



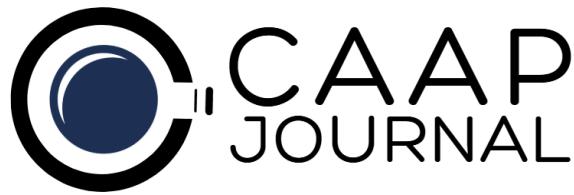
Interview MACAÉ EVARISTO

Ministry of
Human
Rights and
Citizenship

Interviewers:
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CAAP Journal



INTERVIEW WITH MACAÉ EVARISTO, MINISTER OF STATE

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Apresentação

Macaé Maria Evaristo dos Santos is an educator and longtime activist in the fight for racial justice, public education, and the rights of traditional peoples in Brazil. Born in São Gonçalo do Pará (MG), she graduated in Social Work at PUC Minas (Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais), where she also obtained a master's degree in Education, with the thesis entitled *"Instituting practices for the management of Xacriabá schools"* (2006). A teacher in basic education since the age of 19, she was the Municipal Secretary of Education of Belo Horizonte and, later, Secretary of Education of the State of Minas Gerais, being the first black woman to hold this position. She was Secretary of Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion of the Ministry of Education (MEC) from 2013 to 2014. Throughout her administrations, she implemented public policies aimed at inclusion, combating racial inequalities, and played a decisive role in the application of guidelines for indigenous and quilombola school education. In 2024, she was appointed Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC), deepening her work in defense of the rights of historically marginalized populations. In this interview with CAAP Journal, Macaé Evaristo reflects on the paths of education and its relationship with the fight for democracy and social justice.

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1. You have already stated that public schools and universities should be spaces for the output of democracy. What is your analysis of recent attempts to militarize education – such as the establishment of civic-military schools in the state of São Paulo?

I am against this teaching model. My conception of education is based on Paulo Freire, for whom school is a space for dialogue, which seeks freedom and emancipation through education. Schools are spaces for learning and, above all, for living, so the idea of a military discipline does not fit. Based on Freire's conception, education is, in principle, a practice of freedom.

The argument for implementing civic-military schools would be the occurrence of violence in the school environment. In this sense, I bring a reflection by Professor Miguel Arroyo, who states that "it is not childhoods that are violent. They are, in fact, violated by society, by poverty, by the slums, by social inequalities, by race, by gender, and this reaches the schools." Violence in school environments requires us to formulate more complex approaches, which are not simply the imposition of a military model.

In contrast to these civic-military schools, we defend democratic, full-time schools, in which students are integrated into the territory. The school should act as a space open to the community, to culture and guided by democratic values.

2. Your dissertation, defended in 2006 at FaE (School of Education of UFMG),

investigated the Xaciabá¹ indigenous peoples. How do you see today the urgency of a public policy that not only recognizes, but *learns* from new ways of life?

My history with the Xaciabá people goes back a long way, from when I was a public school teacher, and is marked by much learning and joy. I have both a personal history of closeness and friendship with the Xaciabá indigenous people, as well as being a manager at the time I participated in the implementation of indigenous schools. I was the coordinator of the Minas Gerais Indigenous School Implementation Program between 1997 and 2004. I am always proud to see the work of federal deputy Célia Xaciabá, whom I have known since she was a child and who was also my student. And returning to the Xaciabá territory, in São João das Missões, is always very gratifying to meet friends, but above all to see the organization of these people to reclaim their territory. Among so many lessons, I understood that the fight for education cannot be separated from the fight for territory. The re-demarcation of indigenous lands is essential for other rights to be achieved.

3. Throughout history, Law has been both a field of resistance and oppression. How can we strengthen its emancipatory dimension, especially for black and peripheral populations?

Emancipation is an ongoing process of empowerment and autonomy, especially for those who face historical and structural inequalities. I am part of the black

movement, which, as Professor Nilma Lino Gomes points out, is an educator who teaches us that the anti-racist struggle must be daily and intersectional, involving public policies that promote equal opportunities and respect for diversity. It is essential to look at the field of Law as a locus for the construction of emancipation. However, when we look at the Brazilian judiciary, we come to the sad conclusion that there is still a long way to go before we can have a greater presence of black people in the Brazilian judiciary and that affirmative action is necessary for this. I had the opportunity to speak on this topic at an event promoted by the Peregum Black Reference Institute, which has been conducting a technical assessment and monitoring the implementation of quotas in the judiciary. We have a lot of work to do.

4. Over the last decade, Brazil has seen the dismantling of public universities and the decreasing finance for researchers – something that is now being repeated on a global scale under Trump's auspices. What paths do you see to resist this scenario and strengthen a plural, critical and socially rooted science?

The attack on universities is a concrete face of a war against science by segments of the far-right. In this dispute of worldviews, it is strategic to rethink science based on an epistemology that seeks dialogue with other types of knowledge, especially with social movements that fight for justice, equality and democracy. I also believe that the field

of law can be in conjunction with popular struggles. Only in this way is it possible to think about modern sciences from a decolonizing – and, we might say, emancipatory – perspective.

5. Nowadays, algorithms have been shaping behaviors, decisions and even feelings on digital platforms². What is the role of education in the critical development of new generations?

This is not just a debate in Brazil; it also occurs more broadly in the context of transnational companies. We have to debate and regulate the companies and platforms that operate behind these platforms and that use bullying, violence, racism and misogyny as mechanisms to make a profit. Often, behind an innocent game, or a children's cartoon that your son or daughter is watching on the internet, there are pedophile networks and offerings of digital games. We are taking strong action, in conjunction with other sectors of the federal government. Our government has already taken very effective actions, such as the legislation that prohibits the use of phones in schools, a legislation which is having concrete effects.

6. The homeless population has grown dramatically in recent years. In Belo Horizonte alone, there are approximately 15,000 citizens in this situation. How does the *Visible Streets* program seek to ensure the fundamental rights of homeless people, and how does the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC) work

to ensure that its implementation effectively reaches the areas most at risk?

The increase in the number of homeless people is a phenomenon that has intensified in several Brazilian cities, including Belo Horizonte, reflecting structural inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In light of this scenario, the MDHC has been acting strategically with the Visible Streets program: National Plan for the Rights of the Homeless Population.

The Visible Streets program is an inter-ministerial initiative, coordinated by the MDHC, which aims to guarantee access to fundamental rights for this population, with three major actions for access to Minha Casa Minha Vida (My Home My Life), the Cozinha Solidária program (Solidarity Kitchen) and the Pontos de Apoio da Rua program (Street Support Points) (PAR). The focus is to break the cycle of invisibility and institutional violence, acting in the territories through coordination between the federal government, states, municipalities and civic society.

In Minas Gerais, MDHC monitors local reality through integrated actions, technical visits, federative coordination and support for policies such as Minha Casa, Minha Vida (My House My Life), aimed at the homeless population, in addition to promoting support points, solidarity kitchens and community initiatives for care and protection. Our commitment is to take this program to all Brazilian municipalities and ensure that federal public policy reaches the frontline

with effectiveness and dignity, based on the recognition of the homeless population as subjects of rights, and not as targets of social cleansing actions or criminalization of poverty.

7. In over 130 years of the Republic, Minas Gerais has never had a woman elected governor. What does this fact reveal about Minas Gerais politics?

We can still see an unsatisfactory female representation in the highest positions in Minas Gerais and Brazilian politics, such as governor and senator. But the good news is that this situation is changing. We can see this progress in the legislatures. For example, 15 women were elected to the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais for the 20th legislature in the last election, four of whom were black women. Women have increasingly realized the importance of making institutional spaces more diverse. It is time for the electorate to start thinking about the representation of women in positions such as governor and senator.

8. What would you like a black teenager to say if she finds her name in a history book in the future?

In my city of São Gonçalo do Pará, I was a teenager who was passionate about literature. Books have always been great portals and having contact with the history of black women was fundamental for me to be able to dream and envision the paths I have taken. I want this teenager, who sees my trajectory, to know that it is

possible to engage in politics with joy and that the story of an ordinary black woman is the history of this country and worthy of being included in history books.

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