

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

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MACAÉ MARIA EVARISTO

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1. Origins

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

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

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

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

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

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

Father: militant of the black movement

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

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

The childhood

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

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

Currently, I have two daughters, Mariana and Marina, two wonderful women. Mariana is 32 and Marina is 30 years old. Mariana graduated in Law and now in Languages, living up to family tradition. Marina is a Brazilian sign language interpreter and now is also in school for Languages-Libras. I am married and I was married. This is something I talk about in my biography¹. If there's one thing, I never gave up on was love. I love dating. With my first boyfriend, who is a black man and the father of my daughters, I was married for 14 years. We then split up in and I fell in love again several times. I am currently married again, unofficially, but for nearly 12 years. My partner, Carlos Tibúrcio Crispim Mahaia, is a samba musician and not an intellectual in glasses. I created a rule for myself: never date an intellectual in glasses again. Date people who like music, singing, the night!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. At school: *education as a watershed*

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

My school trajectory follows the expansion of the public school, because when I did my first years of elementary school, only those were public. When I went to fifth grade – the Gymnasium, as it was called at the time – public education was not yet universal. There were schools from the communities, from the Rede Cenecista², a kind of cooperative, in which families paid for children to study. I reached fifth grade and right after it becomes public. Likewise, when I reached high school, it was not in a public school yet, but by the community; I studied for a year or two, and then it also became public. My mother, who was a teacher, was part of that story, fighting for the expansion of public education in my town. My mother thought that I should get two diplomas in high school, that learning to teach wasn't enough, since I wanted to continue studying afterwards. So, I got a technical degree in Chemistry, at a private school in Divinópolis; and the teacher's training course at night, in my town.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

University experience

My mother wanted me to go to medical school, it was her big dream. I wanted to go to study Pharmacology, that was the fashion at the time. But when I arrived in Belo Horizonte, I realized that I was going to need a lot more knowledge and a more structured life to compete for a place at the Federal University, on equal footing. So, I took the entrance exam for the university, and I passed the first round, but I didn't get into Pharmacology, by a hair. So, my option was going into Social Work at PUC³. I was glad I did, very happy! It was a lot more like me.

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

Activism as a part of my trajectory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this context, I begin to understand the anti-racist struggle in a more organic way. As you participate, you discuss and realize that engaging in the social movement is an educating. Here, I remember Nilma Lino Gomes' book⁴: "Movimento Negro Educador". It is the movement that



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

By: Luiz Rocha

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

educates, as Paulo Freire would say⁵; it educates us and educates society, it brings these issues to the surface, to denounce them and to force the construction of public policies to overcome these situations.

At PUC, I also found politics. At the Faculty of Social Work, I met Patrus Ananias⁶, who was my teacher. I met several people who fought against the dictatorship, who were involved in a new political scenario, and in the construction of the Workers' Party (PT). I lived all the effervescence of the beginning of the Party, the first PT elections in Belo Horizonte and engagement with this agenda. In addition, it is from my generation of Social Work that the whole debate about the Unified Social Assistance System will emerge. I'm from the generation that lived through that debate, the fight and the construction of several social policies of contemporary Brazil, of the movement.

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

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

In 1984, I joined the Belo Horizonte Municipal Education Network as a teacher. I worked many years as Lead Teacher of literacy for children, youths, and adults. After that, I took on some Pedagogical Coordination posts in schools. I was elected Principal of the Edson Pisani State School, the Vila Fátima school that is in the Cafezal community, right inside the Aglomerado da Serra⁷.

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

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

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

I also worked in one of the first adult literacy programs, instituted in 1990, in Belo Horizonte. It started with the literacy of women who worked in the SLU⁸, street-sweeping. Most were illiterate and the city decided to establish an adult literacy program for them, which was amazing. It meant alphabetizing a woman and having her say: "People always asked me where Tupinambás Street was; for years, I have swept Tupinambás Street every day and couldn't tell them. And today I read the sign "Tupinambás Street". So, that's the thing: the right to education, to diversity is the right to understand where you are.

Other issues appear, such as the fight against racism in education. In the early 1990s, we got to create the Gender and Race Center within the Department of Education. Perhaps this was the country's first initiative, long before Law 10.639⁹. In 1990, Belo Horizonte formed a group with teachers Nilma Lino Gomes, Rosa Vani, and me. We sought Miguel Arroyo, who was Deputy Secretary in the municipal Department of Education, to tell him that it was not possible to manage the Plural School without considering the educational inequalities caused by racism that still existed within the schools. And we argued that within the Department of Education there were space to think about these policies. He asked us to design a project – the proposal to create a Gender and Race Center for Education. And we got to develop it, for the first time, within the Department of Education.

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

8 Urban Cleaning Superintendency of Belo Horizonte.

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



Macaé, 2017.

By: Personal Archive

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

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

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

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

At SECADI, I occupied several positions and participated in many things. From the popular movement’s point of view, we had the March Zumbi dos Palmares¹⁰ and organized the Durban Conference¹¹; I saw Lula approve Law 10.639. SECADI was created due to pressure from teachers, students from the black movement, indigenous peoples, movements from the countryside, from all over Brazil, in which I participated, so that the Minister of Education, at the time Cristóvão Buarque, created in the MEC a Secretariat to deal with the diversity and inclusion agenda. Until then, there was only the Basic Education Secretariat (SEB) in the MEC, which took care of education in general; and as all that is universal – a bit like one size fits all clothes – it doesn’t fit anyone.

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

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

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

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

When I came to Minas Gerais, it was also a tense moment and a totally different situation, a bit without identity. And come in facing a mountain, the dismantling of Law 100¹². I have to conduct a public exam and appoint teachers; that is, I arrived at a dissolved structure. A huge effort. I can't complain, we have to work, get a result, but it was very difficult. The state of Minas Gerais was experiencing a historic difficulty: completely bankrupt and with an immense structure. The state's Department of Education had several employees that made us think that it must have been the largest company in the world. And in an archaic, bureaucratic, slow, and conservative structure. The challenges were great: to establish a policy of participation, listening, and enabling a dialogue. So, in my administration as Secretary of State for Education, it will be the first time that there will be an indigenous person coordinating the area of indigenous education within the Department; the first time that someone from the country coordinates the area of rural education. These people faced many struggles, difficulties, and prejudices. Every day, work was done to deconstruct a historically awfully bad, aggressive relationship between the central structures of the state's bureaucracies and schools.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So, I think about my own situation. Back then, if there had been a quota system, I might have had access to the Pharmacology course. When I was in university, nobody talked about quotas. The ones who always held this agenda and ranked education highly for the emancipation of the black population was the black movement. From the Black Front to the MNU, and the BEC – Black Educator's Collective – and several groups that we participated in, the agenda of education was a priority and had always had this recognition¹³.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Intersectionality and feminism

All these issues are intersectional: there is no way for me to address an ethno-racial issue and not understand what a black woman's agenda is. Black women were the first to draw attention to this: in our issues we live a double process of exclusion. Because the feminist movement – we need to say, the traditional white movement – is very far from the black woman's agenda. When white feminists were fighting to go to the labor market, black women were already working for a long time, most often in horrible conditions of underemployment. It was black women who worked, and still work, on the street: she was the street vendor, the baiana who sells cocada, the one who sells angu, tropeiro, acarajé¹⁴. It has always been a form of survival and even a struggle for

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

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

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

The black men

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

14 Brazilian traditional street foods.

I discovered myself as a black woman since I was born

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

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

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

The virtues and strengths of black women

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

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

A message and a reason to be remembered

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

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

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



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

By: Bernardo Dias / Acervo CMBH.

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

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

3

LARISSA AMORIM BORGES

Larissa Amorim Borges
Jessyka Martins
Matheus Arcelo Fernandes Silva

1. My story starts before me

My story starts before me because it has to do with my ancestors. Of my earliest origins that I know of and honor, on my mother's side Maria Oldete Amorim, I remember: my great-grandmother Lia, who was indigenous, from north of Minas, who decided to leave the village to live with a man quilombola because she was in love. Lia was the mother of Dindinha Patu (Patrocínia) and the grandmother of my grandmother Genoveva Rosa de Amorim, who lived and dreamed on the banks of the rivers Trinta and Mocambo, in Claros dos Poções¹. On my father's side, José Evangelista Borges, the oldest person to what I have news of, and honor is my great-grandmother: Maria Segunda, who is of Portuguese origin. This family came from the region of São José dos Ferros² to Belo Horizonte in the late 1940s. My grandmother, Maria Trindade, was one of the first residents of Alto Vera Cruz³. There, she

1 Municipality located in the north of Minas Gerais.

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

3 Neighborhood in the east region of Belo Horizonte.