

Maria do Monte Serrat: tessituras de vida e formação educacional

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Resumo

Este artigo analisa a história de vida e formação educacional de Maria de Monte Serrat, articulando a educação escolar e os saberes do cotidiano presentes em sua obra autobiográfica. Trata-se de uma pesquisa documental que utiliza a obra "A mãe-da-teimosia: o desejo de ser" para reconstituir os modos de ser, viver, fazer e resistir de Maria do Monte Serrat. Tem como referencial teórico Michel de Certeau (2014), Foucault (2004), Ginzburg (1989) e Perrot (2019). O estudo evidencia que a formação educacional de Monte Serrat expressa tanto o peso das prescrições sociais orientadas para o matrimônio e a maternidade quanto as formas de resistência que lhe possibilitaram ultrapassar esse modelo. Sua formação docente lhe garantiu uma certa independência, mesmo em um contexto em que a função social da mulher permanecia atrelada à vida doméstica.

Palavras-Chave: Maria de Monte Serrat. Experiências de vida e formação. História da educação de mulheres. Mulheres intelectuais.

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Maria do Monte Serrat: life stories and educational background

Abstract

This article analyzes the life story and educational background of Maria de Monte Serrat, articulating the connection between her school education and the everyday knowledge present in her autobiographical work. Using the book "A mãe-da-teimosia: o desejo de ser" (The mother of stubbornness: the desire to be), this documentary research reconstructs Maria de Monte Serrat's ways

of being, living, doing, and resisting. The theoretical framework is based on the work of Michel de Certeau (2014), Foucault (2004), Ginzburg (1989), and Perrot (2019). The study reveals that Monte Serrat's educational background reflects the influence of societal norms oriented toward marriage and motherhood, as well as the forms of resistance she employed to overcome this model. Her teaching training provided her with a degree of independence, even in a context where the social role of women was tied to domestic life.

Keywords: Maria de Monte Serrat. Life experiences and education. History of women's education. Intellectual women.

Maria do Monte Serrat: historias de vida y formación académica

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la historia de vida y la formación académica de María de Monte Serrat, articulando la educación escolar y los saberes cotidianos presentes en su obra autobiográfica. Se trata de una investigación documental que utiliza la obra "A mãe-da-teimosia: o desejo de ser" (La madre de la terquedad: el deseo de ser) para reconstruir las formas de ser, vivir, actuar y resistir de María de Monte Serrat. Tiene como referencia teórica a Michel de Certeau (2014), Foucault (2004), Ginzburg (1989) y Perrot (2019). El estudio pone de manifiesto que la formación académica de Monte Serrat expresa tanto el peso de las prescripciones sociales orientadas al matrimonio y la maternidad como las formas de resistencia que le permitieron superar ese modelo. Su formación docente le garantizó cierta independencia, incluso en un contexto en el que la función social de la mujer seguía ligada a la vida doméstica.

Palabras clave: María de Monte Serrat. Experiencias de vida y formación. Historia de la educación de las mujeres. Mujeres intelectuales.

Introduction

This article provides a space for sharing the autobiography of María do Monte Serrat Carvalho Quaresma, a Black woman, teacher, and

intellectual, born in Abaetetuba, a municipality located in the Northern Region of Brazil, in the state of Pará, in the microregion of Lower Tocantins, on the right bank of the mouth of the Tocantins River. This municipality is characterized by a vast river system, interconnected islands, channels, and streams. Together with the urban landscape, these features represent the cultural and environmental diversity typical of Amazonian regions.

The aim of this article is to analyze the life trajectory and educational background of Monte Serrat, articulating school education and everyday knowledge present in her autobiographical work. Monte Serrat published more than 16 books, of which we located nine: "A Mãe-Da-Teimosia: O Desejo De Ser" (The mother of stubbornness: the desire to be) (2012); "Uma Luz Na Amazônia" (A Light in the Amazon) (n.d.); "Do Meio Do Povo Nossa História Em Lições De Vida" (From the Midst of the People: Our Story in Life Lessons) (2005), among others.

In this study, we focus our analysis on the work "A Mãe-Da-Teimosia: O Desejo De Ser" published in 2012, as it is an autobiographical writing that allows us to understand who Monte Serrat was. Her autobiography goes beyond a narrative of a historical fact; it expresses representations of historical-cultural subjects and their realities created and recreated over time.

Methodologically, this documentary research uses autobiographical literature as a source to represent the social and educational reality of Monte Serrat. Literature as a historical source allows the researcher to reconstruct feelings, values, fears, desires, anxieties, dreams, experiences, and life events of a particular era. It is marked by the representations of the writer about themselves and the world. It must be considered in this process that the literary text addresses "[...] the reality of the imaginary of a given time, this reality constructed by the perception of men, and which takes the place of concrete reality" (Pesavento, 2003, p. 40). Literature can tell us much more than other records of the past when we wish to capture the invisible and the imperceptible.

Our theoretical framework includes authors such as Michel de Certeau (2014), who addresses the invention of everyday life; Foucault (2004), who deals with self-writing; Ginzburg (1989), who proposes the evidentiary paradigm; and Perrot (2019), who analyzes the role and invisibility of women in history, among others.

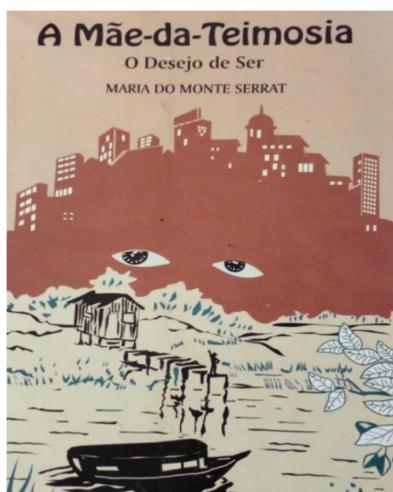
The article comprises two sections. In the first, "Self-Writing as a Place of Memory and Formation: The Autobiography of Monte Serrat," we address the materiality of the work, "*A Mãe-Da-Teimosia: O Desejo De Ser*," and the biographical traits of the writer Maria do Monte Serrat Carvalho Quaresma, who will be referred to in this study as Monte Serrat, the name by which she was known in Abaetetuba society. In the second section, "Formative Experiences of Monte Serrat: Knowledge from Experience and School Knowledge", we focus on the education of Monte Serrat in multiple educational spaces – such as the school, the family, the river, and the forest – highlighting environmental, religious, playful, and mythopoetic knowledge.

Self-Writing as a Place of Memory and Formation: The Autobiography of Monte Serrat

The work "*A Mãe-Da-Teimosia: O Desejo De Ser*" is Monte Serrat's first published work. For the purposes of this study, we used the second edition of the work, published in 2012 in Belém, Pará. The image below shows the cover of that publication:

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Figure 1 – Book cover



Source: Research archive.

The work consists of 228 pages, which, together with the front and back covers, form a set of representations that translate the daily life of Monte Serrat from her childhood, including, with emphasis on her family and educational experiences, going through her affections, dislikes, fears, dreams, and achievements.

On the cover, in the foreground, one perceives a typically riverside environment¹: a wooden house with a walkway leading to the riverbank, popularly known as a bridge; on top of it there is a person standing, apparently, making a gesture of greeting with one hand, as if waving to someone; the presence of the river surrounded by vegetation and a boat passing by is also noticeable. This landscape portrays the municipality of Abaetetuba, a city that the author calls in her work *Vila Formosa* "[...] as if it were the capital of all that tangle of rivers and streams that cut and intertwined in the region [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 40).

However, the book cover also reveals a different landscape from the one described earlier. In the background, one can see the representation of large buildings indicating the verticality of a city, probably Belém do Pará, where the author spent part of her adolescence. Monte Serrat explains what she felt when she first visited the capital: "[...] I felt afraid of the chaotic traffic [...] it seemed like a horror to me [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 140).

Furthermore, another element stands out that is not apparent on the book cover, but which may be one of the most significant points. We observe that the cluster of buildings seems to form a face in which only the slanted eyes are visible, turned towards the riverside environment. From the perspective of Ginzburg (1989), we can understand these implicit elements as clues and traces that have meaning and can help in the reconstruction of the past.

To strengthen this understanding, we sought to identify passages in the work that indicated a possible relationship between this perception and its writing. Presumably, the face represented on the book cover is that of the author herself, who tilts her gaze towards the riverside environment, indicating appreciation and a probable return to her roots. This idea is grounded in a dialogue between Monte Serrat and a doctor who offered her the opportunity to study and work in Belém:

I told her that I loved my "bush environment," as she called the city of Formosa, but that I cherished the hope of one day being able to leave for somewhere where I could continue studying, but that after graduating, I would return to my "semi-jungle" to help my people [...] (Serrat, 2012, pp. 138-139).

From this excerpt, it is clear that Monte Serrat intended to leave her hometown to continue her studies. Her writing reveals an affection for the river-side area² and a sense of belonging, especially when she uses the expressions "my bush environment" and "my semi-jungle." Although she intended to study in the "big city," her desire was to graduate and return to her hometown. In light of these indications, it is understood that the work "*A Mãe-Da-Teimosia: O Desejo De Ser*" is a journey that traverses different realities, demonstrating the writer's persistence in pursuing her academic goals.

To conclude the analysis of this material, it is worth noting that the work is composed of 69 topics that address not only the author's life story but also the culture and customs of the Abaetetuba population, with emphasis on playful, environmental, religious, and mythopoetic knowledge, which will be detailed later.

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Another interesting aspect is how the author intertwines her childhood experiences with photographs of her children and grandchildren, in addition to including poems and tributes. Following this logic, while narrating her autobiography, the author inserts, without explicit reference in the body of the text, photographs of family members that supposedly fulfill an aesthetic and emotional function, indicating the passage of time and suggesting affective bonds not clearly verbalized.

This specificity is not limited to the photographs, but the very structure and organization of the work suggest affective connections. The presentation of the work, for example, is carried out by Monte Serrat's daughter, Márcia de Jesus Quaresma Simão, who describes the writer as a teacher, mother, religious woman, poet, lover of books, and nature. These characteristics portray an editorial care for the author's legacy, suggesting that her autobiography is immersed in an affective and intergenerational sense.

Monte Serrat's work is a writing of the self, which, according to Foucault (2004), mitigates the dangers of solitude. For the author, when the

subject isolates themselves to write about their life, writing fulfills an important role of vigilance, of compensating for the absence of the other, making solitude a moment of dialogue with their inner self. Furthermore, self-care involves both the act and the thought, in a work on the subject's ways of thinking and feeling.

Still from a Foucauldian perspective, the narrative of the self involves the relationship with oneself, but not only that, "[...] it is about making the gaze of the other coincide with the one that is cast upon oneself when comparing one's daily actions with the rules of a technique of life" (Foucault, 2004, p. 162).

In her autobiographical work, Serrat (2012) acknowledges that she was very mischievous as a child and that adults used to attribute malice to her actions as if they had never been children. In a conversation about her inner self, she writes:

[...] I have always displayed worrying behaviors [...] because, purposefully, I learned to disconnect as much as I want, the outside from my inside [...] in a confidential tone, I confess that I suffered a lot after each diatribe, especially if these diatribes of mine caused suffering to someone (Serrat, 2014, p. 58).

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Monte Serrat engages with herself in the work, rethinking her actions and making a return to herself in the writing, evaluating her actions and the limits between the exterior and the interior. In this exercise, the writer forms and transforms herself in this process of self-understanding. Therefore, her narrative does not represent a mere outpouring, but a work of self-knowledge.

"Writing is, therefore, 'showing oneself', exposing oneself, making one's own face appear close to the other" (Foucault, 2004, p. 156). In Monte Serrat's autobiographical traces, one can even discern her "desire to be," which extends beyond the confines of a formal education and is summarized "[...] to the struggle in the battles called life" (Serrat, 2012, p. 233).

Maria do Monte Serrat Carvalho Quaresma, better known as Professor Monte Serrat, was born in the city of Abaetetuba, in the state of Pará, on January 17, 1937. Daughter of Julieta dos Santos Carvalho and Raimundo Damião de Carvalho, she was the fourth of a total of 10 children (Serrat, n.d.). She married Benedito dos Santos Quaresma in 1966, with whom she had

five children: Marluce Nazaré, Gilson, Maria de Jesus, Helder Benedito, and Marco Antônio. Professor Monte Serrat passed away on July 23, 2023.

Her autobiography does not contain information about her ethnic origin, but Monte Serrat was a Black woman, as shown in the following photograph.

Figure 2 – Photograph of Monte Serrat



Source: Research archive.

This photograph, provided by her husband, Benedito dos Santos Quaresma, was taken approximately one year before the writer's death. In the picture, Monte Serrat is at home, sitting on the living room sofa with her back supported by a patterned cushion; she is wearing a lilac dress with horizontal stripes, brown-framed glasses, and a red and white beaded necklace.

In 2022, when we first contacted the writer, it was not possible to conduct an interview due to her health condition; she was 85 years old and had been battling Alzheimer's disease for some time – a degenerative condition that causes memory loss and impairment in other areas of the body.

Considering the circumstances in which the writer found herself, we opted to analyze her autobiography, which helped in reconstructing her life story. We therefore propose to start from the author's own reflections to understand the meanings attributed to her trajectory.

Regarding her childhood, the author dedicates a section of her work entitled "*Children Like Others*," in which she addresses relevant aspects of play in her time. In one of her accounts, she points out: "I didn't like dolls very much, [...] I liked playing tag, hide-and-seek, flying kites, playing shuttlecock, playing with tokens, spinning tops, climbing trees [...] also playing ball [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 54).

In this excerpt, Monte Serrat not only reveals her personal preferences but also raises reflections on gender issues, subtly highlighting a division between "boys' games" and "girls' games." The author recounts that she appreciated masculine games, which, combined with other behaviors, led to criticism, as she describes in the following excerpt:

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"What a girl, people, looks more like a little tomboy! It was already common for me to hear things like that. Since I couldn't grasp the true meaning of everything I heard from the adults, I didn't pay much attention" (Serrat, 2012, p. 74).

Based on this account, it is believed that Monte Serrat's behavior was outside the established norms of the time. When she uses the term "big ones," she refers to the adults who criticized her and associated her behavior with that of a boy, therefore using the pejorative expression "tomboy," disqualifying her position in society. In fact, this account reveals much more than individual censure; it involves norms of conduct that were established in the society of the time.

Ostos (2016) reports that, between the 1930s and 1940s, it was common to find articles in newspapers and short poems in magazines discussing women, their qualities and defects, conjectures about their intellectual capacity, and also about their angelic virtue. These media outlets issued diverse opinions that inculcated aesthetic, occupational, and behavioral norms. It was a kind of social tribunal responsible for establishing what was most convenient for women in society.

Monte Serrat does not explicitly address these gender issues in her autobiography, but she expresses indignation at having her behavior constantly censored and reinforces the importance of children having the right to childhood. For Serrat (2012, 53), "[...] what really matters is being eternally a child [...];" from this point of view, she suggests keeping the playful essence of childhood alive.

The writer's accounts are not only based on the beauty of play, but also reveal a profile of the desired woman: "[...] no lady could wear short skirts; the length was below the knee for younger women and mid-calf [...] for older women." (Serrat, 2012, p. 78), demonstrating the social demands regarding women's dress code, which varied according to age. In general terms, it is a socially constructed feminine standard that influenced female subjectivity at that time.

Regarding the publications circulating in magazines in the 1930s, Ostos (2016) explains that women who did not fit the stereotypes of demure, home-loving girls found themselves in environments where discourses and practices of social diminishment predominated. This same logic appears in Monte Serrat's writing: "[...] when a woman was seen wearing a skirt that reached her knees, she was labeled a schoolgirl, which constituted an offense [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 78). In other words, there was a clear regulation of women's bodies, in which women, both young and old, did not have full freedom over their clothing.

The writer also dedicates herself to recounting the moment when her childhood was affected by financial difficulties. In the topic entitled "[...] the desire to be [...]", Serrat (2012) recounts that, after the death of her father, her mother had to work tirelessly providing domestic services and selling açaí to support the family.

According to her accounts, she extracted the açaí manually, a process known as "mashing" the açaí with her hands. Monte Serrat participated in practically all stages of the work, from purchasing and transporting the fruit to extracting the liquid.

Regarding the consequences of assuming such responsibility, Monte Serrat (2012, p. 89) interprets it as follows: "[...] I was a child of only nine years old, and I had no childhood to play, because I already had on my

shoulders the heavy burden of working hard [...] I worked like a grown-up [...]" In view of this, it can be stated that the absence of her father made the writer's trajectory difficult, as she was forced to work to guarantee her livelihood and that of her entire family.

In this context, Monte Serrat had been promoted to the fifth grade of primary school and aspired to continue her studies to become a teacher (Serrat, 2012). Becoming a teacher was part of a desire that did not arise spontaneously, but was influenced by family, specifically, by her father, as the author rightly points out: "Dad [...] said with satisfaction that, one day, I would be a teacher. This idea had taken root and grown within me. It would be wonderful to be able to teach so many who know nothing [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 88).

In this excerpt, Monte Serrat expresses the desire to teach, a wish driven by a social commitment to education. However, the path to this goal was not easy. Monte Serrat spent a long period away from school, as she had to work as a domestic servant in the homes of wealthy families. Even so, she promised herself that "[...] I would go back to studying, I would leave other people's stoves, even if it cost a lot, I would stop being the little girl in other people's houses, the rich people's; I would be a person, a real person" (Serrat, 2012, p. 126).

For the author, "being a real person" meant overcoming the condition of subordination and invisibility in which she found herself at the time. In this movement of self-affirmation – in which Monte Serrat recognizes her own value, claims her rights, and rejects subordination – she needed to leave her hometown, hoping to continue her studies in Belém do Pará.

In the capital³, the writer faced many other challenges: she believed in false promises, was exploited physically and psychologically, and rarely had the opportunity to sit on a school bench (Serrat, 2012). But, as the title of her autobiography suggests, the "mãe-da-teimosia" (the mother of stubbornness) did not give up on her projects. Monte Serrat returned to the municipality of Abaetetuba in 1957, resumed her studies, and managed to complete her teacher training course at the *Instituto Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* (*Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* Institute, INSA) in 1961.

Monte Serrat was an educator, writer, and member of the Academia Paraense de Letras Interioranas (Academy of Inland Letters of the State of Pará), where she held chair number 4. Her professional experiences are diverse, with particular emphasis on her teaching at the *Instituto Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* (*Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* Institute, INSA), between March 1958 and December 1979, in the courses for Admission to *Ginásio* (first stage of secondary education at that time), *Ginásio*, and Normal School (primary teacher training course). During this period, she taught subjects such as Portuguese Language, General History, History of the Americas, History of Brazil, and History of Pará. In the teacher training course, she also taught General Psychology, Genetic Psychology, Educational Psychology, Differential Psychology, and Psychology of Human Relations (Serrat, 2012).

She worked as a professor of Psychology and History of Education at the São Francisco Xavier School, in addition to teaching music and singing at the *Ginásio Professor Bernardino Pereira de Barros*. She was also a professor of Philosophy at the Theological School of the State of Pará and entered the public teaching profession as a state teacher, appointed by Decree No. 6349/1960. In 1968, she founded the 3rd Regional Division of Education (Serrat, 2012).

Considering Monte Serrat's teaching career and her contribution to the literary field, we conceive of the author as a mediating intellectual who, according to Gomes and Hansen (2016), has the function of disseminating conceptions of the world, society, education, and culture. In her literary work, including her self-writing, Monte Serrat focused on sharing not only her personal experience but also her conceptions of the world, childhood, work, and education.

The writing "[...] of Black women, for a long time, was ignored by critics and understood as a textuality without literary value. Black women writers and their texts seemed to be doubly out of place [...]" (Souza, 2017, p. 22), all because women's literature, in itself, was historically marginalized and delegitimized. When it comes to Black women writers, this marginalization is doubled, reflecting an impoverished conception of literature, still tied to an erudite, unilateral, and exclusionary vision that reproduces the interests of a dominant elite.

In turn, Eagleton (2006) presents a broad and inclusive conception of literature. For the author, there is no essence of literature; all literary works are rewritten, even unconsciously, by the society that reads them. In this logic, any text can be read in a literary way. Monte Serrat's autobiography, in this sense, is configured as a true literary treasure trove of a self-story committed to the desire to be more – a narrative of formation, resistance, and struggles for self-affirmation as a thinking, sensitive, active subject belonging to a community.

Formative Experiences of Monte Serrat: Knowledge from Experience and School Knowledge

The work "*A Mãe-De-Teimosia: O Desejo De Ser*" presents several chapters that narrate the life and education trajectory of Monte Serrat, which includes an incessant search for access to school education, which was sometimes denied to her, given her personal and socioeconomic circumstances. She was taught to read and write by her own mother in the home environment (Serrat, 2012).

Monte Serrat began her schooling at home and, since then, has shown an interest in writing poetry. Probably, the writer's mother had basic knowledge of reading and writing, but she did not have teacher training. Serrat (2012) reports that everyone studied before the death of her father, Raimundo Damião de Carvalho, and she had been promoted to the fifth grade of primary school.

In this context, Monte Serrat was nine years old and "[...] almost completed primary school [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 89), but the lack of financial resources represented a serious threat to the continuation of her studies. Other accounts also reinforce this same situation. Serrat reproduces her mother's words: "[...] I can no longer afford so many expenses and your little siblings, who still know nothing, need to learn something too [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 89), an argument that reinforces not only the financial difficulties faced by the family, but also a conception of education linked to the idea that knowledge is limited to the school environment. The expressions "know nothing" and "need to learn something" reinforce this thinking and demonstrate the almost exclusive valuation of formal schooling.

Brandão (1995, p. 28) states that "[...] everything that is important to the community and exists as some kind of knowledge, and as a way of teaching, also exists as some way of learning. And education is this." In this logic, the school is not the only space where knowledge is produced. The subject learns in the street, in the forest, in the countryside, in the church, and in other places where there are ways of teaching and, consequently, ways of learning.

In her autobiographical work, Monte Serrat presents traces of an education that does not only happen at school. The experiential knowledge present in her work, produced in everyday life, is marked by ways of being, feeling, doing, learning, and teaching, laden with subjectivities. When addressing her daily life, the writer portrays how her community interpreted, for example, the phenomenon of the tides:

If the tide was low, the water was dirty and muddy near the river-bank [...] they waited for the flood, when the water became cool, to fill the drinking pot, the jug for babies and women in labor. This water inside the jugs was sterilized before being used; a piece of incandescent iron was thrown into the water and left to cool, then it was ready to be drunk by women in labor and green children, who were thus free from health problems (Serrat, 2012, p. 55).

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According to the account, the water quality depended on the tides; if the tide was low, the water was dirty, but if it was high, the so-called flood, the water was fresh and could be used to fill the pots, also known as jugs. Monte Serrat also describes a traditional, empirically based knowledge that refers to the sanitization or purification of water using an iron that first needed to be heated in the fire and then placed in contact with the water. These aspects point to a set of environmental knowledge that is acquired in everyday life.

According to Silva and Cuimar (2016, p. 130), in its epistemic dimension, "[...] environmental knowledge can constitute a 'space' where it is possible to circumscribe a diversity of forms of relationship, appropriation and use that local subjects establish with nature." This means that environmental knowledge helps us understand the most varied ways in which communities live in contact with nature.

The riverside environment, especially the rivers, carries a wealth of knowledge that constitutes the social imaginary of Amazonian subjects. For

Monte Serrat, the river was not just a means of transport, but a mythological source. Serrat (2012, p. 55) believed that "[...] girls with their period – menstruation – did not go out so that the *botos* would not harm them and the water spirit would not haunt them [...]", which points to a mythopoetic knowledge, in which nature is seen as a divinity and the figure of the *boto* (Amazon river dolphin) "[...] reveals the local sexual morality pointing to tolerant and permissive characteristics [...]" (Borges Júnior; Gonçalves; Ceccarelli, 2021, p. 83), which exonerated girls who were enchanted by the *boto*, making them victims of enchantment.

Thus, there is a close relationship between environmental knowledge and mythopoetic knowledge. "Mythopoetics or poetics of myth, a vocabulary with derivations and variants, are frequently used in research involving listening to the imaginary in the field of the poetics of voice [...]" (Fares; Pimentel, 2016, p. 211), and the mythology of the *boto* is part of the Amazonian imaginary, perpetuating itself through oral tradition.

Monte Serrat (2012) also mentions the knowledge of play.

Our backyard was very large and clean: full of trees with all kinds of fruits, [...] under which we loved to play hide-and-seek, forming families of improvised dad, mom, and children [...]. It was a miniature of a real home [...] (Serrat, 2012, p. 107).

When the writer narrates this game, it is clear that, in addition to representing a profile of a traditional family, consisting of a father, mother, and children, she also reproduces her own reality. By stating that "it was a miniature of a real home," Monte Serrat probably reproduces her experiences and the socially assigned roles for each gender. Carvalho, Silva, Cordeiro and Santos (2016) state that children not only reproduce their reality through play, but also reconstruct that same reality based on their experiences, interactions with other children and adults, through stories told, and ultimately, through their interpretation of the world and the things around them.

In her writing, Serrat shows that she did not like dolls, preferring games such as hide-and-seek, kites, shuttlecocks, spinning tops, and playing ball – activities directly linked to the natural environment, the backyard, and the streets, which are educational spaces. Monte Serrat even reports that she

used to play at climbing *açaí* trees using a *peconha*⁴, a typical practice of *açaí* extraction.

This knowledge is produced in the daily activities of communities and is often ignored as a form of knowledge. According to Michel de Certeau (2014), the everyday is an invention in which individuals construct their own reality day by day, usually invisibly. In other words, reality is a historical and cultural construction in which knowledge is lived and constitutive of the subject's formation.

Considering this, we return our attention to the dilemma Monte Serrat faced regarding the possibility of stopping her studies and not even completing primary school. Serrat acknowledges the family's financial difficulties, but resists her mother's decision, claiming that she only needs her permission to continue studying and that she would not ask her for anything financially. After obtaining her mother's authorization, Serrat recounts that she received an egg from a friend and sold it for five hundred réis (old Brazilian currency) to buy a pencil, an eraser, and three sheets of paper.

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Monte Serrat continued her primary studies with limited materials, which led her to use the following strategy in the classroom: "[...] I copied everything the teacher wrote, memorized what interested me, then erased everything with an eraser, because it was all already in my head, and so, the next day, I could write new lessons" (Serrat, 2012, p. 91). The author used memorization to avoid forgetting the taught content.

Monte Serrat studied primary education at the Abaeté School Group, founded on April 2, 1902,⁵ during the First Republic period. Although the writer does not present, in her autobiography, a detailed description of the school routine in primary school, it is possible to infer, from clues, that she had an education based on moral and patriotic principles consistent with the model of education valued by republican society at the time.

When recounting the journey from school to her home, Serrat (2012, p. 103) says that "[...] the teachers, each one took the path to their residence, leaving the children free from any supervision. It was the cry of freedom for each one, the itinerary from school to home; a short freedom." The narrative indicates that students needed to be disciplined and follow a pattern of behavior in the school environment.

However, the school was not the only space that propagated this model of education; in Monte Serrat's accounts, it is possible to perceive that this ideology was present in her mother's discourses, especially regarding work.

Mom justified it by saying that we needed to learn to work, because life isn't just one thing! So, each of us had our week for each task that was performed together with the person in charge of the service, for example, a week for cooking, for doing laundry, for cleaning the house, and for taking care of the younger children. And we would take turns, always going through all the tasks routinely (Serrat, 2012, p. 107).

The excerpt demonstrates that irreproachable conduct permeated maternal teachings, functioning as an extension of school morals into the home environment. The writer's mother viewed "learning to work" as preparation for life, respecting socially imposed roles, based on a pre-established routine of domestic chores: cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, and caring for young children.

Michele Perrot (2019) considers that domestic work is fundamental to the life of every community, but it is a burden on women's shoulders, as it is a strictly feminine task, according to the crystallized pattern in society. "It is also a burden on their identity: the perfect housewife is the dreamed-of model of all good education [...]" (Perrot, 2019, p. 114). In light of this thought, it is understood that Monte Serrat received an education for the home, and consequently, for motherhood.

However, Monte Serrat wanted to become a teacher and, with that intention, left the municipality of Abaetetuba⁶ for the capital of Pará to work as a domestic servant during the day and study at night. However, that was not exactly what happened; the writer was emphatic when she wrote: "[...] if you have never been a domestic servant in the home of important people, you will never be able to grasp the extent of what this means in terms of a human being. The domestic servant was treated as inferior" (Serrat, 2012, p. 144). Similarly, Perrot highlights that domestic servants,

[...] they are not salaried like the others. With room and board provided, they receive "rewards" that are passed on to them irregularly

and are subject to deductions if they break dishes or damage clothes. Their working hours are almost unlimited [...] (Perrot, 2019, p. 117).

Domestic servants, therefore, experience a situation of double oppression: firstly, for being women and, secondly, for performing the function of domestic workers. For Monte Serrat, this oppression was even greater because she was Black, in addition to being a woman and a domestic worker. This racial issue is present in the writer's narratives, evidenced, for example, in an episode she experienced while working as a domestic worker, when she heard one of her employers say: "Did you know that you are very beautiful, despite being dark-skinned? [...] you being in my house will be mine too [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 164). In this context, domestic work also exposed her to situations of sexual harassment.

After approximately five years in Belém, Monte Serrat obtained permission to study with the help of a Protestant religious leader. She took the entrance exam in 1954 at the *Ginásio Pátria e Cultura* and wrote about the selection process.

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At that time, it was a real war for places. I didn't get discouraged, I enrolled and, very excited, I went to the exams. It had been four years since I had picked up a book since I finished the 5th grade of primary school [...] (Serrat, 2012, p. 154).

The excerpt reveals a meritocratic perspective on evaluation that prevailed in the 20th century. To reach secondary education, students needed to take this exam, which, according to Gama and Almeida (2018), reinforced social exclusion, making it impossible for many students to continue their studies. In her autobiography, Serrat (2012) records that she achieved admission to secondary school in second place and that she would study at night from 6:45 p.m. to 10:45 p.m.

Monte Serrat studied in Belém until the 3rd grade of *ginásio* (Serrat, 2012). In the grade year of *ginásio*, in 1957, she canceled her enrollment and returned to the municipality of Abaetetuba, as she received a diagnosis of "general physical and mental exhaustion" (Serrat, 2012, p. 182), probably due to the overload of housework and study.

Domestic work also influenced Monte Serrat's religious orientation, as she became an evangelical Christian in the home of a Protestant family. In the following excerpt, the writer portrays her relationship with the Bible.

The Bible is almost memorized by any believer. Me too. I even memorized many psalms, entire chapters of gospels, and various verses scattered throughout the books of the New Testament. I knew which was the longest and shortest book, the longest and shortest chapter, the longest and shortest verse. [...] But each person reads, memorizes, and gives their own interpretation, it's what comes to their mind, and this is one of the main reasons why Protestantism already has more than 300 different sects [...] (Serrat, 2012, p. 180).

This is one of many accounts in which Monte Serrat addresses her relationship with the sacred. In this experience, the writer describes learning the Bible through memorization of psalms, chapters, and verses – and seeks to explain that the multiple interpretations of the biblical text contributed to the growth of the Protestant religion at the time, highlighting a given socio-historical-cultural reality.

The writer's experience within the Christian religion – her belief and the practice of memorizing biblical passages – demonstrates the presence of religious knowledge in her upbringing. Albuquerque, Bezerra, Santos, and Sá (2016) define religious knowledge as the knowledge and experiences that men and women establish with things they culturally consider sacred, based on the relationship established with God, angels, saints, entities, priests, pastors, objects, nature, animals, plants, and other agents.

These insights are also evident in Monte Serrat's relationship with nature – the rivers, the forest, the streams – as shown in the following excerpts: "The tide is so enchanting in its phases and shades that it even influences the soul of the *caboclo* (a person of mixed Indigenous and White ancestry living in rural or riverside areas in Brazil), who has a particular interest in it [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 56). She emphasizes that since childhood she has always had adoration "[...] for nature, in the countryside, in the forest, in the flowers, in the rivers, in the waves, in the song of the birds [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 58). These fragments reveal the writer's sensitive relationship with the natural world,

understanding it not only as landscape, but as an entity endowed with spiritual force.

When she returned to the municipality of Abaetetuba in 1957, Monte Serrat was able to experience other encounters with the sacred. She began giving private lessons and met the Capuchin missionary sisters, who administered the *Instituto Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* (*Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* Institute, INSA), founded on March 3, 1953, by the nuns themselves. The writer recounts that the encounter with the Capuchins influenced her religious choice: "[...] they were sisters of charity and, knowing I was Protestant, they cautiously began the work of winning me over: first captivating me and gaining my affection, and then giving me, without my asking, the guidance I needed [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 202).

In this context, the missionaries invited Monte Serrat to convert to Catholicism, but not only that, the writer recounts that: "Mother Teresa facilitated everything for me, including obtaining a scholarship, since the school was private and I could not afford it [...]" (Serrat, 2012, p. 206). In December 1957, Monte Serrat completed her final year of *ginásio* at the *Instituto Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* (*Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* Institute, INSA), and, by all accounts, received a religious education in the Catholic mold, since the institution had "[...] an educational proposal within the Capuchin Missionary Charism" (INSA, 2003, p. 5).

According to the statutes of the *Instituto Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* (*Nossa Senhora dos Anjos* Institute) (1968), the institution valued education at all levels and vocational guidance in accordance with the laws and norms established by current legislation and with the principles of Christian education, offering support to young people and assistance to the poor and needy. It was characterized as a religious and welfare institution.

In 1959, Monte Serrat enrolled in the Primary Teacher Training Course at INSA, joining a class of seven normalist students. At the time, the normal course was offered in the morning, divided into three years. Thus, Serrat attended the program between 1959 and 1961.

In Monte Serrat's autobiography, there is no detailed information about her daily life at the Normal school, but we have identified the subjects that were taught on her graduation diploma: Portuguese, Mathematics,

Physics and Chemistry; Human Anatomy and Physiology; Music and Singing; Drawing; Applied Arts; History, Geography, Educational Biology, Educational Psychology; Hygiene and Sanitary Education and Methodology of Primary Education; Educational Sociology, History and Philosophy of Education and Childcare.

All the subjects mentioned were part of the primary school teacher training curriculum, considering that, according to Louro (2004), the subjects of Psychology, Hygiene, and Childcare contributed since the 19th century not only to the training of the modern teacher, but also to instructing young women for marriage and motherhood. Serrat (2012) began her teaching career even before completing her teacher training course, already recognized as a teacher throughout the Abaetetuba community.

Final considerations

The analysis of Monte Serrat's narratives allows us to understand how the formation of a poor Black woman emerges from experiences that, although often silent or invisible, leave traces that make it possible to reconstruct her path. These fragments of everyday memories – environmental, religious, playful, and mythopoetic knowledge – present themselves as clues that, analyzed from Ginzburg's perspective (1989), allowed us to reconstruct her life trajectory and educational formation.

In this sense, Maria do Monte Serrat's narratives are marked by everyday life, which, as Certeau (2014) points out, is configured as a continuous invention, constructed by discreet practices, survival tactics, and her own ways of interpreting the world. The writer transforms her experiences into narratives that reconstruct reality, showing that education is not restricted to school, but is produced in small gestures, beliefs, customs, and play.

At the same time, self-writing, as Foucault (2004) points out, allows for an exercise through which the author not only records her history but also constitutes herself as a subject. In narrating her journey, Monte Serrat reworks her own existence, selecting, organizing, and attributing meaning to the events that marked her formation as a woman, teacher, and cultural agent.

Finally, the experiences narrated by the author fall within the field of the history of women's education, especially those whose lives were marked by domestic work, gender expectations, and the moral and religious education that shaped the female role, as Perrot (2019) asserts. Monte Serrat's education expresses both the weight of social prescriptions geared towards marriage and motherhood and the forms of resistance that allowed her to project herself beyond this profile, which linked women to teaching and, consequently, granted them relative independence.

This study, therefore, demonstrates that understanding trajectories like that of Monte Serrat requires a careful look at the subtle marks of lived experience, the inventions of daily life, the writings of the self, and the place that women occupy in history. In this way, the trajectory analyzed not only points to the uniqueness of a woman's journey in the 20th century, but also reaffirms the power of the everyday as a space for formation and re-existence.

Notes

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1. Geographical area located on the banks of rivers, characterized by abundant vegetation, river ecosystems (floodplains, streams, riparian forests), and traditional ways of life.
2. The riverside area is a term used to describe areas along the banks of rivers, lakes, or oceans, which are characterized by their proximity to water and their importance to the local ecosystem. Information available at: <https://destinotop.com/glossario/o-que-e-zona-ribeirinha/?amp=1>. Accessed on: September 12, 2025.
3. The writer does not say the year she went to work in Belém, only that she was over 10 years old.
4. Instrument made of vines, sacks, ropes, or rubber, traditionally used in the Amazon region to climb açaí palm trees, tied to the feet of the collector to provide support.
5. Information available on the official website of the Basílio de Carvalho school.
6. The year she left the municipality of Abaetetuba is not stated in her work.

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