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► **To cite this version:**

Maria Teresa Salgado G. da Silva, Catherine Pelage, Anélia Montechiari Pietrani, Beatriz Resende, Elisabete Nascimento, et al.. Leda Rios, a voice comes out of silence in Brazil. *Le Studium Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2021, 5, pp.86 - 90. 10.34846/le-studium.226.05.fr.12-2021 . hal-04199060

HAL Id: hal-04199060

<https://hal.science/hal-04199060>

Submitted on 7 Sep 2023

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FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Leda Rios, a voice comes out of silence in Brazil

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REPORT INFO

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Host scientist: **Catherine PELAGE**

Period of residence in region Centre-Val de Loire: January 2021 - January 2022.

Keywords:

Leda Rios, Brazil, black woman, journalist, writer, silenced voice.

ABSTRACT

We have recollected most of Leda Rios' work to present her story and to discuss the place of the female mestizo body in Brazilian society at the beginning of the 20th century. We have carried out the first investigations into the barriers that this writer faced when she began her career. Leda Rios worked in the Brazilian press during the first two decades of the 20th century. After having published several articles and chronicles, as well as two books of poetry and plays, the writer - a young talent who began as a poet at the age of sixteen - gave up writing, at its height of her production, at thirty. Despite the recognition of her work during her time as a writer, Leda Rios has been erased from Brazilian literary history. Only traces of her literary life can be found at the National Library of Rio. We have investigated the obstacles encountered during the Brazilian Belle Epoque period, such as the racism that emerged fiercely at that time, seeking to define social roles and we have studied Rios literary productions. After our research period we concluded that Leda Rios voice was erased from the Brazilian Literary canon mainly by prejudices related to gender issues and racism. We hope that our research will make her work better known and studied.

1- Introduction

Leda Rios, poet, fiction writer, chronicler, and playwright, was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1902 and died in 1988 in the same city. She began her career at the age of fifteen, when she started to work as a columnist for the most prestigious newspapers and magazines in Rio, between 1917 and 1932. Her literary production was extremely diversified, presenting multiple genres and formats: poetry, chronicles, short stories, aphorisms, novels, and theater. About fifteen years after starting her literary career, still quite young, in the early 1930s, Rios abandoned literature, without our knowing the reasons. Although she produced a significant work, her name does not appear in the records of the history of Brazilian Literature. Only a few mentions of her first book of poetry can be found in lists made by researchers who inventoried publications from the first decades of the 20th century. XX in Brazil. Our objective was to gather the work of Leda Rios, study it,

trying to understand and discuss the reasons that led her to abandon her literary career, as well as the reasons that led to her erasure from the literary canon. We invited five researchers who helped us to reflect on the historical, social, and literary aspects involving her trajectory.

2- Experimental details

In the first phase of the research, I tried to gather as much information as possible about the life of Leda Rios in her youth, with the aim of obtaining material for the composition of her biographical profile. Although I lived with her throughout my childhood and adolescence, my grandmother did not like to recall events from her youth and early maturity, the period in which her literary career took place. When questions arose, involving this period, she limited herself to commenting on facts that had nothing to do with her literary career. Whenever I tried to change the subject, it was as if she herself sought to erase memories that aroused more pain than pleasure. This is the reason why,

only much later, when I visited the archives of the National Library of Rio de Janeiro, I was able to realize the intensity of her work in the literary field. Although she had a short career, just over ten years, her production was extensive and diversified. Therefore, my construction of the biographical profile of Leda Rios, with regard to her youth, was based a lot on comments collected in the press at the time: her bohemian lifestyle, her ferocious language, her friendships in the artistic and cultural environment of the time, the trips she took, her efforts to present her work and establish herself as a writer.

3- Results and discussion

After the elaboration of a brief biographical profile of Leda Rios, with the aim of getting to know her personality and temperament better, we delved into the socio-historical context in which her work was inserted. We researched a series of works that discuss the impacts and transformations of the belle époque in Brazil, since a significant part of her career develops during this period. In Brazil, this phase took place between 1871 and 1922, a period in which the city of Rio de Janeiro, capital of the young Republic of Brazil, underwent a series of transformations, with new airs of modernity and freedom, which seem to affect women of all social classes, allowing the increase of female education. The women-readers then began to move around the city with more freedom. But the changes and transformations of the Tropical Era will be marked, especially in aspects related to the modernization of the capital of Brazil and its more prosperous cities. If the desire for modernization in Brazil followed the French model, the place of the woman, dependent on her husband in all respects, remained intact.

The extremely critical view of Leda Rios concerning the society in which she was inserted can be very well perceived in her texts. That is, her constant attention and interest in the world around her, punctuated the changes that occurred in social behavior, showing her enthusiasm about the various transformations experienced in many fields of urban life at the time. However, her ironic and insightful vision did not fail to emphasize and point out what she

considered to be a true alienation and obscurantism in the prevailing thoughts and values at the time. In her chronicles, she attacked especially customs, breaking, herself, a series of taboos imposed on women, and denouncing the hypocrisy in social behavior.

In our research around Leda Rios' bibliographic material, we managed to recollect most of her work, based on files and correspondence exchanged with other researchers: two published poetry books; numerous chronicles, an epistolary novel, and several aphorisms, published in the press between 1918 and 1928; poetry and plays, in addition to the various criticisms of her work, which appeared in the newspapers at the time. However, we have not yet been successful in relation to her plays and a novel published in Paris. As far as the plays are concerned, we have confirmation that they were staged and deserved several criticisms over the time they were presented in theaters. However, we were unable to access them, as most institutions responsible for preserving this type of material remained closed throughout the coronavirus pandemic. As for her novel published in France, according to information from the press in Rio de Janeiro, although we visited the National Library in Paris, responsible for guarding works published in France, we were unable to obtain any information.

We had the opportunity to present the essence of our research to the students and professors of the University of Orléans, especially in two events: the Almoreal colloquium “Murs, barrières et obstacles”, organized by Professor Catherine Pélagie, on the 25th and 26th of March, and at the Seminar: “Leda Rios, une intellectuelle courageuse à la belle époque carioca”. In addition, we held meetings with the other researchers of the Le Studium Institut and with the Association of Postgraduate students at the University of Orléans (ADHOSS), in which we were able to present our point of view on the role of the researcher at the university. Finally, we concluded the presentation of our main research proposals, with the organization of a journey at the Sorbonne University – Paris IV, where we brought together the main researchers

involved in our project “Leda Rios, a voice that comes out of silence in Brazil”.

It is also worth mentioning that, based on our research, two works about Leda Rios will soon be published in Brazil by Pallas publishers: the first will focus on chronicles, aphorisms, epistolary novel and other materials produced by the writer in Brazil; the second will focus on her poetic production.

4- Conclusion

The project « Leda Rios a voice that comes out of the silence in Brazil », achieved its main objectives throughout the research carried out in Orléans, supported by Le Studium Institut for Advanced Studies. We were able to map Leda Rios work, bring together important researchers to study it, as well as discuss the reasons that led to its erasure from the Brazilian literary canon.

We were able to gather and organize the material necessary for our work and carry out our studies and research in the best possible way. Finally, we will publish this year to books with Leda Rios work.

5- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

One of the aspects that attests to the success of a project in partnership with an international university, such as the present project, is the stimulus for us to continue to develop dialogues and collaborations. The meetings with Professor Catherine Pelage, as well as the participation in events organized by the Remelice laboratory, in which the researcher is currently the deputy director, were extremely productive. At the end of the research period in Orléans, we started dialogues that provided for future exchanges and partnerships. One of them is the project Literature and psychic suffering in Afro-Diasporic literatures. Until March 2022, we intend to present a project to be developed with the Remelice Laboratory and the support of Le Studium Institute for Advanced Studies.

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

- Article: “Leda Rios, une intellectuelle Bresilienne, Barrières et obstacles devant le corps métis à la belle époque carioca”. English title: “Leda Rios, a Brazilian intellectual. Barriers and obstacles in front of the Métis body during the carioca belle époque”, *Revue Hispanismes*, 2022.

- Book chapter: “Leda Rios – uma voz Negra que sai do silêncio no Brasil”. English title: “Leda Rios, a black voice comes out of silence in Brazil”. In: *Poétiques et politiques du corps dans les aires lusophones*, Chapter page 141 to 149. Paris, Edition Hispaniques, 2021.

7- Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to all the researchers who collaborated in the project, dialoguing with the work of Leda Rios and preparing articles around her production: Prof. Anelia Pietrani, Prof. Beatriz Resende, Prof. Eneida Leal Cunha, Prof. Gilberto Araújo and Professor Elisabete Nascimento. I would also like to thank Professor Maria Araújo, from the Sorbonne University, with whom I organized the journey on the work of Leda Rios. I also thank the students and researchers from the Remelice Laboratory.

It is very important to point out that the support of Le Studium Institute was really special. The peaceful and pleasant environment in which the researchers are hosted, in addition to the organization of the entire team at Le Studium, contributed greatly to our research.

Last but not least, we emphasize that the support of Professor Catherine Pélage and the dialogue that we maintained throughout 2021 were precious and fundamental for the successful conclusion of the research project.

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