

## Thought-action of black women from southern Brazil blurring the boundaries of intellectual history, education and post-abolition

Pensamento-ação de mulheres negras do sul do Brasil borrando os limites da história intelectual, da educação e do pós-abolição

Pensamiento-acción de mujeres negras del sur de Brasil desdibujando los límites de la historia intelectual, la educación y la pos-abolición

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### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the thought-action of black women from the south of Brazil. While there is a long tradition of black thought in the Americas, there is a small production of black Brazilian women thought. In particular in the south of the country, a space that preserves a public image of the exclusive presence of descendants of European immigrants. By understanding black women as agents of knowledge, this text questions what kind of black women thought was produced in the formation of post-abolition Brazil, especially in the south of the country. It adopts as a method the analysis of evidence from the experiences of Luciana Lealdina de Araújo (1970-1930), creator of two asylums for children, texts and actions of educators Maria Helena Vargas da Silveira (1940-2012), Jeruse Romão (1960–present time), Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (1942–present time) and sociologist Luiza Bairros (1953-2016). The aim is to break the silencing of actions and thoughts. The lens of analysis is the problems of black freedom that inform the field of study of Americas post-abolition history. As a result, it points out that this rupture gives visibility to the production of black women social activists, who turned their writing into a translation of the radical thought that informed and motivated them. In conclusion, it states that the thought-action of these women shapes education as emancipation and opposition to exclusion. In addition to not only inserting itself but blurring the boundaries of the fields of intellectual history and black education in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Thoughts of black women; Post-Abolition History; History of Black

Education.

## RESUMO

Esse artigo investiga a conformação do pensamento-ação de mulheres negras do sul do Brasil. Assim como há uma longa tradição de pensamento negro nas Américas, há uma diminuta produção concentrada nas pensadoras negras brasileiras. Mais ainda do sul do país, espaço que preserva uma imagem pública de exclusiva presença de descendentes de imigrantes europeus. Ao entender mulheres negras como agentes do conhecimento, este texto questiona que tipo de pensamento de mulheres negras foi gerado a partir da formação brasileira no pós-abolição, em especial do sul do Brasil. Adota como método a análise dos indícios das experiências de Luciana Lealdina de Araújo (1970-1930), idealizadora de dois asilos para crianças, dos textos e ações das educadoras Maria Helena Vargas da Silveira (1940-2012), Jeruse Romão (1960 – tempo presente), Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (1942 – tempo presente) e da socióloga Luiza Bairros (1953-2016). O objetivo está em romper com o silenciamento das ações e pensamentos. A lente de análise está nos problemas da liberdade negra que informam o campo de estudos da história do pós-abolição nas Américas. Como resultado, aponta que tal rompimento confere visibilidade à produção de mulheres negras ativistas sociais, que fizeram da escrita uma tradução do pensamento radical que as informava e motivava. Como conclusão, afirma que o pensamento-ação dessas mulheres conforma a educação como emancipação e contraposição à exclusão. Além de não apenas se inserir, mas borrar as fronteiras dos campos da história intelectual e da educação do negro no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Pensamento de mulheres negras; História do Pós-Abolição; História da Educação do Negro.

## RESUMEN

Investigase la formación del pensamiento-acción de las mujeres negras en el sur de Brasil. Así como existe una larga tradición de pensamiento negro en América, existe una pequeña producción concentrada en pensadoras negras brasileñas. Más aún en el sur del país, espacio que preserva una imagen pública de presencia exclusiva de descendientes de inmigrantes europeos. Al entender a las mujeres negras como agentes de conocimiento, cuestionase qué tipo de pensamiento se generó desde el sur de Brasil. Adopta como método el análisis de evidencias a partir de las experiencias de Luciana Lealdina de Araújo (1970-1930), creadora de dos asilos para niñas, los textos y acciones de las educadoras Maria Helena Vargas da Silveira (1940-2012), Jeruse Romão (1960– actualidad), Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (1942–actualidad) y la socióloga Luiza Bairros (1953-2016). El objetivo es romper con el silenciamiento de acciones y pensamientos. El lente del análisis son los problemas de la libertad de los negros que informan el campo de estudio de la

historia posterior a la abolición en las Américas. Como resultado, señala que esta ruptura da visibilidad a la producción de mujeres negras activistas sociales, quienes convirtieron sus escritos en una traducción del pensamiento radical que las informó y motivó. En conclusión, se afirma que el pensamiento-acción de estas mujeres comprende la educación como emancipación y oposición a la exclusión. Además de no sólo insertarse, sino desdibujar los límites de los campos de la historia intelectual y la educación negra en Brasil.

**Palabras clave:** Pensamientos de mujeres negras; Historia posterior a la abolición; Historia de la educación negra.

## **Peculiar Marginality as a starting point of the theory and methodology of analysis**

[...] it is this peculiar marginality that stimulates a special point of view of black women, (allowing) a different view of the contradictions in the actions and ideologies of the dominant group (Bairros, 1995, p. 463).

The nonsensical idea that animates this book is that young black women were radical thinkers who tirelessly imagined other ways of living and never stopped considering how the world could be otherwise (Hartman, 2022, p. 13).

This text is born from contact with a long tradition of black thought in the Americas, and in Brazil you will find some reflections elaborated on and by thinkers and their networks. However, there is a small production concentrated on black Brazilian thinkers from the south of the country, a space that preserves a public image of the exclusive presence of descendants of European immigrants. By understanding them as agents of knowledge, I question what kind of thinking of black women was generated from the Brazilian formation in the post-abolition period? I privilege as sources the evidence surrounding the experiences of Luciana Lealdina de Araújo (1870-1930), as well as the texts and actions of Maria Helena Vargas da Silveira (1940-2012), Jeruse Romão (1960 – present time), Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva (1942 – present time) and Luiza Bairros (1953-2016). The goal is to break with the silencing, but, above all, to give visibility to the production of black women social activists who made writing a translation of radical thought, which informed and motivated them.

The space and time cut of the analysis is in the south of Brazil in post-abolition times. Temporality based on a long duration that permeates projects of the elites to forge a white regional identity and its European traits, but also finds examples of black

resistance and affirmation through long-lived black associations. And that has in the 1970s the conformation of the demand and formulation of black consciousness as a mark of the contemporary black movement.

The excerpts that open the reflection inform about the influence and narrative order that allow me to elaborate the central argument of this text. Namely, black Brazilian women committed to social transformation have produced - and produce - a thought that confers intelligibility to the experience of what has been lived since the black collectivity. They do so within an intricate hierarchical network of powers that simultaneously explains the interdictions present in Brazilian society in the post-abolition period and the radicality of self-managed actions and configurations, and/or in which they were inserted. In order to revert the state of things to something that had not even been experienced before, but which was constantly imagined, as I highlight when presenting the experiences of the lived in the next topic.

In *Rebel Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, African American historian Saidiya Hartman (2022) informs about the need to pay attention to the whole of what the records have captured, that is, beyond the content that is often based on silence and pain when produced by official sources. Thus, historical interpretation must be able to identify only what has been read by society as normal or abnormal. It is worth observing that which went against what was pre-established or merely present in the prevailing ideologies, but which was experienced in a totally different way by ordinary people. In the interpretation of these actions and elaborations resides the radical imagination of a world marked by limitations of all kinds.

In *Our Feminisms Revisited* (1995), the black sociologist from Rio Grande do Sul, Luiza Bairros, presents the notion of peculiar marginality based on a dialogue with the notion of *outsider within*, by Patricia Hill Collins, also a black sociologist, but an American, (2016). In short, he warns that from the margins of a society marked by sexism and capitalism, knowledge emerges that enunciate a special point of view.

Although I do not have information about an approximation between Hartman and Bairros, what this text argues is that the peculiar marginality warned by the Brazilian author meets the notion of radical imagination of black thinkers, who in many cases had common, and sometimes even rebellious, lives, as the American author

warns. Where the approximation of these epistemic constructions is best observed is in the role attributed (and claimed) to education in Brazil by black activists. This element can be observed through empirical research triggered in the sequence, in dialogue with the field of the history of education and post-abolition in Brazil.

A marker of the dialogue that emerges from the black intelligentsia is identified, which, in the perception developed here, has in the thought of black women a sophisticated epistemic elaboration that combines thought and action, as we will observe below. They thus corroborate Luiza Barios' perspective around the fundamental task of positively enhancing the peculiar marginality of black women, which would only be possible by combining political reflection and action.

I revisit recently developed research on the experience of black women in southern Brazil, informed by the problems of the post-abolition period (Silva, 2017; Oliveira, 2020). I intend to present to you the black insurgencies in the South, in dialogue with elements present in the thinking of black women in a more general way.

In theoretical terms, the common thread of social history allied to the understanding of post-abolition as a historical problem is present throughout the analysis. This acquires more defined contours with the publication of *O pós-abolição como um problema histórico*, by historians Ana Lugão Rios and Hebe Mattos (2004). The survey highlights the problem of the freedom of black people beyond the already well-known projects formulated by the elites, and emphasizes the different meanings of freedom, especially after the abolition of slavery, which highlights the tensions between freedom, the hierarchy imposed by an idea of the black race and the search for the right to citizenship in different segments. While the projects of the elites informed about the intended identity of our social formation, looking at those located in the less favored and often marginalized spaces allowed us to revisit the elitist projects from the attention to race, class and gender, at first, and to observe what the common people themselves built and projected for the Brazilian nation. This procedure has allowed us to look at correlated experiences beyond our national borders and, thus, highlight a broad historical process in which anti-black racism reigns, following the historicity of the political-cultural category of *amefricanity* created by Lélia Gonzalez (1988).

This common thread allows us to approximate and to some extent extrapolate,

on the one hand, the field of intellectual history within which it is intended to contribute by presenting social thinkers, who interpreted reality, both from a theoretical and methodological point of view. Thus, whenever possible, I highlight the themes addressed and the experiences from which they start, in order to highlight not only the relations between past and present, but, in dialogue with the radical imagination, with the future. On the other hand, it leads us to the field of the history of black education in Brazil, an element par excellence highlighted from the thought-action of these women. They built what Hartman (2020) identifies as projects against black historians, that is, narratives that, despite being transgressive, have not (yet) been installed as history, and that can be observed in the many tensions and productions about engaged pedagogy, content, and teacher training. I present below examples of these actions.

## **The Insurgencies to the South of the South**

A black woman with dark skin named Luciana Lealdina de Araújo walks through the city that is not hers, but now she will have to be. Born in the capital of the Province of São Pedro do Rio Grande do Sul, in 1870, she had to deal closely with the fragility of freedom in times of slavery. Even though she was not enslaved, her color, feminine condition and scarce financial resources formed a kind of authorization for acts of violence and enslavement.

At just over 20 years old, which was already considered a sufficiently adult age, the young lady went to live in the city of Pelotas. The times of freedom that marked the last decade of the nineteenth century allowed him to observe how the change in the legal status was not able to ensure better living conditions for his or her equals. The city had a significant black population, but the margin largely summarized the spaces occupied by many of them, especially the girls who were delivered to the circle of the exposed of the local Santa Casa de Misericórdia.

Luciana knew that childhood was a time when care and guidance could be defining for adult life. So, after a long period of hospitalization to treat pneumonia, she decided to carry out a project that was quite radical for the time: a shelter for black orphans. However, evidently, he also knew that alone this undertaking would be difficult

to leave the field of imagination. If the margins concentrated a significant part of the local black population, there were many who broke with it and were in professions, albeit manual, with access to decent wages and working conditions. Within their possibilities, they worked in collective spaces, especially unions, and were present in night courses (Peres, 2012), often helping their colleagues in the acquisition of their first letters. It is with these subjects that Luciana will meet, present the idea, and collectively build the bases for the realization of the welcoming space, made official on May 13, 1901, in an explicit reference to black freedom.

I came across the story of Luciana Lealdina de Araújo through the newspaper *A Alvorada (The Dawn)*. Representative of the local black press that circulated in the city of Pelotas between 1907-1965 and which is configured today as the one with the longest longevity in Brazil. The writing of the official history of the city safeguarded very punctual elements and full of controlled images (Collins, 2016) of the benefactor, as can be seen in the following passage: "Luciana, this poor black woman, only through the influence of her piety and her energy was able to inspire the creation and maintenance, in cities of Rio Grande, of true temples of instruction and charity" (Osório, 1998, p. 92).

The aforementioned publication originally came out in 1922 and made use of a passage present in the production of Julia Lopes de Almeida, a writer from Rio de Janeiro who idealized the Brazilian Academy of Letters, and who met Luciana in 1916. Among other elements, the work in question reproduced the following passage by Almeida about Araújo's intention: "His poverty and his race took away from him the strength and prestige that these ideas require" (Osório, 1998, p. 93).

The specific references illustrate the need to criticize the archive and the importance of accessing elements that were produced from within. Thus, without leaving aside criticism as a basic element of the production of scientific knowledge, observing what comes from the black press provides us with other elements. In an edition dedicated to the newspaper's anniversary, he highlighted that:

The whole of Pelotas watched this Matron of 'color' illuminated by grandiose feelings, illuminated by the realization of an evangelical thought of donating her with the assistance of an orphanage of her race, since the white race had,

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as a daughter of God, an Orphans' Asylum to support her (*A Alvorada*, May 7, 1933, n.p.).

The article presented elements about Luciana's initiative based on her protagonism in defense of children of color, who in turn were rarely welcomed in the then existing asylum, Nossa Senhora da Conceição, due to the lack of sponsorship responsible for their expenses. The project was expanded to the city of Bagé, on the border with Uruguay, where Luciana remained until her death in 1930.

The color was not a formal impediment to access to the instruction spaces, however, the other crossings prevented access. Something that characterized black freedom in Brazil, which highlights the importance of collective insertion projects that carried a radicality by suspending the impediment inherent to race and even gender.

Research in the field of post-abolition and the history of education has shown that approximate initiatives were a constant in Brazil and even broke with the private space, characteristic of an asylum for orphans, for example, and entered the propositions of public classes and/or schools. An example was gestated in the same period as the Asylo São Benedito de Pelotas, it was the Night School idealized between 1902 and 1904 by *O Exemplo (The Example)* da imprensa negra de Porto Alegre. Historian Melina Perussatto (2022), when investigating this initiative, warns that even if there was a preponderance of men, black women were not excluded. As well as occupying fundamental spaces, in view of their performances as teachers arising from training in teaching, in the mold of Sophia Ferreira Chaves. From this trajectory, the author highlights evidence that positions black women teachers as agents of social transformation in favor of an education project based on the collective experience of black associations.

In Santa Catarina, we can highlight the trajectory of Julia Chrispina do Nascimento, a black teacher responsible for the idealization of the *Escola Particular Mixta (Mixed Private School)*, founded in Laguna (SC), in 1903. The professor from Santa Catarina comes to our attention through the research developed by historian Júlio Rosa (2020). This, in turn, presents it from sources produced by two local black associations, União Operária and Cruz e Souza, in the period from 1903 to 1950. Her

findings highlight that Julia not only idealized the school but was at the forefront of it as a teacher.

Experiences such as these, perceived in other regions of the country, were fundamental for the field of the history of education not only to denounce the exclusion of the black population from the formal educational system, but also to pay attention to the importance of initiatives and disputes from the black groups themselves (Romão, 2005; De Barros, 2021). Although research that contemplated the education of blacks in times of freedom had been a constant since the 1930s, they focused on demonstrating exclusion. Something that began to occur mainly from the 1980s onwards, as presented by the black educator from Rio Grande do Sul Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva and by the black educator and sociologist from São Paulo Luis Alberto Gonçalves (2000).

It is by resorting to historical and sociological studies that the analysis undertaken demonstrates the actions of defense of education understood as a right from black organizations throughout the twentieth century. such as the I and II National Meetings on the Reality of Blacks in Education, in 1984 and 1985, promoted by the oldest black club in the country, Floresta Aurora, in the city of Porto Alegre. A milestone in the discussion and consequent production of texts on the subject.

In *História da Educação do Negro e Outras Histórias (History of Black Education and Other Stories)*, published in 2005, the black educator from Santa Catarina Jeruse Romão warns of the emergence of the theme of the schooling of blacks in Brazilian research. For the reflection that we make here, it is important to follow the author's words when she draws attention to the limits faced by the two areas that were concentrated in these discussions, namely history and education. Thus, if, on the one hand, history was still faced with the limitation of the scarce access to written sources, education, on the other hand, was practically unaware of the educational practices and conceptions experienced by black social movements.

In this sense, the research by educators Natalia Gil and Claudia Antunes (2021) concentrated in Rio Grande do Sul is quite revealing of the constant exclusion of black people from the educational system both in slave times and in the post-abolition period,

although through different mechanisms. They also emphasize, in the wake of Romão's warning in 2005, that black groups created forms of agency in order to access education by themselves, and constantly denounced the discrimination suffered in this space, especially through the pages of the black press. The research of historian and educator Priscila Pereira (2018), on black teachers in Porto Alegre, and historian Alcía Medeiros (2023), on the educational field in Santa Maria, between the end of the slavery period and the first decades of the republic, corroborate the same perspective based on empirical data.

These more recent studies on the way in which the black population, and especially women, were protagonists in the conception and offer of spaces of reception and formal education aimed at the black population, but not only, allow us to affirm that there was a contestation of discrimination based on color. The so-called *prejudice of color*, constantly the target of denunciations by the black press in the first half of the twentieth century, sustained claims in different cities for public schools already in that period.

Looking at black insurgencies in southern Brazil, in a more detailed way and in dialogue with what has been produced within the disciplinary limits of history and education, allows us to show that black experiences are a condition of possibility for the construction of inclusive spaces and an engaged pedagogy. Forged at the same time from the margin and from within a collective experience. This requires contemplating sources produced by black groups, with emphasis on the black press, but also those produced by associations and that still embody the bodies of black people who build possibilities to combat racism through education.

It is essential to interpose problems to the sources that allow us to observe a process known to be one of exclusion, but also of agency, often radical in the case of a society that has gestated and still gestates perverse mechanisms of restriction of citizenship. And that, not by chance, allowed the black educator from Minas Gerais Nilma Lino Gomes (2017) to defend the thesis, now widely accepted by researchers on the subject, that the black movement is an educator of Brazilian society. Which leads us to the next topic of this reflection in which I highlight the engaged pedagogy that resulted from the experiences and dialogues undertaken by black women.

## Forging an engaged pedagogy

Luciana Lealdina de Araújo died in 1930, but her legacy was not lost. The spaces he founded both in Pelotas and Bagé, respectively Asylo São Benedito and Orfanato São Benedito, exist to this day and maintain strong ties with the local black community. In addition, the networks composed by Luciana with black workers from Pelotas radiated other possibilities that came to fruition in the sequence. As an example, the newspaper *A Alvorada* was the spokesperson for the Frente Negra Pelotense, created in May 1933, and which comes from the *Pro-Education Campaign* developed by the newspaper.

He highlighted, for example, the actions of the *frente negrinas* (black front) that discussed above all the role of education and black women in the labor market, whose subject was of interest to other writers, such as Miguel Barros, who would represent the Front at the First Afro-Brazilian Congress, held in Recife in 1934. In his speech, he warned that: "Many young Ethiopians, who graduate as educators, struggle to be able to teach and have to do so particularly, in the impossibility of working for the State, most give up". Next, she highlighted the marginality imposed on black women teachers in that period: "she goes to sewing, the maximum condition that a woman who has the 'considered' characteristics of African descent can desire" (Barros, 1935, n.p.).

Among the members of the Pelotense Black Front were Durval Penny and Armando Vargas. Durval was part of the first board of directors of Asylo São Benedito, was director of the institution and one of the founders of *A Alvorada*. Armando, on the other hand, was a typographer and columnist for *A Alvorada* as well as a member of *Fica Aí*, a local black club, and together with his wife Joanhina Vieira Vargas he would soon accompany the birth of his granddaughter Maria Helena Vargas.

Maria was born in 1940 in the city of Pelotas and lived with her grandfather very closely. She certainly found in him a shaper of her racial, gender and geographical positionality consciousness, which translates into the name she adopted when she began her career in the field of letters, namely *Helena do Sul*. He experienced the local black collectivities, with an emphasis on *Fica Aí*, studied and came across a racism

reigning even in the Normal Course in the mid-50s. Belonging to an impoverished family, with a washerwoman mother and a driver father, she saw teaching as a possibility of insertion in the job market. In the 60s, she took the opposite path to Lucina Lealdina and moved to Porto Alegre, where she continued her studies in the Pedagogy Course, simultaneously with her work as a primary school teacher.

It is in the teaching experience, alongside the constant presence with collectively organized black people, that she experiences and conceives what the African-American educator bell hooks, based on related experiences, identifies as engaged pedagogy (2013). Committed to inclusion and respect for black students, something that will be translated into the title of her latest production *Diga sim ao estudante negro/a* (Do Sul, 2008) (*Say yes to the black student*). Helena worked as a teacher for 25 years, mainly in peripheral schools, such as Morro da Cruz, in Porto Alegre. As soon as he retired, he began a literary production in which it is possible to follow his educational conception, gestated throughout practice and in dialogue with different areas of knowledge, such as education, arts, geography, history and sociology.

Maria Helena's production evokes what Luiza Bairros attributed as the potentiation of peculiar marginality, but also of a radical imagination warned by Saidiya Hartman, both in relation to her professional practice, as a black woman from an impoverished class, and in contact with a student body of that same class. In *As filhas das lavadeiras* (2002) (*The Washerwomen's Daughters*), Helena presents 20 testimonies of black women daughters of washerwomen from the states of the South and Southeast and, being one of these daughters herself, presents her comments and memories by intertwining the stories. Thus, of the 20 testimonies, 10 are from teachers, which, added to the author's own, constitute the most constant professional experience among those women. And, at the beginning of the book, the author justifies the proposal, which greatly illustrates the fact of the black female collectivity and radical imagination:

The inspiration for this book didn't come from afar. She was always very present, in the living picture of memories, where a special place is that of the old black washerwoman, with few cornrows, with a lot of energy, in the tank or

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in the rest of the washed, taking a break to pump the herb in the gourd of the mate, while dreaming, for sure, of a better life for all her children and grandchildren.

(in memory of Joaquina Vieira Vargas, my grandmother, a pillar of female resistance) (Silveira, 2002, p. 3).

What we are identifying here as an engaged pedagogy based on a radical imagination is directly inserted in the way it is possible to identify black women's thinking today (Oliveira; Meinerz, 2019). Marked by the conception of autonomous ways of building knowledge, combining critical thinking and collective experiences. Thus, the peculiar marginality imposed on black people in Brazil enunciates the crossings by the axes of oppression identified by the tool of intersectionality as race, gender and class (Collins; Bilge, 2021).

This can be observed through the performance and production of educators Maria Helena Vargas, Jeruse Romão and Petronilha Gonçalves e Silva, all black women from the South. The incidences in national discussions reverberate within the field of the history of black education. And they carry in themselves activism in the social movement, allowing us to observe a production that, although forged within education, does not depart from the collectively constructed experience. This also enunciates about the black presence in the South of Brazil, despite the image still so present in the common sense throughout Brazil.

It would not be feasible here to make a digression based on the authors' extensive production, but some notes strengthen the highlighted argument. Maria Helena had a professional career in public education in Rio Grande do Sul and with retirement began her career as a writer. Thus, in 1987, he launched the first of a total of 11 authorial books, about the collective black experience, especially in the south of Brazil, and in an intrinsic relationship with the space of schools and classrooms. Through reports, chronicles, poetry and novels, which sometimes fictionalized reality, self-called experiential tale<sup>1</sup>, in an approximation of what we now call writings (Evaristo, 2020). It is also possible to follow his production in book chapters, journalistic texts and interviews, but for the purposes of the analysis I highlight *Negrada* and *Diga Sim ao Estudante Negro/a*.

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*Negrada* was published in 1995, a year that marks a series of reflections and actions around the 300th anniversary of the murder of Zumbi dos Palmares, a date remembered in the presentation of the book. Throughout 21 texts in the format of short stories, chronicles and illustrated stories, it presents reflections on the history, culture and education of blacks in Rio Grande do Sul. As the author warns, it is "a real black woman", when referring to the many black voices, found in what she identified as *experiences of blackness*, transformed into writings (Silveira, 1995). Among the topics addressed are the movement of black women in the south, the importance of oral tradition for the transmission of values among black families, the way in which the history of blacks continues to be lived in the state despite a systematic erasure and the role attributed to education by black families, as well as the role of education in combating discrimination against black children. As an example, I highlight two fragments in the chapter *A Criança negra e a educação (The Black Child and Education)*:

Most educators, naively, try to silence the existence of barriers between being black and education, but the facts are stronger than the silence of these educators.

[...] In order for educators to reverse the situation, making it more favorable to Afro-Brazilians, they must start from the trinomial of knowing, respecting and loving. As a result of this trilogy, the possibilities of better adaptation of children to the school environment will increase, providing them with greater integration with the community, favoring the level of learning and satisfaction of the child in attending school (Silveira, 1995, p. 123).

In relation to history, the author draws attention to the need for educators to "know facts, to seek, to research, to analyze" (Silveira, 1995, p. 131) through works that allow countering the idea of the non-existence or unimportance of the black presence. Which would be fundamental for the construction of an appreciation of black people in the state and consequently in the classroom. Without this transgressive movement, the author warned that "it will seem that in the south there was no black force in colonization and a Rio Grande, totally white, will always be evident, resulting in increasingly discriminatory movements" (Silveira, 1995, p. 131).

*Diga Sim ao estudante negro/a (Say Yes to the Black Student)*, in turn, was published in 2008, and, in the mold of *Negrada*, is aligned with its time. At this time, we

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already had law 10.639/03 that requires African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in schools. Maria Helena had been living in Brasília since 1999, defined herself as *Helena do Sul* and worked with the federal government, more specifically in the promotion of continuing education and pedagogical strategies capable of positively including black students. These elements run through the work on the importance of law 10.639/09, through the introduction of discussions on school dropout and pedagogical proposals, and content for the application of the law, with a focus on the permanence of black students. It is worth noting that the author has never left aside the bet on the transformative role of education, so much so that in the ceremonial in which she opens the book, she dedicates it to the people who have always supported her "in the delirium and irreverence of pursuing the realization of the good dream for the black population, respected in the ethnic-racial relations of Brazilians" (Do Sul, 2008, p. 08).

The two books highlighted here present reflections on the importance of sharing positive images of the population in the classroom, which includes photographs and narratives. In *Diga Sim ao estudante negro/a* there is a warning about their potential: "Educators are responsible for selecting images, not always visible in textbooks [...] most of them suppressed the images of the black" (Do Sul, 2008, p. 71). And, he adds:

It is incredible how difficult and slow the process of imagining new roles for black men and women in our society has been, other than those customary and incorporated into the collective imagination, in a pejorative way as to their attributes that range from physical aspect to intellectual capacity (Do Sul, 2008, p. 71).

Maria Helena's observation denotes an apprehension that reached the second half of the twentieth century, based on access to formal education.

While in the previous topic it was possible to follow the evidence of the construction of educational spaces and shelter for black children, here we are faced with the claim against the State. In addition to the qualification of discussions on how to teach black children, rethink content and pedagogical proposals for the entire classroom. This allows us to highlight that the black community did not move away from the action of providing access to education but carried it out in a much more open dialogue with the State and, also, through investment in teacher training.

In the middle of the twentieth century, some schools designed by black collectives became a reality. The *União dos Homens de Cor (Union of Coloured Men)*, founded in Porto Alegre in 1943, but with national representation, was concerned with education and, mainly, with the qualified training of the black population (Silva, 2003). The *Teatro Experimental do Negro (Experimental Theatre of the Black)*, in Rio de Janeiro, for example, between 1944 and 1946, maintained literacy and cultural initiation classes, and was the mainstay of the National Council of Black Women, in which Maria de Lourdes Vale do Nascimento stood out, also involved with discussions and initiatives around education and work (Romão, 2005; Xavier, 2020). While in Pelotas (RS), the *Fica Aí club (Stay there Club)* inaugurated its own headquarters in 1954, it also did so in relation to a school in the same headquarters, resulting from a partnership with the State Department of Education. This school remained at its headquarters until the 1970s. And, in the same interval, she valued the training of teachers, who were congratulated in the pages of the local black press (Silva, 2017).

Thus, Maria Helena's concern finds ballast in something that has remained fundamental for different black organizations, namely the education of the black population. The training of teachers gains special attention and finds a correspondence in the possibility of making the classroom a public tribune for the opposition of images about the black population. Something that also depended on access to or even the production of supports that would allow the deconstruction of ingrained images. This is a justification of the approaches of Maria Helena and black women who produced in the same period, that is, the last three decades of the twentieth century, as we will observe below.

## **Approaches that blur disciplinary boundaries**

In order to observe how these interests were shared, I also highlight that in addition to the aforementioned Luiza Bairros and Jeruse Romão, we found dialogues with the anthropologist from Minas Gerais Lélia Gonzalez, the Sergipe historian Beatriz Nascimento and, back in the south, with the educator Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva.

While Maria Helena Vargas and Jeruse Romão had education as their first training, completed, respectively, at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in 1966, and at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), in 1983, Petronilha Silva graduated in Portuguese and French at UFRGS, in 1964. Nevertheless, it was the concern with the education of the black population that was placed as a guiding thread in the actions and approaches of these teachers. With emphasis on the production of data that, later, would serve as a basis for the formulation of educational public policies committed to the eradication of racism.

Jeruse Romão was born in the city of Florianópolis (SC), in 1960, daughter of Bernardino Romão, a musician, and Zulma Maria Romão, a teacher. He grew up in the Morro da Cruz Massif, a region marked by the presence of former slaves and their descendants, as well as by impoverished people from rural areas and often racialized (Vargas, 2016). It was a region with a precarious structure, but with a lot of presence of black and popular culture. The family and housing experience allowed her to forge an awareness of the collective place in the world and that acted for her insertion in social activism with the black movement of Santa Catarina with national incidence.

In 1986, she was one of the founders of the Center for Black Studies, at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), which aimed to formulate public policies for the promotion of racial equality. The Center was responsible for the elaboration of the *Educa-Ação Afro (Afro Education-Action) Newspaper*, which circulated between 1995 and 2006. Quarterly, the media outlet followed in the footsteps of the black press, but with an educational focus. Among the subjects are discussions within what we currently conceive as Education for Ethnic-Racial Relations, and already in the 1st issue we access what would be the mark of Romão's production, translated into the title "Curricular decolonization: school for all". The brand was also demonstrated by the sharing of authorship, with sociologist João Carlos Nogueira<sup>2</sup>.

Whether in the 15 editions available for research or in the monitoring of the formulation of policies in which she acted as a parliamentary advisor, as well as in her theoretical texts prepared between the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first, the simultaneous commitment to black students is highlighted,

mainly through the valorization of self-esteem, and with the training of teachers (Romão, 1999; 2001a; 2001b; 2009)<sup>3</sup>.

He sought to articulate knowledge from the black as a theme and the lived experience, which effectively made his gaze focus on discussions about curriculum. One element ran through her entire production: the need to build something that did not yet exist, as she highlighted in a recent interview, and which mentions the possibility of conceiving education in Brazil based on respect for Ethnic and Racial differences (Carvalho, 2021).<sup>4</sup>

Petronilha Beatriz, in turn, was born in 1942, in the city of Porto Alegre, more specifically in the African Colony, a self-explanatory name for the contingent of black people that characterized the region. Daughter of a teacher who was widowed at an early age, which gave her little contact with her father. She was a teacher throughout her professional life, going through basic education in the city of Porto Alegre (RS), public and private, and higher education, at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), for which she is currently professor emeritus. Member of the National Council of Education and rapporteur of the *National Curriculum Guidelines for the education of ethnic-racial relations and for the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture* (Brasil, 2004).

Petronilha's production between the 1970s and 2000s is marked by the collection of data and the formulation of markers to be incorporated into educational censuses, in order to provide a basis for policies, not only in his home state, but also nationally. It also included the concern with the formulation of contents that would allow the observation of the relations between work, education and identity in both urban and rural areas. And she did so by maintaining the relations between the state institutional bodies and spaces of the black movement, especially those that brought together black teachers, such as the aforementioned meetings held at Floresta Aurora (Silva, 1979; 1987; 1991; 2011; Silva and Barbosa, 1997).

Content that presented the black experience from terms that broke with the stereotypes that were at the basis of exclusion, added to the formulation of policies, was the mark of the production and performance of these black women from the south of Brazil. However, the geographical cut of the analysis is not presented as something

that reduced the discussion, on the contrary, it only aims to activate a lens to a space that is still read today as non-existent of blacks. It should be noted that these traits are also found in the production of black women from other states, such as the anthropologist from Minas Gerais Lélia Gonzalez (1984, 2018) and the Sergipe historian Beatriz Nascimento (2018, 2021), or even in the production of Luiza Bairros, who although she remained in Rio Grande do Sul until the end of her training in administration at UFRGS, soon left the state, and played a leading role in the Unified Black Movement (MNU) and in the Black Women's Movement, from the 1980s onwards (Bairros, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2000; Pinto and Freitas, 2017).

Luiza Bairros and Lélia Gonzalez undertook joint dialogues based on their actions with MNU and *Nzinga*, a collective of black women they created in 1983. These dialogues appear in a research agenda that problematized the image of black women in the history of Brazil, made explicit the exclusion of blacks from the labor market and, together with Sergipe historian Beatriz Nascimento, highlighted the importance of knowledge built by black people themselves. This has been understood and defined as a self-insertion of black women as producers of knowledge from the act of speaking, despite the fears and silences imposed, as was problematized by the African-American theorist Audre Lorde (2019). Something that finds resonance in the production of Beatriz Nascimento, when she claims a speech that contemplates participation in national education. To which he combines the problematic of a method that allows us to reexamine what has already been written about black people "not from the point of view of the dominant ideology, but from the point of view of our aspirations and needs" (Nascimento, 2021, p. 54).

This contestation of the method and the interposition of its own elaborations finds approximate propositions in the formulation of the perspective of legitimacy of speech, presented by Sueli Carneiro (2023). This has been configured as a condition to break with the mistaken writings, images and speeches that reaffirm the myth of universal, neutral and objective knowledge, along the lines of what the Afro-Portuguese theorist Grada Kilomba presents in defense of the *shattering of the mask of silence* (Kilomba, 2019).

The evidence of the process around the peculiar marginality that reaches the black population in Brazil, with special attention to gender cuts, has powerful counterparts in the productions of Lélia Gonzalez, Sueli Carneiro and Beatriz Nascimento, in addition to Luiza Bairros herself. This allows us to point to the historicity of a writing politically informed by the black women's movement organized in intrinsic dialogue with the general black movement and that has reverberated in the field of post-abolition history studies by identifying projects of emancipation and (re)signification of freedom, which allow us to break with unique stories about the black population.

The impacts on the field of post-abolition studies are also due to a change in the student body of Brazilian public universities, which since the first decade of the twenty-first century, has seen the implementation of policies of social inclusion with a racial profile. If the sources were the first wall shaken, the second was certainly in the emphasis on approaches and methods that challenged scientific neutrality. It is in this context that the productions of a positioned black thought, with an emphasis on the writings of black women engaged in social struggle, begin to have more space in the academic benches. A perception that is not exclusive to history, but to the different areas of knowledge production. And they are at the basis of the justification for mapping the characteristics of this thought(s) of black women and how it was possible from Brazilian realities.

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Peculiar marginality provokes reflections from the margins and returns to politically informed actions to put it on hold, which evidently requires a radical imagination that contests the hegemonically established point of view. This was present even during slavery, when it was not uncommon for it to be necessary to believe in another world, even though none of the existing structures understood as legal offered any horizon of possibility.

Among the common traits that allow us to conceive the idea of black women's thought are the commitment to the conception of knowledge that combines lived

experience and writing. Which, in turn, is a condition for the epistemic insurgency that is at the basis of the dispute over terms that have validity from this point of view and that oppose the epistemic violence, which was/is still observed in the construction of scientific knowledge. Such a commitment requires simultaneously the affirmation of a self-definition and the formulation of methods, as the trajectories and relationships undertaken here allow us to observe.

The trajectories presented here evidenced the presence of a feminine political project of education as synonymous with emancipation and opposition to exclusion. Such feminine experiences and project can both be understood in the present as linked to anti-racism and explain themselves and/or configure ways of constructing knowledge, which allow us to observe the making of an engagement, more precisely of an engaged epistemology forged through black insurgencies.

Thus, turning attention to the perspectives of black women themselves, who substantially occupy the place of interlocutors of the analysis, allowed us to undertake a dialogue that blurs the boundaries of intellectual history, black education, and post-abolition itself. In addition to interlocution, the problematization of a black intellectuality reached in the pages of the black press and in authorial texts gains space. In this way, the path of rupture with the famous myth of the lack of sources to observe black experiences in times of freedom and with the silence that still affects the thinking of black women follows.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In *The Washerwomen's Daughters* (2002, p. 8) the author warns: "It is a book written, sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, according to the discursive style with which the historical references of the washerwomen's daughters were treated. It escapes the idea of the systematized elaboration of biographies and invests more in the tale of victory, but without excluding the indicative dates, career accompaniment and titles of the women, as well as any fact that the daughters have considered relevant in their stories, related to the efforts of their mothers."

<sup>2</sup> *Educa-Ação Afro*, jul/ago/set/1995, n.1, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Although Jeruse Romão's production is recorded in many other texts and interviews, however, the limits of the analysis undertaken here restrict the possibility of encompassing all of them, it was decided to cite only the most illustrative of the points mentioned here. A similar warning applies to the following exposition on Petronilha Beatriz Gonçalves e Silva. It is suggested to read the lattes curriculum of both educators and follow up on their interviews and speeches available on YouTube.

<sup>4</sup> To learn more see: ROMÃO, Jeruse. *Antonieta de Barros: Teacher, writer, journalist, first Santa Catarina and black deputy in Brazil*. Florianópolis: Cruz e Sousa, 2023;