

THE TRAJECTORY OF WALDIR PINTO MONTENEGRO MATOS: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER IN EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN BAHIA



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the trajectory of Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos, a prominent educator in the south of Bahia, with an emphasis on the contributions of her pedagogical practices and the significant educational legacy she left for the region. The analysis is conducted from a gender perspective, considering the barriers and challenges faced by a woman in a predominantly male social and educational context. This study is part of an initial research on memory, municipalism and education in southern Bahia, between the 1940s and 1950s, carried out within the scope of the Graduate Program in Education of the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Bahia, in 2023. Waldir's work in the interior of the state, from his training to the creation of educational institutions, reflects a model of resistance and innovation, subverting gender and social norms. The study uses as a theoretical basis contributions on collective memory, cultural history, teacher development and gender, in order to understand its relevance for education and female empowerment in the region.

Keywords: Waldir Pinto Montenegro. Gender and Education. Teacher Development. Collective Memory. Female Empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos, one of the most relevant figures in the history of education in southern Bahia, offers a unique opportunity to study educational practices in peripheral contexts and the overcoming of barriers imposed by patriarchal structures. Professor Waldir's trajectory is marked by an identity construction deeply rooted in the history of her family and in the socioeconomic context of the interior of Bahia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Waldir was born on March 28, 1917, in Caetité, in the hinterland of Bahia, as part of a large family from different marital contexts of his father. His childhood was lived in a rural environment, on a family property located about two kilometers from the municipal headquarters. According to her, this migration was motivated by political persecution, leading members of the Montenegro family to disperse to states such as Bahia, Ceará and Rio Grande do Sul (Matos, 2004). In this process, the surname Montenegro would have been adopted again in Brazil as a form of identity protection and reconstruction, a relevant symbolic element in the family's narrative of belonging (Assis, 2024).

Waldir's childhood took place in a typical dynamic of rural communities of the period, characterized by direct contact with nature and a domestic routine shared between family members. The environment of the family farm, with its fruit trees and livestock, enabled an experience marked by the exploration of space and activities that mixed leisure and learning. It was in this context that Waldir had his first contacts with formal education (Assis, 2024).

Going to school, although limited in resources and far from the sophistication of large urban centers, represented an initial milestone in the literacy process and in the construction of her identity as a future educator (Assis, 2024). The daily routine of walking to school, interspersed with reading and other activities in the family environment, played a crucial role in the consolidation of skills that would be fundamental in her professional career.

Waldir's education is inserted in a historical context in which formal education was still limited in the interior of Brazil, especially for women. The combination of a rural childhood with a structured family nucleus favored the development of skills and perspectives that would shape their educational trajectory. Waldir's account of living with siblings and participating in collective activities suggests the importance of early social interactions in the formation of his worldview (Matos, 2011).

Born and educated in an environment of scarce resources, Waldir defied gender norms and became a leading figure, especially in the educational field. Although the account of her childhood is permeated by personal and family memories (Matos, 2011), it is possible to identify elements that contributed to the construction of her trajectory as a teacher. The relationship between family experiences, sociocultural context and access to education outlines Waldir's first steps on a path that would lead her to stand out as an educator committed to the development of education in the interior of Bahia.

This initial excerpt of her trajectory presents the foundations of a life that would be marked by challenges and significant contributions to the educational field, especially in a scenario of social transformations in twentieth-century Brazil. Thus, this study aims to analyze her career and legacy from a gender perspective, highlighting how her performance shaped education in the region and promoted female empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

This article examines the trajectory of Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos, a prominent educator in the south of Bahia, with an emphasis on the contributions of her pedagogical practices and the educational legacy left to the region. This study is part of an initial research on memory, municipalism and education in southern Bahia, in the 1940s and 1950s, developed within the scope of the Graduate Program in Education of the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Bahia, in 2023. The study adopts a descriptive approach, based on bibliographic and documentary research, with the objective of understanding the trajectory of Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos in the light of theories on collective memory, cultural history, teacher development and gender.

The methodology seeks to identify and analyze the main events, practices and challenges faced by Waldir, in addition to his contributions to the educational field in the south of Bahia. The documentary research included the examination of primary and secondary sources, such as minutes, ordinances, local newspapers, oral and written testimonies that directly address Waldir's life and work, such as Matos (2018) and Benevides (2011). These documents were cross-referenced with theoretical sources that support the analysis, including Halbwachs' (2004) theories on collective memory, Le Goff's (2003) contributions on cultural history, and Ferreira's (2023) and Tardif and Lessard's (2011) reflections on teacher development.

To integrate the gender perspective, the study also relies on authors such as Scott (1995), who discusses gender constructions as historical and cultural categories, and Louro (1997), who addresses gender relations and their implications in educational practices. The analysis of the sources was carried out in the light of these theories, seeking to understand how Waldir's performance challenged gender norms and contributed to the transformation of the local educational scenario.

The descriptive approach allowed mapping and systematizing the events and achievements that marked Waldir's trajectory, providing a detailed overview of his pedagogical practices and the legacy left for education in the region. The research also considered the historical, social, and political contexts that influenced her actions, highlighting the specificities of her performance as a woman in a predominantly male environment.

THE EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORY OF WALDIR PINTO MONTENEGRO

The formative trajectory of Waldir Pinto Montenegro is inserted in an educational context marked by the need to expand and strengthen teacher training in the Bahian hinterland. In 1922, after the marriage of one of her paternal sisters, Waldir was invited to live in the city of Caetité to keep her company. At the age of eight, in March 1925, she was enrolled in the school run by teacher Beatriz Rodrigues Lima, where she attended the first and second years of primary education (Matos, 2011).

The year 1926 marked the foundation of the first Normal School in the interior of Bahia, a significant advance for the training of teachers in rural and peripheral areas. Located in an old Jesuit building, the institution was established in Caetité with the objective of meeting the need for teachers in the hinterland, expanding access to qualified pedagogical training. In 1930, Waldir was transferred to the School Attached to the Normal School, where she completed the third and fourth years of primary education, demonstrating progressive academic prominence (Assis, 2024).

The Normal School, directed by teacher Evangelina Lobão, represented a space of academic rigor and integral training, with pedagogical practices that incorporated civic instruction and extracurricular activities. Students were encouraged to use the institution's library, considered an essential pillar for strengthening research and study skills.

In 1934, Waldir entered the Normal School of Caetité, at the age of 16, starting a course that combined theoretical and practical knowledge. The curriculum, broad and

diverse, covered subjects such as Psychology, Didactics, Fundamentals of Education, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Moral and Civic Education, and Handicrafts. The training was enriched by supervised internships, carried out at the School of Application and in other primary schools in the city. According to Waldir's own account: "In the 1st and 2nd years of the course, we studied subjects that today correspond to high school. We also participated in intense pedagogical practices, which effectively prepared us to work in primary education." (Matos, 2004, "verbal information").

One of the highlights of this practical training occurred when Waldir temporarily took over a class of a professor on leave for health reasons, an experience that was recognized as part of his internship. In 1936, she completed the normal course and was chosen as valedictorian of the class, evidencing her academic performance and leadership.

After her graduation, Waldir was appointed to teach in Santa Rosa, in the municipality of Condeúba, in 1937, through a decree signed by Governor Juracy Magalhães. Her approval in a state public exam in 1938, in which she was among the top five, consolidated her position as an effective teacher in the state network.

Waldir's teaching career was marked by a diversified itinerary, involving transfers and adaptations to different locations. During her work in the municipality of Livramento, she stood out as director of the Lelis Piedade Schools and promoter of educational and civic events. In 1951, her work was recognized with the appointment as regent of supplementary education and teacher at the Livramento Gymnasium (Assis, 2024).

THE PRESENCE OF PROFESSOR WALDIR IN IBICARAÍ IN THE SOUTH OF BAHIA

The educational context of Ibicaraí in the 1950s was marked by challenges and initiatives, of which Waldir Montenegro emerged as a central figure. On March 21, 1954, the Cooperative of Education and Culture of Santa Cruz da Vitória Resp. Ltda., a landmark that integrated municipalities such as Ibicaraí, Itabuna, Itapetinga and Ibicuí, economically interconnected. The initiative was widely publicized, highlighting the leadership of José Guedes de Magalhães as an agent of regional progress (Jornal Voz de Itabuna, May 25, 1954).

Waldir Montenegro was transferred to Ibicaraí in 1954, through Ordinance No. 1736 published in the Official State Gazette, to work at the 14 de Agosto Gymnasium, linked to the National Campaign of Free Schools (CNEG). The transfer took place with the support of Batista Neves, then Secretary of Education of Bahia. Waldir already had extensive

experience in secondary education and registration in the Campaign for the Dissemination and Improvement of Secondary Education (CADES) to teach subjects such as Geography, General History and History of Brazil.

THE PERFORMANCE AT THE 14 DE AGOSTO GYMNASIUM

Upon arriving in Ibicaraí, Waldir took over practically all the subjects of the 14 de Agosto Gymnasium due to the lack of other teachers. In addition to his work in the classroom, Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos was an active figure in the management and strengthening of the educational structure of the gymnasium. His vision of education went beyond the teaching of subjects and involved the construction of a school environment that promoted the intellectual growth and character of students.

The trajectory of Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos was marked by important contributions to the educational development of Ibicaraí, and his influence was central in the creation of two institutions that stand out in the history of the city: the Commercial School of Ibicaraí and the Montenegro Education Academy.

THE CREATION OF THE COMMERCIAL SCHOOL OF IBICARAÍ

Since his arrival, Waldir Montenegro idealized the creation of a high school institution in the city. In partnership with the Cooperative of Education and Culture of Santa Cruz da Vitória and with the support of José Guedes de Magalhães, it began the procedures to found the Commercial School. In February 1956, the first entrance exam to the Night Commercial Gymnasium was held, evaluated by a commission composed of prominent figures such as Father Nestor Passos and journalist Otávio Moura.

However, conflicts with local leaders, such as Justino Marques, president of the local CNEG directory, culminated in Waldir's dismissal from his duties at the 14 de Agosto Gymnasium in March 1956. This episode highlighted political and institutional tensions in the conduct of educational projects in the municipality (Assis, 2024).

The Commercial School of Ibicaraí was an initiative of great relevance for technical and commercial education in the city. Founded at a time when Brazil was beginning to expand technical education, in order to train professionals trained to work in specific areas, the school was a milestone in local educational development.

Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos had a direct and significant participation in this institution. His experience and vision of expanded education were essential for the

consolidation of the school, which offered the young people of Ibicaraí the opportunity to qualify in areas related to commerce and administration, which was of great importance in a region in economic growth, especially in the context of cocoa production. The school prepared students for the job market by providing a practical education that was geared towards the needs of the local community.

POLITICAL CAREER AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

In addition to his contribution to education, Waldir Montenegro played an active role in local politics. In 1958, she was elected councilor for the Republican Party, becoming, along with Zilda Cerqueira Mascarenhas, one of the first women to hold this position in Ibicaraí. During his term, he led important movements, including the impeachment process of the second mayor of the municipality for administrative impropriety, registered by the City Council on December 30, 1961.

PEDAGOGICAL STYLE

Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos was recognized for a pedagogical style that balanced disciplinary rigor and sensitivity. Their traditional approach included the use of methods such as punishment to maintain order and focus in the classroom, which engendered respect and sometimes fear among students. This rigor reflected her high expectations in relation to the academic performance and ethical behavior of students, characteristics that she considered essential for the formation of responsible and committed citizens.

However, despite his firmness, Waldir showed sensitivity and care for the well-being and development of the students. Reports highlight his dedication to understanding the needs of each student, showing that his concern transcended the pedagogical dimension, aiming at the integral formation of individuals. This balance between demand and humanized attention has made her pedagogical practice not only unique, but also effective, inspiring generations of students and teachers.

THE MONTENEGRO ACADEMY OF EDUCATION

Overcoming adversity, Waldir fulfilled his educational dream with the foundation of several courses at the Commercial School of Ibicaraí, which were unified in 1972 under the name of Montenegro Education Academy, a tribute to his family and legacy. The enterprise

housed the Technical College of Commerce, the Normal School and the Gymnasium of Ibicaraí, as well as professional courses that responded to local demands.

The Montenegro Education Academy, created later, was an institution that perpetuated the legacy of Waldir Pinto Montenegro. This academy, which bears his surname in recognition of his educational contribution, was established with the objective of fostering education, culture and preservation of the values that Waldir defended throughout his life.

The academy has become a space for debate and promotion of ideas, aimed at strengthening education in Ibicaraí and the region. It brought together educators, thinkers and people committed to raising the educational level of the community. In addition to its role in promoting academic and cultural events, the academy also served as a tribute to Waldir's trajectory, reflecting the lasting impact of his work on the education of young people and the intellectual development of Ibicaraí.

These two institutions symbolize different periods in the trajectory of Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos, reflecting his commitment to educational transformation and his relentless pursuit of offering better opportunities to future generations. In both, his dedication to promoting quality education, adapted to local demands, and his vision that education is an essential instrument for personal and collective development are evident. In addition, these institutions are a testament to Waldir's pioneering role in overcoming the gender barriers and socioeconomic challenges of the time, reinforcing the idea that education can be a powerful tool for social emancipation and the construction of a more just and equitable society.

The Montenegro Academy of Education remains in memory as a testament to its dedication to education, symbolizing a legacy of progress and social transformation that has deeply impacted the southern region of Bahia. Waldir Montenegro left not only an educational contribution, but also an indelible mark on the political and cultural history of Ibicaraí and adjacent municipalities.

THE CREATION OF THE MONTENEGRO COLLEGES OF IBICARAÍ

Waldir Montenegro consolidated her trajectory as an educator and manager by creating the Montenegro Colleges of Ibicaraí, demonstrating a visionary spirit and unwavering determination. Always committed to improving her knowledge, she participated in courses, congresses and seminars throughout her professional life. In the 1970s, he

entered the Pedagogy course, with a qualification in School Administration, by the Federation of Higher Schools of Ilhéus and Itabuna (currently the State University of Santa Cruz - UESC), completing his graduation in 1979.

His commitment to improving the structure of the Montenegro Education Academy culminated in the foundation, at the age of 72, of the first private college of Physical Education in Bahia. Through Ministerial Ordinances, Waldir was able to implement the higher education course of Full Degree in Physical Education. A few months later, he created the Faculty of Education Montenegro, offering the Pedagogy course with qualifications in Teaching of Pedagogical Subjects, School Administration and Educational Guidance (Matos, 2018; Benevides, 2011).

Waldir's vision for the training of professionals did not stop there. In 1999, it expanded the academic offer by including the courses of Tourism and Executive Secretariat (bilingual), both with training at the bachelor's level. These new courses reinforced the role of the Montenegro Education Academy as a maintainer and consolidated the institution as a reference in higher education in southern Bahia.

CHALLENGES AND THE LEGACY LEFT

According to Matos (2018), under Waldir's leadership, the Montenegro Education Academy graduated 31,176 students between 1956 and 2000, directly impacting the education of generations of Ibicaraians. In 2002, the newspaper *Correio de Ibicará* published a tribute entitled "A life dedicated to Education", highlighting the pioneering work of the teacher as "extraordinary and worthy of reverence". Waldir was described as a woman ahead of her time, committed to the educational progress of the region.

The newspaper *A Gazeta*, in a special edition of 1999, emphasized the innovative character of the Montenegro Academy of Education, considering it a "victorious dream" that represented the audacity and sensitivity of its creator. On the school's façade, Waldir left messages that summarized his educational philosophy: "Without letters, life is dead" and "Open schools to close prisons" (Matos, 2018).

In the last years of her life, Waldir faced administrative and financial difficulties that led her to transfer the management of the institution to third parties. This transition, marked by mistakes, resulted in the loss of part of his assets (Benevides, 2011).

Waldir Montenegro passed away on October 11, 2011, at the age of 94 years and 7 months, receiving tributes and recognition from his community. His burial was marked by

solemn ceremonies and demonstrations of respect and gratitude, highlighting the indelible impact he left on the education of Ibicaraí.

His legacy is celebrated as a definitive milestone in the history of local and regional education. The Montenegro Academy of Education and Montenegro Colleges remain in the collective memory as symbols of their commitment to progress and transformation through teaching, exemplifying the strength of their leadership and their innovative vision.

Thus, Waldir's legacy went beyond the limits of the classroom, consolidating itself in the structuring of institutions that became educational pillars in the region. His legacy is not only in the practices he applied, but also in the transformations he promoted in generations of students and teachers. Waldir Pinto Montenegro Matos remains a reference of educational leadership, whose performance profoundly marked the history of education in the south of Bahia.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the 1950s, the Brazilian educational field was predominantly male, especially in the spheres of leadership and administration. The work of Waldir Pinto Montenegro, however, subverted this reality, making her one of the few women to occupy leadership positions in education in Ibicaraí and region. Her choice as a woman city councillor in 1958 was one of the first manifestations of her ability to break through gender barriers by challenging social and political norms of the time. Their active participation in areas such as technical and higher education was also a demonstration of the transgression of the space traditionally occupied by men.

Their subjectivation in academic spaces is marked by the timeline in which private spaces were reserved for women, a characteristic of the demarcations of cultural relations constructed by gender and with men being a universal subject who must occupy public spaces (Beauvoir, 1967). In view of these social marks, we can affirm that Professor Waldir lived within a discursive chain of gender marked by the network of power relations, as well as by social, ethnic, class and sexuality relations.

Thus, we identified that Professor Waldir stood out for being a woman who was inserted in a social context marked by inequalities in power relations between men and women.

THE CHALLENGE OF BEING A WOMAN IN EDUCATION

In the 1950s, Brazilian society was still deeply structured by a gender divide that relegated women to the private and domestic space, while men dominated the public sphere, particularly in the areas of politics and education. Waldir Pinto Montenegro, by challenging these conventions, became an example of resistance. Her leadership in the creation of the Commercial School of Ibicará, along with the founding of the Montenegro Academy of Education, can be seen as a deliberate effort to expand educational access while also subverting the limitations imposed on women.

In this period, in the Brazilian scenario, a social mentality of limitations of rights and submission of women within the relations and productions of a capitalist society prevailed, supported by the classification and separation of the sexes. However, Waldir contributed to break with these cultural and social patterns present in Ibicarian society. According to Floresta (1989), for women to conquer spaces in an excluding society, it was necessary to access them through scientific knowledge. Path taken by Professor Waldir Montenegro.

In view of her trajectory in the labor market, as well as in the academic environment, Professor Waldir showed that she is ahead of her time, postulating an ideal of equality between the genders that, according to Beauvoir (1980), only acquires in a concrete and realistic way in the face of the occupation of spaces in the labor market.

According to Louro (1997), education has always been a space in which women have had to fight against gender stereotypes, especially in the role of leaders. In her analysis of the role of women in education, the author states that the teaching profession often requires women to behave more authoritarily in order to be seen as competent and successful, something that Waldir Pinto Montenegro clearly exemplifies.

EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

The creation of the Montenegro Academy of Education and, later, of the Montenegro Faculty of Education, was one of Waldir Pinto Montenegro's greatest achievements. Through these institutions, she not only offered technical and vocational training to the local population, but also opened doors for many women, providing them with the necessary tools to engage in the labor market and public life.

She defended her point of view and waged her social struggles even though she was not part of any feminist group. As Costa and Sardenberg (2008) state, women's

struggles must be defended and fought by women, characterizing the differences in the articulation in favor of a feminine identity, which has different identities.

CURRICULAR INNOVATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

By creating courses in Physical Education, Pedagogy, Tourism and Executive Secretariat, Waldir Pinto Montenegro demonstrated his ability to adapt education to local needs and the socioeconomic context of the region. Curricular contextualization, as discussed by Tardif and Lessard (2011), is fundamental for educational success, as it allows educators to connect content to the realities of their students. Waldir followed this line of thought, creating a model of education that, at the same time, offered technical and personal development.

According to Silva and Tardif (2010), teacher development, especially in peripheral contexts, must incorporate diversity and local needs, which is evident in Waldir's work. By adapting the courses to the context of Ibicaraí, she broke with the rigidity of traditional curricula and created an education that was in tune with the socioeconomic and cultural reality of the students.

WALDIR'S PEDAGOGY: AN EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

Waldir Pinto Montenegro's pedagogy was in line with Paulo Freire's (2004) ideas about emancipatory education, which proposes a critical and reflective approach to education. Waldir, through her work as a teacher and manager, trained students who not only absorbed academic content, but also developed a critical understanding of the world around them. Her work aimed at social transformation, with a special focus on overcoming gender and class inequalities, offering students the tools they need to become agents of change.

It is considered that the pedagogical practices of women like Waldir Pinto Montenegro are essential to promote a type of education that not only teaches, but also empowers and awakens political and social awareness, allowing students to perceive their role in society and the ability to act on it.

GENDER AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: THE CHALLENGE OF THE WOMAN LEADER

Gender is present in all social structures, and time and history are determinants in the collective organization and reproduction of generations. As a woman in a leadership position in a predominantly male field, Waldir Pinto Montenegro had to deal with the challenges imposed by a society that, even in the 1960s and 1970s, viewed with reservations the rise of women to power. She was often described as a strict and demanding person, characteristics that, at the time, were more associated with men than women.

Waldir's leadership, however, was fundamental for the consolidation of the Montenegro Education Academy and Montenegro Colleges, which have trained thousands of students over the years.

EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT

According to Ferreira (2023), teacher professional development is a continuous process that requires critical reflection and constant adaptation to changes in the educational field. Waldir Pinto Montenegro has incorporated these principles throughout his career, promoting the continuous training of teachers through the Montenegro Education Academy. This space, aimed at updating and improving teachers, served as a powerful tool to empower educators, especially women, in a peripheral context.

DICHOTOMY BETWEEN FEMININITY AND LEADERSHIP

According to Bruschini (1994), many women still carry values from other generations that have been updated in their behavior. Traditions, values, social roles contribute to the formation of patriarchal behavior – the housewife, wife and mother.

The analysis of her leadership from a gender perspective also reveals the dichotomy faced by many women in positions of power. To be respected and maintain discipline, Waldir had to demonstrate a firmness that was often seen as incompatible with stereotypes of femininity. This balance between assertiveness and warmth is one of the most striking aspects of her leadership, as she defied expectations about how women "should" behave in positions of authority.

We perceive the existence of a dynamic of social transformation potentiated by Waldir's presence in the political scenario of Ibicarái established in space/time, in the ideas

of distinct values between men and women, in scientific fields, in political conceptions, in subjective and collective identities, as well as in the power relations of the labor spaces of the dominant models of the masculine over the feminine.

In her analysis of female leadership, Arnot (2002) highlights that women often need to adopt leadership characteristics that are traditionally seen as masculine, such as firmness, objectivity, and control. Waldir was able to balance these demands with her affectionate character and concern for the well-being of her students and colleagues, challenging established norms about what constitutes "female leadership".

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND EDUCATIONAL LEGACY

Halbwachs' (2004) theory of collective memory and Nora's (1993) cultural history provide an important theoretical basis for the analysis of Waldir Pinto Montenegro's legacy. The memory of her contribution to education is not only preserved in the institutions she helped found, but also in the lives of those who passed through her schools. Waldir's image as a determined and visionary woman continues to be a reference point in education in southern Bahia, a legacy that transcends generations.

Waldir Pinto Montenegro's trajectory is a significant example of how women can, through education, transform their communities and challenge the barriers imposed by a patriarchal society. His contribution to education in the south of Bahia, especially with regard to the creation of educational institutions and the promotion of an emancipatory pedagogy, is a legacy that endures to this day. From a gender perspective, Waldir's trajectory exemplifies the importance of an education that not only responds to local needs, but also empowers women and men to become agents of social transformation.

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