



Master's thesis analyzes the erasure of cultural black manifestations and existence, based on Porto Alegre's urban planning

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City | Based on the analysis of three historical events in the capital, a researcher observed how the "sanitization" process of spaces occupied by the black population took place over the years

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*Photo: Ilhota landscape in the 1950s/ Personal Archive

"It is evident that white people don't go on secret meetings at five in the morning to establish how to keep their privileges and exclude black people. But it feels like they do," Cida Bento, psychologist and activist, summarized what she calls "white pact". Similarly, in the general improvement plan for Porto Alegre from 1914 it wasn't written which avenues needed to be open so that black people would leave the spaces they occupied, but that was what happened. In face of the capital's increasing background of inequality, a master's thesis of the Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning from UFRGS analyzed how the urban structure of Porto Alegre was built, over the years, in a process of "sanitization" of spaces previously occupied by the black population and the resulting invisibility of these people in favor of the acquisition of the "modern", whose enjoyment was and still is mostly taken by the white population.

Vitória Kramer de Oliveira, author of the research, used the methodology of scene analysis, in which she reported three historical events in the city of Porto Alegre: the construction of Avenida Borges de Medeiros, where Beco do Poço used to be; the Redenção [Redemption] fields, named in honor of the liberation of enslaved black people from the third district of the capital, where Parque Farrroupilha is today, and the dismemberment of the Ilhota territory and its replacement with a neighborhood plan to open large avenues and a channel, the Arroio Dilúvio. For the researcher, these events highlight the tension between urban planning, the idealization of the city, what this represents in practice and who the people affected by these plans are.

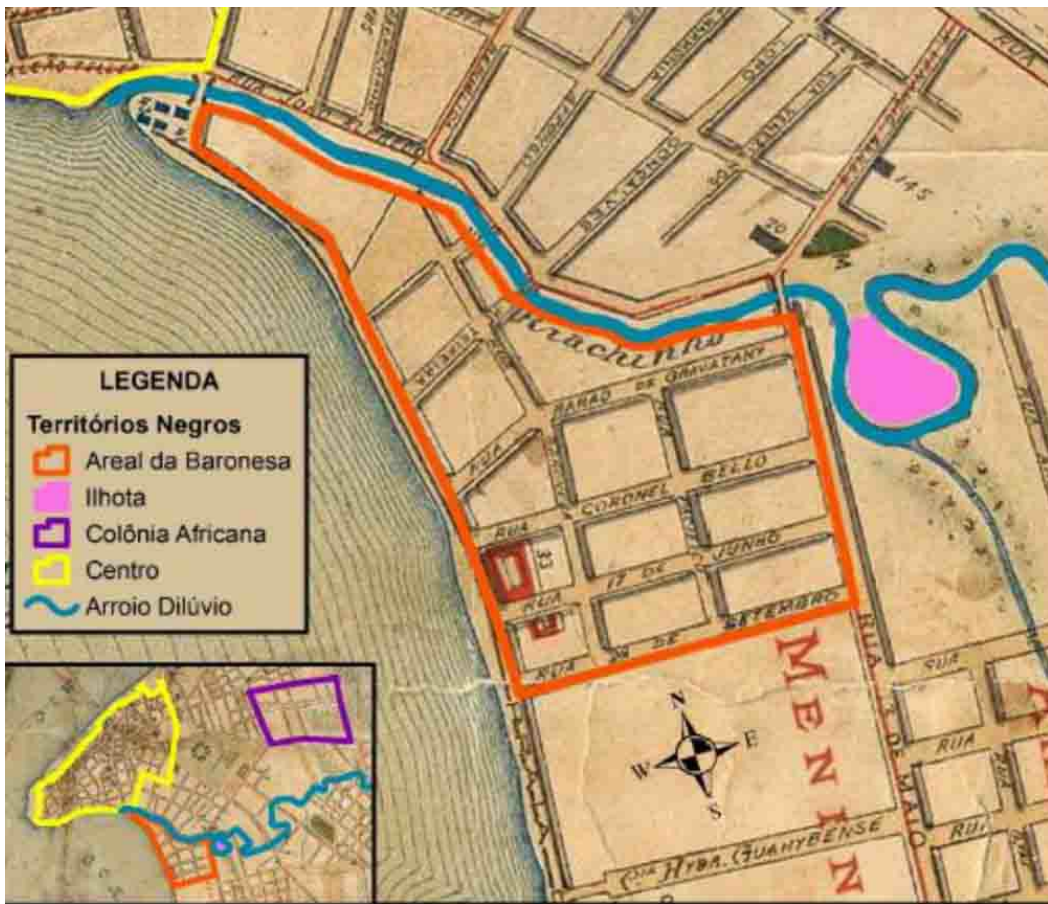
"Analyzing the plans that were envisioned for the city since 1914, more or less, we clearly see an ideal city that did not obviously talk about race, but when we see in practice how this urban planning was carried out — the reforms, the sanitization —, there was a very clear racial component"

— Vitória Kramer de Oliveira

Through analysis of newspapers at the time, the researcher understood how these stigmatizations were made regarding which spaces should be sanitized — spaces that, incidentally, were occupied by a poor black population. But what the researcher defends in her thesis is that this process is not a coincidence. "When several coincidences happen throughout history, we begin to notice a pattern of behavior, and not something that happened by chance," she says.

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Map of Areal da Baronesa and Ilhota before changing the course of the Riachinho, now Arroio Dilúvio – 1905 (Image: Personal Archive)

De-invisibilizing whiteness

Vitória started from her own racial experience to set a central tone for how she would approach the research topic. As a white woman, when researching the erasure of blackness in Porto Alegre, her fear was that she was claiming a place of speech that did not properly belong to her. Therefore, even exploring equivalent studies by black researchers on memory and erasure, her theoretical contribution was the de-invisibilization of whiteness as a predominant race in these urban projects, highlighting it. "I had to bring in a lot of this vision of whiteness, which was missing at the time of urban planning in the readings I was doing," she comments.

Gaps in Porto Alegre's history allowed these narratives to resurface. Following the Lei de Cotas (Quotas Law), greater access for black people to universities led to an increase in academic work on race. Vitória reports that the great foundation that made the research possible was the work of other black intellectuals and researchers, both from UFRGS and PUCRS. Among these, she mentions Daniele Vieira, whose research has a geographical and mapped perspective of the memory of the territories of the city's black community.

More important than the reality of a place is the image we have of it. "In the South, in Rio Grande do Sul and in Porto Alegre, for example, we built an image of a city, with a white European population, descendants of Germans, Italians and Portuguese," explains the researcher. On the other hand, the black cultural existences and manifestations present in the region, state and city are set aside due to the prevalence of this European root, whose origin lies in a well-done effort of identity construction.

Regarding what predominates in the current urban field, Vitória highlights that the production of this type of sanitization in the city is something that still remains.

"I think it's worth thinking about which city ideal we continue to reproduce. Where do white and black people live? Do they go to the same leisure spaces? Who is more privileged to have their history preserved in the city and who is not?"

— Vitória Kramer de Oliveira

Unlike the beginning of the last century, literacy and racial awareness are in evidence in the public debate, "despite the false concern with the racial issue in the municipal political field", points out the researcher. Vitória's expectation is that the research will contribute to more debates and reflections around racial issues in urban planning.

Even without knowing what she intends to research next, Vitória does not exclude the possibility of a doctoral training. Her study perspective is to follow a critical line that allows her to create tensions around what is considered concrete or fateful. The path she intends to follow as a professional is one of difference. "I really believe that science encourages this power of change, of seeing new things and breaking old paradigms. There is an important component of social and political change within research in human and social sciences," she observes.



Illustration of Beco do Poço, in the central region of Porto Alegre — 1920s (Image: Personal archive)

Translated into English by **Bianca Costa Lopes**, undergraduate student enrolled in the course "Supervised Translation Training II (English)" of the Undergraduate Program in Language and Literature, under the supervision and translation revision of Professor Elizamari R. Becker (P.h.D.) – IU/UFRGS.

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