, an idea formulated by Maria Aparecida Bento (2002) concerning the rejection of openness and diversity in institutions:

[...] whiteness as a place of power is articulated in institutions – which are as a rule conservative, reproductive and resistant to changes – and constitute a context conducive to maintaining the framework of inequalities (BENTO, 2002, p. 166).

It is a tactical and indisputable pact, the purpose of which is to maintain the privileges of the dominant group. According to the author, the expression of self-love, while generating an aversion to the other, works, in the collective dimension, to evoke unifying bonds between those considered equal. In short, the pact has an ideological function to identify who the “us” and “them” are, and to hide conflict and domination.

[...] Whiteness is the territory of silence, denial, interdiction, neutrality, fear, privilege. We emphasize that this is an ideological dimension, in the fullest sense of ideology: with blood, warmth, enthusiasm, veneration, spokesperson, emblems, iconography, with its saints and heroes. Also in the false representations, in the traps in which everyone falls and struggles, in the eagerness to precisely leave the heat and the blood with which we must live daily (BENTO, 2002, p. 167).

For this reason, a biography of black women in public administration could not be anchored in the foundations of the “glass ceiling” theories, typical of liberal feminism. It is not about defending

that some women reach the top of organizations, public and private, “breaking the glass ceiling, while others remain cleaning up the pieces” (Cinzia ARRUIZZA, Tithi BATTACHARYA, Nancy FRASER, 2019). By focusing life courses as a whole, the intersections present since birth are revealed; when we treat the stories collectively, the structural characteristics are made explicit.

That is what this is about: not individual trajectories, but a large social segment placed by the colonial policies of subjection and exploitation, updated in the post-abolition context and re-updated by the strategies of recent capitalism, with its necropolitics (Achille MBEMBE, 2016). It is from all this that we need to break away from. Therefore, the work of black women is fundamental in the state, in society, everywhere. It is essential to change the landscape.

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# RESEARCH TEAM



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In 2020, the  
**HOMICIDE**  
rate of Brazilian

**NON-** *wo*  
**BLACK** *men*

**FELL** BY **11.7%**

In the same period, the  
**HOMICIDE** rate of

**BLACK**  
**WOMEN** *increased*

by **12,4%**