

## “I’ll learn to read to teach my comrades”: afro-popular formation and the construction of public policies in the praxis of professor Jeruse Romão<sup>i</sup>


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## “I’ll learn to read to teach my comrades”: afro-popular formation and the construction of public policies in the praxis of professor Jeruse Romão

### **Abstract**

An interpretation of the Brazilian reality from the context of the southern region of the country takes into account the socioeconomic, cultural, and political markers that constitute this territory, as well as the specific strategies developed by the black population to continue the historic struggle for a life with dignity in Brazil. It is in this historical and geographical context that Afro-popular formation developed. Despite considering the collective nature of this process, like everything built by and for social movements, there are protagonists who led the actions based on their militant practices. The choice of Professor Jeruse Romão among this group active in Santa Catarina since the 1980s is due to her recognition as a reference by activists and intellectuals of the Brazilian black movement. With this article, my main motivation is to highlight the relevance of Professor Jeruse Romão's trajectory not only for the black movement but, especially, for Brazilian education. Thus, my objective is to characterize the educational practices of Afro-popular education based on black thought in the counter-colonial process of building public policies at the service of social justice. I believe that this movement has special relevance in confronting the invisibility of the black population in the South of Brazil, which not only exists and resists but actively organizes and articulates other possibilities of existence beyond a racist society.

**Keywords:** black thought in education; afro-popular formation; public policy; black memory.

## “Vou aprender a ler pra ensinar meus camaradas”: a formação afro-popular e a construção de políticas públicas na práxis da professora Jeruse Romão

### **Resumo**

Uma interpretação da realidade brasileira a partir do contexto da região sul do país leva em consideração os marcadores socioeconômicos, culturais e políticos que constituem esse território, bem como as estratégias específicas desenvolvidas pela população negra para a continuidade da histórica luta por uma vida com dignidade no Brasil. É nesse contexto histórico e geográfico que se desenvolve a formação afro-popular. Apesar de considerar a coletividade desse processo, como tudo construído por e para movimentos sociais, existem protagonistas que capitanearam as ações, a partir de suas práticas militantes. A escolha pela professora Jeruse Romão, dentre esse grupo em atividade em Santa Catarina desde os anos 1980, se dá pelo seu reconhecimento enquanto referência por militantes e intelectuais do movimento negro brasileiro. Com o presente artigo, tenho como motivação principal evidenciar a relevância da trajetória da professora Jeruse Romão não apenas para o movimento negro, mas, especialmente, para a educação brasileira. Assim, tenho como objetivo caracterizar as práticas educadoras da formação afro-popular, embasadas pelo pensamento negro no processo contra-colonial de construção de políticas públicas a serviço da justiça social. Acredito que esse movimento tem especial relevância no enfrentamento à invisibilização da população negra do Sul do Brasil, que não apenas existe e resiste, mas ativamente organiza e articula outras possibilidades de existência para além de uma sociedade racista.

**Palavras-chave:** pensamento negro em educação; formação afro-popular; políticas públicas; memória negra.

## 1 Introduction

In response to the colonization of the Americas, indigenous peoples and African diaspora communities employed various strategies in their struggle for freedom. Regarding the Afro-Brazilian population, access to education and preservation of cultural memory were key issues in their struggle for rights. Embodied in historic achievements such as the establishment of the Palmares Cultural Foundation (1988) at the federal level and the System for Promoting Racial Equality Policies (2003) across all government levels, the acknowledgment of racial disparities and the erasure of Black culture in Brazilian society represent a legacy in the struggle for memory in a country seeking reconciliation without historical reparation. Similarly, legal milestones such as Laws 10.639/2003, 11.645/2008, and 12.711/2012 recognize education's role in building a democratic society free from racism.

These advancements were achieved by the Brazilian Black Movement, coordinated through its grassroots efforts, institutional spaces, and multinational organizations, united in purpose despite the wide diversity in organization, ideology, and political praxis. In this context, the educational role of the Brazilian Black Movement, both for society and for itself, emerges as a driving strategy in building political unity to secure rights.

Efforts to realize this unity underscore the diverse spectrum of Black experiences across Brazil's vast landscape. The social dynamics observed in Salvador differ significantly from those encountered in Florianópolis. Consequently, our lived environment shapes our sphere of influence, creativity, and discourse. It tells us about our identities, our trajectories and how, at the same time as we transform space, it transforms us.

Thus, an interpretation of Brazilian reality from the perspective of the country's southern region considers the socioeconomic, cultural, and political markers that shape this territory, as well as the specific strategies developed by the Black population to sustain their historical struggle for a dignified life in Brazil. An example is the commemoration of November 20th as a day of Black struggle, first celebrated in 1971 by the Palmares Group in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, at the Marcílio Dias Black Social

Club. Beyond a symbolic date, Black Consciousness Day highlights the pivotal role of Black people in their struggle for emancipation, from the era of slavery to the present day. It elevates Zumbi dos Palmares to the status of a national hero and martyr in the fight against slavery in Brazil, challenging the historical narrative that credited the abolitionist legacy to the slave-owning monarchy.

The role of schools in shaping historical narratives and collective memory is crucial to the Brazilian Black movement's struggle for quality public education. In Santa Catarina, five municipalities enacted local laws mandating the inclusion of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in curricula prior to the national Law 10.639/03. Itajaí led the initiative in 1993, followed by Florianópolis and Tubarão in 1994, Criciúma in 1997, and Imbituba in 1998, all preceding the federal legislation by up to a decade (Romão, 2010).

These pioneers embody the organization and coordination of Santa Catarina's Black movement, which, despite the state having the lowest proportion of Black population in the country, represents a significant hub for political activism in Brazil. The First Political Training Seminar for Militants of the Black Movement of Santa Catarina, held in 1991, is a milestone of this period. The event took place in Florianópolis, the state capital, organized by the Center for Black Studies (CBS).

It is within this historical and geographical context that Afro-popular culture emerges and evolves. While acknowledging the collective nature of this process, as a construct by and for social movements, key actors spearheaded actions through their activist practices. The selection of Professor Jeruse Romão from this group active in Santa Catarina since the 1980s is due to her recognition as a reference by activists and intellectuals of the Brazilian Black movement, as evidenced in the interviews accessed for this article. Carol Lima de Carvalho, a doctoral student in History at the State University of Santa Catarina, says that she interviewed the teacher for

Her influential role in the Black rights movement. She is a leading authority in the field of Ethnic-Racial Relations Education (ERRE), specializing in teacher training and the implementation of Federal Law 10.639/03. Her approach emphasizes local histories and the worldviews of African and Afro-Brazilian populations (Carvalho, 2021, p. 208).

Pamela Iris Mello da Silva (2020, p. 88), a PhD student in Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, says that “Jeruse’s trajectory is well known for her struggle and activism”, and that she is “an interstate and (inter)national reference in black activism” (Silva, 2020, p. 44). Drawing from the interviews conducted by these two researchers, with the first one published in its entirety, I present below a profile of Professor Jeruse Romão.

Regarding her preferred designation, Professor Jeruse Romão stated in an interview with Carol Carvalho that:

I prefer to be called Professor Jeruse Romão in academic spaces. My legal name is Jeruse Maria Romão, but I dropped "Maria" at some point, much to my mother's dismay. I feel comfortable as Jeruse Romão, and in educational settings, I'm known as Professor Jeruse Romão. However, I also have other spiritual connections. In Umbanda and Angola terreiros, I'm known as Jeruse de Iansã, which is my name as an Ialorixá in these sacred spaces. Or I can be “Coruja” in capoeira spaces, because capoeiristas have names; although I'm not the person in the game, but I've been a member of the capoeira movement since the 1980s, so I was honored to have a nickname<sup>1</sup> (Carvalho, 2021, p. 211).

Born in 1960 on the island of Florianópolis, Professor Jeruse Romão is the eldest of six children, four of whom were raised in Morro da Caixa, a significant Black community in the city. Her mother was a teacher, and her father played in the Military Police band. The community, nestled in the heart of the city, was home to Florianópolis' emerging Black middle class, descended from Black workers engaged in the city's urban waterways, particularly the laundresses' fountains and the port supplying the Public Market, as well as those from rural areas of neighboring municipalities.

As the fourth free generation in her family, Jeruse was the first to enter higher education in 1983. In 1986, he co-founded the Center for Black Studies (CBS) with other young Black activists, an organization dedicated to advancing the Black movement, with education as its primary focus since inception. Regarding the sole organization she was

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Jeruse Romão's connection to capoeira is documented in the Social Mapping of Capoeira in Florianópolis, compiled by the Greater Florianópolis Capoeira Forum (2019), and in the work of photographer Joaquim Corrêa. Given this connection, I titled this work using a chant from Capoeira Angola, which carries the teacher's praxis through oral tradition.

affiliated with, Professor Jeruse Romão states that:

We were a convergence of diverse perspectives united by a common goal: to establish a new type of Black movement. As young activists, we observed that the existing Black movement was overly focused on cultural assimilation into white bourgeois society, failing to address fundamental structural issues. The NEN, therefore, evolved to reflect the diverse educational backgrounds of its members, which proved to be a remarkable development (Carvalho, 2021, p. 215).

Nevertheless, the teacher acknowledges that her Black consciousness emerged much earlier. Even as a child, she realized that the lives of black people who don't fit into the place designated by white-centered society are marked by confrontations (Romão, 2019 apud Silva, 2020).

In a highly dynamic manner, Jeruse confronts these challenges across various aspects of her life: in her pedagogical practice as an elementary and higher education teacher in both public and private institutions, as well as in her role as a director; in her capacity as a parliamentary advisor for five terms (four in the Florianópolis City Council and one in the Santa Catarina State Legislative Assembly); and at the national level when she worked in Brasília in 2001. As a UNESCO consultant for the Ministry of Education, she mapped and analyzed pre-university programs and initiatives nationwide that enhanced higher education access for Black and Indigenous youth. She also founded and previously led the Center for Black Studies and established the Leonor de Barros Afro-Brazilian School of Political Education.

This article aims to highlight the significance of Professor Jeruse Romão's journey, not only for the Black movement but particularly for Brazilian education. Therefore, my aim is to analyze African-influenced educational practices rooted in Black thought, examining their role in developing socially just public policies through a decolonial lens. I believe this movement holds particular significance in confronting the erasure of Black populations in Southern Brazil, who not only exist and persist but actively organize and forge alternative paths of existence beyond the confines of a racist society.



## 2 Building Afro-popular education

Afro-popular education is rooted in principles, methodologies, and pedagogies that are both unique and interwoven with Black experiences and knowledge systems. This educational approach acknowledges the cultural, historical, and social specificities of Black people, aiming to implement practices that value their perspectives and worldviews. This approach to education can be implemented in formal institutional settings such as schools and universities, as well as in non-formal and popular education contexts, encompassing community initiatives, social organizations, cultural movements, and other learning practices beyond traditional structures.

The implementation of Law 10.639/03 in institutional settings exemplifies how Afro-Brazilian education can reshape school curricula, not only by incorporating content addressing Afro-Brazilian history and culture but also through educational practices that acknowledge alternative forms of social organization and life reproduction inherent in Afro-Brazilian cosmologies.

In non-formal and popular education, Afro-centric learning often emerges through community initiatives, workshops, dialogue circles, and other participatory activities that actively engage learners in the educational process. Afro-popular education distinguishes itself from general popular education by focusing on Black culture, identity, and history, employing methods and pedagogies rooted in Afro-Brazilian worldviews. While popular education aims to promote social justice, it may inadvertently perpetuate white-centric perspectives if it fails to challenge Eurocentric narratives and paradigms, and neglects to acknowledge the knowledge and practices of Black communities. Afro-Brazilian popular education serves as an emancipatory tool, empowering the Brazilian population to recognize their heritage in the Black struggle and assert their rights as citizens. It fosters critical awareness of oppressive and discriminatory structures while celebrating and strengthening Black identity and culture, drawing from the experiences of Afro-Brazilians.

Black Feminist Thought, which has a diasporic constitution with special dialogue between black Brazilian and African-American intellectuals, often invokes “lived experiences as a criterion of credibility” (Collins, 2019, p. 411). This critical social theory

framework supports intellectual endeavors rooted in Black lived experiences, aiming to comprehend the intricacies of reality through material conditions. Considering this, I chose to analyze practical experiences as catalysts for Afro-popular education.

The First Political Training Seminar for Black Movement Activists in Santa Catarina, held on June 15-16, 1991, provided insight into the political context and internal organization of the state's black movement, serving as our starting point for understanding the construction of Afro-popular education. The event commenced with João Carlos Nogueira elucidating the genesis of political education seminars for Black Movement activists, which stemmed from the organization and implementation of activities planned for the previous year's November 20th commemoration in the state. The purpose of the trainings was to cover "all the issues that affect the lives of black people at a cultural, religious, political, social, etc. level" (Romão, 1991, p. 01):

- History of the Black Movement
- Black Movement and Conjuncture
- The Black Movement and Religion
- The Black Movement and the Trade Union
- Black Movement and Cultural Diversity
- Black Movement and Education
- The Black Movement and the Labor Market
- Black Movement and Political Parties
- Black Movement and 500 Years of Oppression
- Black woman

The seminar's structure demonstrates that the Black Brazilian intelligentsia has long recognized racism as a pervasive social construct affecting all aspects of life. It is evident that intersectionality serves as a crucial political praxis for the Black movement to function as an agent of change. Steve Biko, a key figure in Pan-Africanism, asserts that "the essence of Black Consciousness is to enable and intensify people's participation in their own struggles" (Biko, 1990, p. 21), emphasizing that Black Consciousness radicalizes the political stance of the Black population, empowering us to organize our own lives. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Black people to reconnect with their heritage and recognize their role as the architects of their own emancipation.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the status of the Black population will



not improve through political systems that perpetuate their marginalization. Steve Biko wrote during South African apartheid, a regime that led to his imprisonment and murder, highlighting the long history of Black popular resistance against various strategies of colonization and domination employed by white supremacy. Although Brazil does not have an explicitly segregationist regime, the Brazilian government's effective stance in not only combating racism—criminalized by the Caó Law in 1989—but also actively developing public policies aimed at promoting racial equality is a relatively recent phenomenon.

In this context, the educational interests presented indicate an alignment with the Brazilian Black movement, as evidenced by the First National Meeting of Black Entities (NMBE) scheduled for that year, which was also a key topic of discussion at the Santa Catarina seminar. Regarding NMBE participation, Jeruse states that

Caution is warranted regarding individuals or organizations that mobilize solely for participation in events. To achieve this, these entities must establish specific criteria for selecting delegates. The organizations also need to recognize the [state black organizations] forum (Romão, 1991, p. 03).

The teacher's perception that the articulation of the black movement should be constant and occur at the grassroots level was evidenced in her proposal, made on the second day of the seminar, to organize meetings in the municipalities: "We need to discuss in the municipalities the necessity of articulation and how to articulate." Regardless of their affiliations—be they religious, social, or otherwise—what matters is their united front against racism, underscoring the need for organized efforts (Romão, 1991, p. 14).

This is a crucial aspect in understanding Afro-popular education; it can and should occur within formal educational settings, but it must also extend beyond, reaching all spaces relevant to the Black community. Furthermore, the professor emphasized the importance of organizing with religious and social groups, highlighting the intentional stance of the Black movement in asserting the political nature of cultural expressions, which are often folklorized by white society. This perspective also exemplifies the unique nature of Afro-Brazilian worldviews, which recognize that the values shaping our ways of life permeate all aspects of our existence. Meanwhile, racist ideology separates mind from body, reason from emotion, politics from culture, and the sacred from the profane.

Therefore, ongoing political education for activists is crucial for both the movement itself and the broader Black community. In 2017, Professor Nilma Lino Gomes, a researcher and former minister, encapsulated the tenets of Black Thought in Education by introducing the concept of the black movement as an educator in her eponymous book. In this passage, the author contends that the Black movement serves as a generator of emancipatory knowledge and a systematizer of insights regarding racial issues in Brazil (Gomes, 2017, p. 14). She goes on to say that the intellectuals of the black movement question “the primacy of Eurocentric interpretation and production of the world and of scientific knowledge” (Gomes, 2017, p. 15). Thus, the author argues that the praxis of the Black movement educates and re-educates society, the state, and itself.

The need to re-educate oneself is linked to the need to constantly ask oneself “who am I really?”, resulting from the systematized denial of one's existence by colonialism (Fanon, 1968). Another proposal presented by Professor Jeruse Romão on the second day of the seminar was to

Make a survey of the history of the Black Movement in each municipality. The Black community in Santa Catarina state shows the most reluctance to participate due to a lack of familiarity with the history of the Black Movement, even within their own municipalities. There is reluctance to address racial issues, as people claim to be non-racist (Romão, 1991, p. 13).

Thus, drawing on Nilma Lino Gomes (2017), the Black movement and Black intellectuals are crucial political actors in developing an educational project that not only addresses the socio-historical debt to the Black population but also serves as an emancipatory force for all Brazilians, who remain subjugated by the dynamics of coloniality. Understanding the history of the Black Movement at the municipal level would serve as a demand and strategy for historical, political, and epistemological reparation, enabling discussions on racial issues and confronting racism. The territorial dimension is also evident in the proposals, stemming from the Santa Catarina Black Movement's understanding of the need for national coordination while simultaneously addressing local (municipal and state) particularities present in social dynamics.

Professor Jeruse Romão's work is characterized by a strong focus on territorial

considerations. Despite national-level initiatives, these proposals are fundamentally rooted in ongoing grassroots efforts within Black communities. Understanding experiences within the context of specific territorial dynamics enhances the scope of Brazil's universal public policies. Therefore, examining contemporary conditions and reflecting on the past's influence on the present is crucial for understanding the formation of the current situation we are contending with.

Therefore, memory plays a crucial role in shaping Afro-popular educational strategies. In Professor Jeruse Romão's career, we highlight her work *The History of Black Education and Other Stories*, which she edited in 2005, as well as *Africa is Within Us. Africanidades catarinenses*, organized in 2010 and *Antonieta de Barros: professor, writer, journalist, first black congresswoman from Santa Catarina*, published in 2021.

Finally, the Black Movement's political education has fostered a sophisticated and constructive dialogue with non-Black populations and the State, acknowledging the complex interplay of ethnic identity markers that shape the Black racial experience in Brazil, particularly in Santa Catarina.

The Black Movement must remain vigilant and speak out forcefully against capital punishment, the extermination of street children, and the plight of the landless and homeless, as well as oppose the mass sterilization of Black women. Santa Catarina lags behind in addressing this critical issue. We could establish a statewide day to advocate against capital punishment. No nation can achieve first-world status without eradication, a process that will primarily impact the Black community (Romão, 1991, p. 14).

In this initial examination, we identified key elements of Afro-Brazilian popular education embedded in Professor Jeruse Romão's praxis, considering the context of its development. The initial point addresses the imperative for Black individuals to unite and mobilize. In other words, Afro-popular cultural formation emerges through collective processes and dialogues among diverse groups, encompassing varied spatial, cultural, and other experiential dimensions. In this context, grassroots efforts are crucial, as is maintaining a presence in key areas significant to the Black community, extending beyond formal educational settings. The role of history and memory holds a prominent

place, as does the importance of engaging in dialogue with both non-Black populations and governmental institutions.

To further this more contextual phase of the analysis, I present the partial report from the Santa Catarina Black Movement's State Plenary, held on July 19, 1998. The document, a concise four-page summary, outlines the key events of the meeting without directly quoting any statements. The key information of interest in this document is the "nominal list and occupational profile of the militants and observers present" which records the 63 individuals who participated in the activity. It is noteworthy that the Black movement in Santa Catarina included a significant number of students and teachers, as well as workers from various professions such as secretaries, security guards, domestic workers, drivers, salespeople, and refrigeration technicians. This diverse composition was identified as a challenge for mass organization during the 1991 seminar.

Consequently, this highlights another crucial aspect: the active involvement of those affected by Afro-popular education as key architects of its development. Another piece of information that helps us contextualize the Black Movement in Santa Catarina at the time is that it spread beyond the state capital, with representatives from the cities of Rio do Sul, Ituporanga, Gaspar, Tubarão, Joinville, Chapecó, Lages and Criciúma, a much broader articulation than we see in the state today.

Professor Jeruse Romão explored Afro-Brazilian popular education during her tenure at the Center for Black Studies. The *Black Thought in Education* series was primarily organized by Professor Jeruse and Professor Ivan Costa Lima.

The fifth volume in the series, titled *Afro-Brazilian Popular Education*, was co-edited by the two authors and Sônia Silveira. In it, Jeruse Romão presents Afro-popular education based on the literacy practices of the Teatro Experimental do Negro in her article "'Há o Tema do Negro e há a Vida do Negro!': public, popular and Afro-Brazilian education" (Romão, 2009). The structure consists of three main sections: The Black Theme, Black Life, and Public, Popular and Afro-Brazilian Education: the educational action of the Center for Black Studies. The aim of the text is to point to the Black Movement as a "pioneer in the struggle for the democratization of the Brazilian education system" (Romão, 2009, p. 35).

In the initial section, the author situates the writing within the context of autumn 1999, highlighting the scarcity of research addressing educational practices advocated by the Black Movement. Engaging with Anísio Teixeira's analyses of the Brazilian educational system, she argues that even the discourses that dealt with inequality continue to make black people invisible by denying their difference and “not by questioning the reasons for this difference” (Romão, 2009, p. 39). The author concludes that the school system perpetuates the cultural whitewashing of the Brazilian population.

The second section examines the Black population's response to the social project conceived by whiteness, including education, challenging racist stigmas. The Black Experimental Theater (BET) <sup>2</sup> exemplifies this pioneering movement, implementing a pedagogical approach aimed at "re-educating whites and empowering blacks" (Romão, 2009, p. 43), thereby actively pursuing a commitment to construct a democratic societal model. The BET's praxis resulted in one of Brazil's pioneering adult education initiatives, showcasing the Black movement's foresight in recognizing the need for affirmative action in education, and advocating for educational rights even for those outside the formal system.

In the final section of the article, Professor Jeruse Romão discusses the work of the Center for Black Studies, focusing on its Education Program, which centered on training educators in the public school system. Through a pilot project carried out in the municipality of Rio do Sul in 1993, with the aim of transforming the school into “an egalitarian space that combats racism” (Romão, 2009, p. 49) through training activities that transform not only the way teachers look at the black population, but also pedagogical practices.

In response to faculty demands, the CBS establishes the Center for Afro-Brazilian Educational Resources to equip educators with tools for anti-racist teaching. To this end, the Education Program published workbooks, the Afro-Action Education newspaper, and documentaries, while also establishing a library featuring books, toys, and educational games focused on Afro-Brazilian themes.

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<sup>2</sup> The Black Experimental Theater was created in October 1944, in Rio de Janeiro, as “a pedagogical enterprise whose aim is to help dispel the tensions still discernible in race relations in Brazil” (Nascimento 1997 *apud* Romão, 2005, p. 118).

The teacher introduces the series of which the article is part, Black Thought in Education, pointing out that the title is

Inspired by and aligned with the theoretical frameworks discussed in the seminar 'Black Thought in Brazilian Education: Expressions of the Black Movement', organized by Professor Petronilha Silva from the Federal University of São Carlos. Thus, this is not merely a matter of adopting terminology; rather, it represents an alignment with a movement that establishes and highlights the existence of educational thought produced by the Brazilian Black movement (Romão, 2009, p. 53).

Therefore, while highlighting the path of Afro-popular political education developed by Professor Jeruse Romão, it is crucial to emphasize not only the collective nature of this process but also its national scope, particularly across the Southern, Southeastern, and Northeastern regions of Brazil.

This was an exercise in rapprochement and already indicates the next steps. Still in this historical period, I am interested in analyzing the articles published by the teacher in the Educa-Ação Afro newspaper between 1995 and 1999, which bring more elements to understand the Afro-popular political formation in Jeruse Romão's praxis. However, this study also aims to examine how Afro-popular political education necessitates structural changes for its full implementation. To this end, the following section highlights the professor's contributions to public policy development, affirmative action initiatives, and curriculum design through her activist professional praxis.

### 3 Conquering public policies

Examining the development of mechanisms to safeguard the rights of Black communities is crucial for understanding the impact of Afro-popular education. Here, knowledge and action, theory and practice, are considered inseparable. Public policies aim to ensure that access to history and memory becomes a shared right for the entire population, addressing social inequalities and seeking reparation. In an interview with Carol Lima de Carvalho, Professor Jeruse Romão states that she has devoted her entire life



[...] without deviation, to focus on developing public policies for the Black population in education, advising legislators, supporting the Black movement, and consulting with educational systems. I started with the first law in Professor Márcio de Souza's mandate: the law that institutes the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian cultures and histories in the municipality of Florianópolis (Carvalho, 2021, p. 213).

The law referenced by the professor is Municipal Law No. 4.446/1994, which mandated the inclusion of "Afro-Brazilian History" in the curricula of municipal schools in Florianópolis. As previously discussed, this legislation emerged from the coordinated efforts of Santa Catarina's Black movement, including the election of organized activists. This included the candidacy of Márcio de Souza, a chemistry teacher and founder of the Center for Black Studies. Professor Jeruse Romão served as chief of staff during Márcio's first term from 1992 to 1995, representing the Workers' Party. I highlight the aforementioned legislation as the primary action within the scope of Afro-popular political education, as it directly and specifically addresses the curricular structure of public education in Florianópolis, serving as an important precedent for other legislation at municipal, state, and national levels, as previously discussed in the preceding section.

Her second experience in an elected position was in the Santa Catarina State Legislative Assembly, serving as a parliamentary advisor to State Representative Wilson Vieira, known as Dentinho, who chaired the Legislative School in 2003 and 2004. At the time, Professor Jeruse Romão was a member of the Black Women's Forum of Greater Florianópolis, which actively participated in the region's political life. In the early 2000s, the arrival of drug trafficking groups from southeastern Brazil to Greater Florianópolis prompted public hearings on security issues. The Forum, concerned about the well-documented consequences of increased policing in Black communities, urged attending legislators to consider alternatives to the militarization of predominantly Black neighborhoods. In this context, Professor Jeruse Romão, as the head of the Black Women's Forum in these spaces, was commissioned to draft the proposal that led to the creation of the Antonieta de Barros Program (ABP).

The ABP, in its conception, was an unprecedented affirmative action initiative aimed at bringing the Black population closer to the "people's house" through an internship program targeting Black and marginalized youth in Florianópolis. The broad

debates within the program aimed to raise awareness among young interns at the Legislative Assembly and existing staff, addressing gender, racial, social, and ableist inequalities. The professional internship was thus recognized as a crucial element in the participants' career paths, underscoring the legislative body's commitment to each individual's development.

Furthermore, to prevent electoral populism, participant registration was contingent upon endorsement from local social movement organizations. Consequently, this would enable the entire ecosystem to recognize the significance of social movements within communities.

At that time, Volnei Morastoni served as the President of the Santa Catarina State Legislative Assembly. In 2005, he took office as Mayor of Itajaí and appointed Professor Jeruse Romão to oversee the city's policies for its Black population. Despite presenting a comprehensive plan for management, the professor declined the invitation out of respect for the Black activist community in Itajaí.

From 2017 to 2020, the professor served during Councilman Professor Lino Peres' second term in the Florianópolis City Council<sup>3</sup>. As a parliamentary advisor, she led the Human Rights department, coordinating efforts between social movements and the mandate to develop public policies. Guidelines concerning Black populations, women, LGBTQIA+ communities, quilombola communities, Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners, immigrants, Black youth, education, and housing rights were the primary focus areas during the four-year work period.

Among the various initiatives, the Municipal Policy for the Migrant Population stands out. This policy acknowledges the unique characteristics of migrants arriving in Florianópolis, particularly those from Haiti, Venezuela, and African countries. It emphasizes the importance of anti-racist legislation that recognizes migrants as rights-bearing individuals. The initiative made Florianópolis the second city in Brazil to implement the National Migration Law at the municipal level, developed in collaboration with civil society organizations led by immigrants in the city. The incorporation of diverse urban identities in public policy formulation, spearheaded by Professor Jeruse Romão,

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<sup>3</sup> During this period, Carla Ayres and Professor Cadu also temporarily assumed parliamentary positions for 30 days, in accordance with the rotation system implemented by the Workers' Party of Florianópolis.

marked a significant shift in legislative approach, transcending traditional city-centric policymaking.

#### 4 Final considerations

Based on the information presented, it is evident that Professor Jeruse Romão's Afro-popular political education is anchored in two key elements: collective construction and continuity.

Collaborative development ensures strategic practices are created with and by the people, not merely for them. The Afro-Brazilian worldview extends beyond cultural formations, encompassing a mutual responsibility that ensures autonomy and agency in the process of political emancipation. Collective engagement is essential for identifying key demands and priorities in shaping educational objectives and their implementation strategies.

Another crucial dimension observed is the need for continuity, both in educational processes and in acknowledging the history, trajectory, and experiences of predecessors, particularly those of the local Black Movement. This recognition is essential for understanding oneself as part of an ongoing ancestral process that extends beyond individual experience. This enables us to identify the historical tasks at hand and determine which demands have seen progress, guiding us in establishing new practices.

The past two decades have necessitated a restructuring of Brazil's Black Movement and other social movements in the country. This shift follows over a decade of partisan alignment, a parliamentary coup resulting in President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, the rise of far-right leadership in the executive branch, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected white, Black, and indigenous populations in Brazil. This situation underscored the imperative to revisit fundamental principles and recalibrate strategies in developing a collective agenda aimed at safeguarding established rights and expanding public policies to promote racial equality.

In this context, embracing the concept of Sankofa—revisiting the past to reclaim forgotten wisdom—becomes imperative. And here is Afro-popular education: as content,

as an analytical tool, as a methodology and, especially, as Principle of civilization.

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