

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

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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 Hungria¹, 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.

¹ 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 Pedras²; 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. FIES³ 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 Mangabeiras⁴. 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.

² Belo Horizonte slum with high levels of social vulnerability.

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

⁴ 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 Elo⁵, 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 Center⁶, 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 Piep⁷ 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 CCPJO⁸. 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 Contraegum⁹, 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-arara¹. Back then, during the

¹ 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.