

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

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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

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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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

My other sister, we say she is the smartest in the house, because she is a professor at PUC². She is very dedicated to her studies, she studied at CEFET³, a school that was built to serve the children of factory workers, but the admission process became so difficult that people had to pay for preparatory courses. My grandmother paid for this course for her, and it was a huge victory for our family when she got in.

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

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

Husband and children

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

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

² Pontifical Catholic University.

³ Federal Center for Technological Education of Minas Gerais.

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

My daughter Maíra was born in 1999. Always very smart, intelligent, curious about things. She also got the major she wanted. She always liked the international area and did International Relations at UFMG⁴. But in the third semester, she found that it wasn't what she wanted. So, she studied for another entrance exam. Today, she is studying Graphic Design at UEMG⁵. She was a militant in the students' movement, she's in the feminist black movement. Currently, Maíra is doing a different kind of militancy, not so engaged, in a specific group.

Constructing identity from the territory: Concórdia neighborhood

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

Since it was a black neighborhood, our presence and coexistence with the culture were very strong. We participated in Afro culture festivities, in the congado⁶. The guards always left in May, and we followed them from the gate, we participated, we went up the street to see. We loved to play! At the same time, we ran in fear. We followed all the celebrations in the Dona Cassimira yard, before being Dona Isabel⁷. It was on a street right after ours.

4 Federal University of Minas Gerais.

5 Minas Gerais State University.

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

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

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

In Concórdia, there is a kind of popular Catholicism, of cultivating popular saints. But on the religious side, we didn't have Afro-Brazilian influence in the neighborhood. We were all raised in the Catholic tradition. We had our first communion, then confirmation, all of that. My mother was "daughter of Mary", my father was an altar boy⁸. But there was prejudice. Even though we were a black family, there was that ignorance keeping us away from the religion of African origin, which would be Candomblé. We guessed that we had family members who were part of Umbanda, but it was all a big secret. I grew up without that influence and, as an adult, I resented not having had a lot of contact, in a neighborhood with such a strong tradition. I resent it a little, because I think a piece was missing. If I had a little of that upbringing from Candomblé, or even Umbanda itself, than what I had in the neighborhood, maybe I would feel more complete. But that didn't happen, the path was all Catholic.

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

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

As a child, we would cut and straighten our hair. We couldn't have long hair in a braid, because it was frowned upon. We'd put on smoothing products, rollers, hot iron, henê⁹, everything you can imagine, for the hair to be neat - and neat hair was straight hair. As a teenager, my older sister

8 Rites and activities of the Catholic Church.

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

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

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

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

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

2. School trajectory

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

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

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



First year at the Concordia neighborhood school.

By: Personal Archive

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

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

It was during the military dictatorship, so the school was run by the military. But it was a good experience. I remember teacher Isabel, in Industrial Practices, who was very attentive. Students used to be invisible in the classroom, especially black students. It was practically impossible to have any closer interaction with a teacher, but this teacher, Isabel, had a very affectionate relationship with me. I also remember another teacher who I had a great admiration for, the Portuguese teacher, who was black and married to a school interventionist¹⁰. She is responsible for my love for reading, she encouraged me to read.

When I turned 13, I was mistakenly transferred to the school's night shift. I wasn't supposed to go to school at night school at the age of 13, it was supposed to be in the morning. I arrived at school and didn't see my name on the morning shift list. My mom went to the school, but they didn't give her much of an explanation. Then, I found out that my name was on the night shift. Class ended at 11 P.M. A 13-year-old girl walking in the grittier areas of downtown¹¹ was dangerous, but I kept going. My mother worked, my brother was very small, and I decided to stay at night to help take care of him and do chores at home, even though I was very young.

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

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

11 Known as Baixo Centro.

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

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

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

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

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

I decided to major in History. I took the entrance exam and passed at UFMG. I studied in the old FAFICH building¹², in the Santo Antônio neighborhood. It was a whole another world that opened up, another completely different reality, other minds, experiences, other things. At that time, I already lived in the São Gabriel neighborhood. My family had already moved there when I was eight, but I stayed with my grandmother in the Concórdia neighborhood until I was 11, when I moved to São Gabriel, a neighborhood that is difficult to access; and I was already in college, at night, which was very tough and difficult. I had to work during the day to pay to afford to pay for photocopies and bus fare.

12 Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences.

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

3. Political engagement and militancy

My political engagement began in 1981, at Estadual Central. I was already involved with pastorals within the Catholic Church, which had a different way of acting. It was the time of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, of the Theology of Liberation. I was inclined towards this more politicized version of pastoral care; I was part of the Youth Pastoral and later the University Pastoral. Groups of young people had this coexistence character to them. And as I discovered that, through these groups, I could be part of more political movements, I set the religious issue aside and moved closer to political issues. I owe much of my political training to these church groups. When I was 16, I took a course on unemployment with Eduardo Suplicy¹³, at the São José Church. I went to the discussions on Politics and Church, Faith and Politics, a movement that still exists today, in which all political trends in Brazil were discussed and the importance of linking the church with politics. I participated in seminars, courses, and started doing reading on politics.

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

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

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

14 Black Union and Awareness Group.

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

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

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

4. Professional trajectory

In 1986, I went through a federal public exam and started working at the now-extinct Inamps¹⁵. It was a low-paid position, but I had health insurance, childcare assistance, benefits that made me stay there for 10 years. I worked 6 hours at Inamps and started teaching at night, in 1989, the year after my graduation. It was a municipal school in Betim. It was very difficult, because it was far away, at night, it took me a long time to get home. I did try to get my bachelor’s degree as soon as I got my teaching degree, but I couldn’t make it all work out, because I was already married, teaching, and working.

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

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

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

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



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

Workshop on race relations. Belo Horizonte, 2005.

By: Personal Archive

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

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

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

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

In 2001, when I went to get my Master's, I asked to resign one of my job positions and, in the other, I went to work at the Belo Horizonte Municipal Education Secretariat. It was a project to train teachers who worked in daycare centers, to ensure that they had certification in Early Childhood Education. I stayed for three years and then, at the invitation of the Secretariat team, I went to coordinate the Center for Ethnic-Racial and Gender Relations. That was in 2004, a year after Law 10.639 / 2003¹⁷ had been promulgated by the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

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

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

Right after this experience in the Education Secretariat, at the end of 2007, I received an invitation from Regional North¹⁸ to take over, together with another colleague, the head of the Florestan Fernandes Municipal School. The school had undergone an intervention process and the board was removed. I was in charge of this school for four years. It was also not easy; it was a place marked by management problems. There was a group of very unstable teachers who didn't stay at the school. Most of the students were black, with families headed by women, the majority benefiting from the Bolsa-Família¹⁹ and the environment was strongly marked by violence. It was complex. There were many confrontations and several challenges. During this administration, we implemented, starting in 2008, an institutional project on the ethnic-racial issue and promotion of racial equality. This project received national recognition and received several awards.

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

Confronting prejudice, racism, and sexism in the professional environment

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

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

18 Sub-administration level of Belo Horizonte.

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

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

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

Another situation was in relation to a project that I developed, because at that time there were a lot of resources coming from MEC, FNDE²⁰, destined to the Secretariats to promote more consistent courses, with a higher workload. I developed a training project for teachers and librarians in the municipal network, a training with a workload of more than 120 hours. Everything was fine, it went through all the procedures. At MEC, it was practically approved and a person responsible for the project called me insistently saying: "look, you're having problems with the budget, you have to ask the person responsible for this to review it". I answered: "But we already asked". Then they said: "You have one day to solve this, otherwise you will lose the project". Then I found out that the person responsible for this had not paid any attention to it. Several other projects from other areas and other themes had passed and ours was there, stuck. I had to put a lot of internal pressure, contact people to be able to get it unstuck, let's say, this project, solve the problem that had been pointed out by MEC and be able to have the course.

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

20 Ministry of Education and National Education Development Fund.

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

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

We had this internal discussion, it was very tense, and I realized that, with that group, I wouldn't have support. So, together with a representative from the Education Secretariat, we went to have a conversation with a lieutenant-colonel in the Military Police, at Praça da Liberdade²¹. I knew that the person who accompanied me wouldn't say anything and the discussion would be up to me. It was this whole thing! I don't know where I got my strength from. But at no time did I give up on my position, despite facing a high-ranking police officer. This is very intimidating. He was all dressed up, with those medals, in an environment that is all that police disciplinary thing, and I laid out my entire position. I said that the book addressed the issue of police violence and that they should agree that, historically, the police had a very strong contribution to this process of racism, by reproducing and producing this violence, targeting mainly black people, black youth. At that time, 15 years ago, this discussion was taking place.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The role and strength of black women in education

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

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

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

How do black women deal with their challenges? The first one is recognizing oneself as capable, as empowered to accomplish and produce things. Even if our family doesn't say it, the world around us tells us otherwise. I think that, even today, this mentality persists, although with some progress. But my generation had to face it, even though I had a little more opportunity than my mother's generation, for example. I'm not even talking about dreams, but about the projects we have in mind, about life and professional career. It's about meeting ourselves, discovering ourselves. And it's a process that doesn't happen overnight. To this day, I'm in this process, I have difficulty recognizing myself in some places, I have difficulty recognizing myself as a black intellectual, a black writer. And this is being built on an internal, intimate dialogue, and in the relationship with other women, who have been bringing up these issues. Thinkers that are only now being translated in Brazil, such as bell hooks²², who says that black women are intellectuals in their own right, even if not in academic knowledge, but in the very knowledge of survival and maintenance of life. It's an intellectual thought, too. It took a long time to reach us. I think that the next generations will be able to benefit a lot.

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

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

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

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

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

Today, there are a multitude of them, led by young black women who organize themselves into study and discussion groups, in political movements, not only in the academic world, but in the neighborhoods, in the communities. There are quilombol²³ women and indigenous women, who are organizing themselves to bring these discussions into the agenda. And the inspirations, which, as I said, when we were teenagers, we were inspired by artists, nowadays we are inspired too by these women who arrived before and who are there, representing very well all this effort and these

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

legacies, who make us think: "It's possible to get there and have a position". Not in the sense of economic position, but an important position within the society in which we live, bringing a contribution to the group that we're a part of, to our population. I really like the example of a teacher from Rio de Janeiro, Giovana Xavier, from UFRJ²⁴. She says that we always treat black women thinkers as an exception. And each time they reveal themselves, we come to the conclusion that there is a constellation of these thinkers, it isn't one or two. The more you research, the more you discover these prominent black women. Over the centuries, very important women have appeared who have made enormous contributions. This is also very comforting. Being part of this constellation of women who are making a difference, who are putting things in motion, even if it's a little. We say: "It doesn't move the structure, but it rocks it a little". And I would like to be remembered as a black teacher who dedicated her life to the racial debate and for my entire trajectory, which started very early. For a lifetime of dedication and also a lot of involvement. I want to be remembered as the black teacher who got involved and dedicated her life to issues of racial justice and anti-racist struggle.



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

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