

HELENA POTIGUARA: BIOGRAPHY OF THE INDIGENOUS EDUCATOR (1954-2009)

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ABSTRACT: The research deals with the biography of Maria Helena Gomes, known as Helena Potiguara, an indigenous educator of recognized leadership, in the Potiguara ethnic group, for her educational role in the city of Crateús-CE. Located in the field of the History of Education, with a theoretical contribution to Cultural History, the study aims to understand the educational background and political practices woven by educator Helena Potiguara, which made her stand out in the Potiguara community (1954–2009). Through the methodology of oral life history intertwined with documentary sources, a hermeneutic biographical narrative with an emphasis on Helena Potiguara's formative and political trajectory is elaborated. The results show that Helena Potiguara broke the silence of her ethnic origins through her work with the ecclesial communities of the Catholic Church, leading a differentiated indigenous education, which allowed her to lead collective mobilizations in the identity representations of the indigenous people in the city of Crateús.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous education. Maria Helena Gomes. History of education.

RESUMO: *A pesquisa trata da biografia de Maria Helena Gomes, conhecida como Helena Potiguara, mulher educadora indígena de liderança reconhecida, na etnia Potiguara, por seu protagonismo educacional na cidade de Crateús-CE. Situado no campo da História da Educação, com aporte teórico na História Cultural, o estudo objetiva compreender a formação educativa e as práticas políticas, tecidas pela educadora Helena Potiguara, que lhe conferiram destaque na comunidade Potiguara (1954-2009). Por meio da metodologia da história oral de vida entrecruzada com fontes documentais, elabora-se uma narrativa biográfica hermenêutica com ênfase na trajetória formativa e política de Helena Potiguara. Os resultados demonstram que Helena Potiguara rompeu com o silenciamento de suas origens étnicas a partir dos trabalhos com as comunidades eclesiais de base da igreja católica, protagonizando uma educação indígena diferenciada, o que lhe permitiu liderar mobilizações coletivas nas representações identitárias sobre os indígenas na cidade de Crateús.*

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Educação indígena. Maria Helena Gomes. História da educação.*

RESUMEN: *La investigación trata de la biografía de María Helena Gomes, conocida como Helena Potiguara, educadora indígena de reconocido liderazgo, en la etnia Potiguara, por su rol educativo en la ciudad de Crateús-CE. Ubicado en el campo de la Historia de la Educación, con un aporte teórico a la Historia Cultural, el estudio tiene como objetivo comprender la formación educativo y las prácticas políticas, tejido por la educadora Helena Potiguara, que le dio protagonismo en la comunidad Potiguara (1954-2009). A través de la metodología de la historia oral entrelazada con fuentes documentales, se elabora una narración biográfica hermenéutica con énfasis en la trayectoria formativa y política de Helena Potiguara. Los resultados muestran que Helena Potiguara rompió el silencio de su origen étnico a través de su trabajo con las comunidades eclesíásticas de la Iglesia Católica, liderando una educación indígena diferenciada, que le permitió liderar movilizaciones colectivas en las representaciones identitarias sobre los pueblos indígenas de la ciudad de Crateús.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educación indígena. Maria Helena Gomes. Historia de la educación.*

Introduction

There is a small river in my province, / A hinterland, where I first saw / To smile at existence the sweet light: / It has the name of the tribe that inhabited it, / When it was given to the rude tapuia, / That name, know it, - Cratheús. (Poetry “The Virgin of Crateús” by José Corroliano de Souza Lima, 1870, n/p, our translation⁴)

The initial epigraph of this text highlights the city of “Cratheús”, today called Crateús, located in the hinterlands of Ceará , 350 km away from the capital, Fortaleza, known as the Princess of the West. This region is inhabited by a representative contingent of indigenous peoples, who settled there before the Brazilian colonization. The word Crateús originates from an indigenous toponym, probably Tapuia, composed of the word *kra* (dry), *té* (thing or place) and *us* (people); which means people of the dry place. And it is in this hinterland town that the Potiguara peoples live, for which their educational context is evidenced in this study.

To understand the history of indigenous education in the state of Ceará, it is interesting to consider several documents that are perceived as the legal framework for this type of education. Firstly, it is worth highlighting the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988) which assured indigenous peoples a differentiated, specific and bilingual education in articles

⁴ Poetry Published in 1870 (in the same order as the 1870 edition) (Notes by A. Tito Filho in the 1973 Edition) and organized by Ivens Mourão (the author's great-great-grandson). Available: <https://www.portalentretextos.com.br/post/obra-completa-de-jose-coriolano-de-sousa-lima>. Access: 01 Apr. 2020.

231 and 232. Decree No. 26 of 4 February 1991 (BRASIL, 1991) which deals specifically with indigenous education, it's also worth mentioning:

Art. 1 The Ministry of Education is given the authority to coordinate the actions related to indigenous education, in all levels and modalities of education, after consultation with FUNAI (National Indian Foundation). Art. 2 The actions foreseen in Art. 1 will be developed by the state and municipal education departments in consonance with the national education departments of the Ministry of Education (BRASIL, 1991, n/p, our translation).

Another relevant contribution is the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LDB), which designated, in its Article 78, the Union Education System with the collaboration of federal agencies for the promotion of culture and assistance to indigenous people, when developing integrated teaching and research programs to offer bilingual and intercultural school education to indigenous peoples (BRASIL, 1996). The Department of Education of Ceará (SEDUC) also found and recognized indigenous schools in the state of Ceará, through Decree n. 25,970, of 31 July 2000: “creates indigenous schools that indicate and takes other measures” and assured the “specificities and peculiarities of each ethnicity” (CEARÁ, 2000, p. 2). The same happened later through other state decrees, such as n. 30,165 of 10 May 2010 and n. 30,765 of 5 December 2011.

However, the texts of these documents do not allow, in isolation, a detailed understanding of the details that involve the educational context of the Ceará indigenous groups, especially the Potiguaras. Thus, a field investigation, which considers microsocio-cultural aspects, shed light on the subjectivities of an indigenous woman educator, makes it feasible to reflect on some tensions, setbacks and achievements of indigenous peoples regarding female educational formation and the political practices undertaken towards the education of other generations. Especially, when this woman has a life story permeated by formative challenges, which overlap in the life of a female collectivity, and a long acting trajectory in the history of education in this community as a teacher; as is the case of Maria Helena Gomes, henceforth only Helena Potiguara, as she became known.

A central problem for the study was elaborated: How did an indigenous woman residing in the municipality of Crateús, in the interior of Ceará, get schooling to become an indigenous teacher and rise to a position of community leadership recognized for her differentiated educational practices and policies? To address this issue, a scientific study was developed with the aim of understanding educational formation and political practices, woven

by educator Helena Potiguara, which gave her prominence in the Potiguara community (1954-2009).

A biographical type research (DOSSE, 2015) was developed, situated in the field of the history of education, theoretically supported by cultural history (BURKE, 1992) and methodologically in the oral history of life (ALBERTI, 2006), which made it possible to reconstitute the educational context and preparing a biographical narrative of Helena Potiguara. A woman whose life trajectory was marked by her educational activities, which enabled her to carry out an indigenous formation differentiated not only between the ethnic groups that make up the Potiguara community, but also in its surroundings, inseparably interrelated to individual and collective history.

Helena Potiguara's biographical study becomes relevant because it allows not only to preserve the memory and history of education in a community, but also because it recognizes the value of the life stories of indigenous peoples, from their formative perspectives, by bringing to light the specific nuances of an educational context often made invisible and relegated to a second level importance in the historical narrative. Helena Potiguara, by becoming a reference character among the indigenous people of the state, especially in the region of Crateús, for her leadership capacity, not only contributed to the educational process of those who lived with her, but also in the political sphere for her role in the land occupation movements (LIMA, 2010; PALITOT, 2008).

For better reading comprehension, the article is subdivided into five sections, namely: "Introduction", in which the theme of the research (indigenous education) was explained, its delimitation (Potiguaras de Crateús-CE), the problem and objective of the study, as well as its relevance; "Theoretical-methodological path", which clarified the type of study, the data collection technique, the ethical aspects, among other methodological aspects; "Karatus: The breaking of silence", in which the political trajectory of Maria Helena Gomes was highlighted in her intertwining with religious entities, in which the latter made it possible to break the silence of the indigenous peoples of Crateús, which ended up mobilizing a struggle in favor of social claims; "The indigenous roots of an educational practice" which discussed the beginning of the educational practice of Maria Helena Gomes through her struggle to implement the first indigenous school in Crateús; and "Final considerations", a section in which the problematic and objective of the research is resumed in order to answer them, compiling the main results and discussions, as well as inferring limitations and suggestions.

Theoretical-methodological path

The study is inserted in the field of the history of education, theoretically supporting itself in cultural history. It is important to point out that the understanding of this historiographic current is part of the conceptions that emerged from the end of the 1920s, with the beginning of the movement known as the Annales school, which enabled History to encompass new subjects, sources, methods and research objects (LE GOFF, 2014). This approach broadens the understanding of what can be designated as historical sources, understanding them as every vestige that translates the history of man in time, whether through letters, paintings, photographs, personal documents, oral narratives, etc. (BURKE, 1992). In this area, it allows one to go deeper into the lives of common subjects, excluded or made invisible by official history. With this, the individual, the subjectivities and singularities of specific contexts that are not subject to analysis through macro-historical lenses are valued (LORIGA, 2011).

Considering that this study aims to develop a biography, it is necessary to understand the conceptualization used about the biographical genre, as well as the importance of studies on the life history of educators (FIALHO; SANTOS; SALES, 2019). According to the authors Palhari and Machado (2014), biography is a methodology with the potential for dialogue between the individual and the sociocultural, which provides subsidies to understand the individual in various dimensions. This way becomes feasible to better understand contexts from the individual life, as long as it is not heroicized or used as an example, since the historical narrative and the constituent aspects of the society of the past do not contain a single or unquestionable truth (LEVI, 1992).

It is important to highlight, in fact, that the biographical genre of this study does not intend to enshrine people, nor is it centered on figures of heroes or great martyrs (RODRIGUES, 2015), but casts new perspectives on a micro-historical perspective (LORIGA, 2011). It is an understanding that the historical making is unveiled in the daily action of subjects and social groups silenced by official history, presenting a new dimension in the construction of identities and social memory (NORA, 1993). However, it is emphasized that a biography is not restricted to the particularities of an individual's life, but seeks to understand the whole through the part, by unveiling aspects of a specific socio-historical context that broadens the understanding of the history of education (FIALHO *et al.*, 2020; XAVIER; FIALHO; VASCONCELOS, 2018).

Helena Potiguara's biography was developed with methodological support in oral history. "This methodology, which works fundamentally with narratives, reports or oral interviews, allows the researcher to prepare individual and collective analyzes and develop specific understandings, with greater richness of details and minutiae" (CARVALHO; FIALHO, 2017, p. 102, our translation). Therefore, it allowed not only a historiographic understanding elaborated through narratives of facts and events, but also a perceptibility and critical observation of archetypes that permeate the history of education of indigenous women in Brazil, especially in Ceará, under their perceptions.

To shed light on female education is to be aware that, according to Barcellar (2006), women are a social group that has not been purposely studied to favor and guarantee the male hegemony of power. And when it comes to indigenous people, silencing and invisibility are expressed doubly: by the condition of women and by ethnicity. After all, the indigenous people, historically, were attributed a mistaken understanding that they were little evolved, primitive, rude and lazy beings, who collaborated with socioeconomic backwardness, to justify the entire historical massacre. As Marques (2017) emphasizes, their perceptions and the valuation of their cultures were not considered, relegating this social group to invisibility in the history of education.

Oral History in this work was understood as the methodology that best suited the biographical research in this report, as it involves indigenous women, as Jucá teaches (2011, p. 52, our translation), it offers "a possibility of diversifying the sources to be worked on, starting to value the meaning of memory in the understanding of human life". Bueno and Cárdenas (2018, p. 30, our translation) add:

Oral History is defined, then, as the construction and interpretation of the past based on the memories and recollections expressed through the oral testimony of those who participated directly or were contemporary to the fact, studying, accompanying, confronting and comparing with other documents or sources.

Given this understanding, Helena Potiguara's orality was the object of this research, which enabled the constitution and interpretation of the past. Her memories made possible the "[...] study of the different forms of articulation of actors and interest groups, the study of socialization patterns and the trajectories of individuals" (ALBERTI, 2006, p. 166, our translation). However, a biographical narrative related to the History of Brazilian Education, in a local character, was elaborated, which presupposes "[...] the possibility of knowing and

recognizing their educators, their actions and educational practices in different historical contexts” (XAVIER; FIALHO; VASCONCELOS, 2018, p. 156, our translation).

The indigenous educator was selected through other readings, such as Palitot (2008; 2009), Thomé (1994) and Lima (2010), who listed her as the initial character of indigenous education among the Potiguara people. The contact with the interviewee took place through conversation on social networks with her son, Renato Potiguara, who is the current cacique and who was the intermediary for the interview, with the appointment of the day and place at the discretion of the educator: 5 March 2020, at the Federal Institute of Ceará, Fortaleza campus, when they would have a specialization class they were taking.

The interview with Helena Potiguara lasted about one hour, it was recorded, transcribed, textualized, validated and used as a primary source, crossed with other sources (such as books, articles, theses and dissertations), in order to unveil the relevant plots to the history of education of the Potiguara people. It is interesting to clarify that the interview was carried out after the approval of the research project “Education and Educators in Ceará of the 20th Century: practical readings and representations”, coordinated by the researcher Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho, in the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), under favorable opinion decision number 2,585,705/2018.

With the consent of Helena Potiguara, the previously scheduled meeting was held, in which she was personally interviewed, after reading the Informed Consent Form (ICF), which informed the objective of the research, the absence of benefits, its risks, the non-preservation of identity, form of participation, the possibility of giving up at any time, etc. Subsequently, the transcription was validated, which allowed Helena Potiguara to read the transcribed text literally, so that she could make the necessary adjustments to qualify the information that was provided.

The analysis of the narratives prioritized problematizing the emerging paradoxes in the social and educational trajectory of the biography, by highlighting the nuances and singularities that permeated her formative and political trajectory (CARVALHO; FIALHO, 2017). For this, there was "the development of problematizations about the education of women or even for women, propelling possibilities of breaking paradigms and questioning certain dogmas and stereotypes enshrined by common sense or by generalizations that subjugate the feminine" (FIALHO; DUKE, 2019, p. 4). This discussion resulted in a biographical narrative about the educational background of the indigenous teacher Helena Potiguara, who analyzed her interpretations of differentiated indigenous education and the collective mobilizations that resulted in the constitution of five ethnic groups in the city of

Crateús (Tupinamba, Kariri, Kalabaça, Potiguara and Tabajara), as will be presented in the following section.

Karatius: The breaking of silence

Maria Helena Gomes, an indigenous woman of the Potiguara ethnic group, was born on 20 March 1954 in Piauí, but was registered as a native of Ceará from the city of Novo Oriente. She is the daughter of Gonçalves Ferreira do Nascimento and Manoel Gomes de Oliveira, being the eldest of twelve siblings. The parents met in Piauí, where they had gone to live as children, fleeing the drought that ravaged the Ceará hinterlands, however, they returned with their family to Crateús in 1971. The author Thomé (1994, p. 183, our translation) brings one Helena Potiguara's report on this period:

I came from there with my parents when I was 8 years old, in 1962. We lived next to Novo Oriente, in the hills. My childhood life was helping to raise siblings. My mother was working in the fields with my father, and I was at home taking care of the children. I didn't go to school because in the countryside there wasn't none. Sometimes the teacher gave a month of classes, two months, but it was difficult to happen.

When talking about her schooling, Helena Potiguara says that she was literate only at age 12, in a small private school in the interior of Ceará, due to the absence of educational institutions in the vicinity of her residence and the need to collaborate with housework. She adds that she got married very young, between 15 and 16 years old, and from the marriage 3 children were born. But the marriage ended with the absence of her husband who worked traveling and spent four months of the year away.

In 1983, having to support her children on her own, and with the Crateús Hinterland region being ravaged by drought, she enlisted to work in the “Bolsão da Seca” in Santa Fé, which consisted of the registration of women by the battalion of the city to carry water from the government dam to build the wall of the Santa Fé dam. It was an emergency front, created to ease the suffering of drought victims (PINHEIRO, 2012). Helena worked for 11 months carrying 18 liter water cans on her head, from 6 am to 11 am and from 1 pm to 5 pm. The author Lima (2010, p. 159, our translation) brings a speech by Helena Potiguara about this period:

[...] I came from a job in the drought pocket, in 1983, it was five years of drought, from 1979 to 1983. The pockets were commanded by the army, from the IV Battalion of Engineering and Construction (BEC). We suffered

a lot there. In addition to hunger, lack of water, need, there was also the presence of the commander, Major Borge.

It was during the work at “Bolsão da Seca” that she met Father Alfred Kunz, known as Father Alfredinho, who invited her to go to the Church of São Francisco. Through the priest, Helena Potiguara became a member of the Brotherhood of the Suffering Servant (ISO) and joined the pastorals of the Catholic Church; like many other indigenous people who were co-opted by the Catholic Church (MAROLDI; LIMA; HAYASHI, 2018). Since then, she was enchanted by the work with the homeless developed by Dom Frago⁵, becoming a collaborator in the actions of the diocese of Crateús, when she began her political and social mobilization in the struggle for indigenous causes and felt the need to continue with the studies. The following year, in 1984, Helena Potiguara returned to regular school, as she narrates: “Twenty years later I returned to the classroom at MOB⁶. [...] it gave me the right to enroll in a state school at the 5th grade level. And so I was enrolled. I completed elementary school from 5th to 8th grade in the municipality of Crateús at the Lions school, starting in 1986” (our translation).

The constitution of social and political mobilization for the ethnic recognition of indigenous groups in the city of Crateús, during the 1990s, was undertaken by segments of society, including the collective of indigenous subjects and the pastoral actions of the Catholic Church. The Diocese of Crateús, led by Bishop Dom Antônio Frago⁵, carried out work with homeless groups, which involved the indigenous movement in the city of Crateús and other municipalities in the surrounding region. Seeking to value “its origins in these experiences of church organization aimed at the liberation of the poorest social groups” (PALITOT, 2009, p. 271, our translation).

It is important to mention that the diocese already carried out another similar work, entitled *Pastoral do Negro* (pastoral of black people), which carried out awareness about blackness, of which Helena Potiguara was also part. *The Pastoral do Negro*, in addition to developing awareness-raising activities, mobilized families who did not have housing, organizing them to carry out occupations on public lands. Helena Potiguara even participated

⁵ Dom Antônio Batista Frago⁵ was born in Paraíba in 1920 and was ordained a priest in 1944. On 28 April 1964, he was appointed first bishop of Crateús by Pope Paul VI; function he held until February 1998, when he resigned due to age limit (Conferencia Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, 2019).

⁶ The Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL) was instituted during the military dictatorship, by the federal government in the government of Emílio Garrastazu Médici, through Decree n. 62,455, of 22 March 1968, with the initial objective of teaching people over the conventional school age (15 to 35 years old) to read and write, including later the age group 9 to 14 years old.

in many of these occupations. Palitot (2008, p. 9, our translation), published narratives in which she explains:

It all started around 1988 when the theme of the Fraternity Campaign was about blacks, that we started a work in this region, in this region where I live, which is Fátima II, visiting all black families. And in these visits we managed to organize ourselves and talk about the main problems that our people were facing. So we found that it was important not only to tell the story of a black people but also to find a place to live; because nobody had a place to live.

Helena Potiguara was involved in almost all occupations, being: the first, that of the Terra Prometida, on 11 August 1990; the second, Nova Terra, on 30 August 1991; the third, in Vila Vitória, on 17 August 1993; the fourth, that of Terra Livre, on 5 August 1995; the fifth, in Campo Verde, in 1996. Her role in the black movement allowed her to visualize the importance of an indigenous organization. After all, it was in these various mobilizations and occupations that the opportunity to identify families with indigenous ethnicity was constituted, as these moments favored contact with people who became part of the pastoral and other residents who assumed the indigenous identity.

Concurrent with her work with the pastoral and occupations, Helena Potiguara went back to school, in 1990, at Colégio Regina Pacis, to complete normal high school. She completed the course in four years, of which three years were for regular disciplines and another year of specialization for high school teaching. During this period, she collaborated with Dom Antônio Fragoso's project, especially as the bishop entrusted the Belgian missionary Margareth Malfliet with a new challenge: the work of mapping the families they believed to be people of indigenous descent. Thus, “[...] the pastoral action aimed to rescue the 'indigenous roots' of the residents of Crateús. As the process progressed, the pastoral began to demand recognition of the indigenous identity and access to the rights guaranteed in the Federal Constitution to indigenous populations” (LIMA, 2010, p. 132, our translation).

Pinheiro (2012) describes the religious role in the processes of indigenous identification in Ceará, and in an excerpt of her research she reports the moment previously mentioned by Helena Potiguara about the beginning of her educational formation carried out through the Mobral program and the beginning of the work of *Pastoral Raízes Indígenas* (Indigenous Roots Pastoral).

As part of an adult literacy program, as a student, Helena Potiguara participated in a school event to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the so-called 'discovery of Brazil'. During the event, the leadership met with Dom Fragoso, when he spoke about his desire to support initiatives aimed at

valuing indigenous memory and culture in the Ceará hinterlands. In his speech, Fragoso acknowledged that the Diocese of Crateús was behind in its mission to build a 'liberating popular church' and therefore decided to ask the nun Malfliet to be responsible for creating a pastoral dedicated to indigenous issues (PINHEIRO, 2012, p. 125, our translation).

The first meeting was held in the backyard of Helena Potiguara's house, in 1992, and was attended by the missionary Margareth, Mazé Kalabaça and Tereza Kariri, with the support of Maria Amélia Leite. These women were protagonists in the survey of the ethnicity of the indigenous people of Crateús (GOMES; VIEIRA; MUNIZ, 2007). After the meeting, they decided to name the project “*Pastoral Raízes Indígenas*”. From this began the silencing break, the recognition and the reconstitution of the history of this ethnic group. In addition, Helena Potiguara gave an interview to *Revista Mensageiro*, of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), in which she spoke about the beginning of the work with the *Pastoral Raízes Indígenas*:

Then we came to discover that there was not only the strength of black people there, there were also other strengths and their influences: through our research into our stories that the elders told, we discovered that most of us were indians, in fact we are indians because of our past, from our grandparents, from our great-great-grandparents, this reality of today is born (REVISTA MENSAGEIRO, 2000 *apud* PALITOT, 2008, p. 10, our translation).

It was in this process of remembering the past with the members that Helena Potiguara and the sister Margareth Malfliet made an imaginary map of Crateús and the region around the city, making markings with places that referred to indigenous memory and attracting supporters to act in this initiative.

With the progress of the process, adhesion grew, and the pastoral configuration became limited in face of the longings of its members. The new adhesion and the news of the removal of Dom Fragoso from the Diocese of Crateús impelled them to look for another form of organization. Faced with uncertainty about the future bishop's support, they began to seek autonomy in relation to the Church. Then came the Indigenous Council of Crateús and Region (CINCRAR) in 1992, which had its importance reaffirmed with the need for an institution with legal personality to manage the resources of indigenous school education (LIMA, 2010, p. 180, our translation).

The Indigenous Council of Crateús and Region (CINCRAR) was dissolved in 2007, after 12 years of operation. Palitot (2008, p. 273, our translation), explains that this

[...] occurred after disagreements about the management of federal resources by the last board of the council, which resulted in its deactivation and the

emergence of five new indigenous associations: Indigenous Association of the Kariri de Crateús (AI-KA-CRA), which also includes Tabajara, Potyguara and Tupimamba; Potyguara Indigenous Roots Association in Crateús (ARINPOC); Association of Tabajara Indigenous Peoples in Crateús (APITC), of the Tabajara of Nova Terra, migrated from Pé-de-Serra do Ipu; the Vila Vitória – Favela Village Association (AVFVLA), of the Tabajara of Vila Vitória, and the Calabaça of Crateús Indigenous Association (AICC), which brings together the Calabaça, dispersed throughout the city.

Such associations, as can be seen, brought together indigenous families from different ethnic groups.

The indigenous roots of an educational practice

In the meantime, Helena Potiguara enters higher education, as she starts “to study Pedagogy at the 3rd degree level, which is the college at the University of Vale do Acaraú (UVA) in Sobral, in an extension in the municipality” (GOMES, 2020, our translation). When she finished the course, she left for postgraduate studies, to attend a specialization course in Teacher Education at the State University of Ceará (UECE), also in Crateús.

And I always carried with me the dream of having a school. The way we think and idealize the construction of knowledge among the simplest people and, mainly, the indigenous peoples, which are my roots as an ethnic group. I am of indian descent and there is a mixture of black people in the middle as well (GOMES, 2020, our translation).

The pastoral movement also made it possible to partner with other organizations that worked with the indigenous populations of Ceará. At the beginning of the organization of differentiated indigenous education led by Helena Potiguara, a partnership between the *Pastoral Raízes Indígenas* and the *Associação Missão Tremembé* (AMIT - Tremembé Mission Association) enabled, in 1993, Helena Potiguara to have a 12-day exchange experience with the Tremembé people, which was in the process of implementing the first indigenous schools in the state of Ceará. She also had the opportunity to visit the Tapeba indigenous people's school.

About the intention of creating the indigenous school in Crateús, Helena Potiguara infers:

Well, in the beginning nobody wanted me to create this school. I mean the other institutions. But the dream was big in the head and the feeling in the heart, the desire too. Then I went to CREDE, insisted, insisted and they didn't even want to know. When I saw that they weren't going to let me. Then I said: oh, then, I'll start it on my own. That was on 4 April 1994, when I went there the last time to insist and it didn't work out, so I went to create it on my own. Then we had made a free land camp with people who couldn't

afford rent and we made a group with adults only. And we created the Escola Raízes Indígenas (Indigenous Roots School). The teacher was me, and I taught the adults. There were many adults, who were from families that had nowhere to live and were participating in classes at night (GOMES, 2020, our translation).

Thus was born the first educational organization among the indigenous people of Crateús, as they had previously attended the formal schools of non-indigenous people. About this initial episode, the author Lima (2010, p. 198, our translation) explains that:

The first two teachers (Helena and Hector), as mentioned, were indigenous people who worked in a literacy program for adults created by the Diocese of Crateús. The classrooms were located in the community offices of Vila Vitória and Terra Livre. In 1996 two new rooms were opened at Maratoan and Altamira. At this stage, it was common for two people to take over the classroom and share the salary. In 1998, they requested the opening of classes in Monsenhor Tabosa and Poranga.

The activities of *Escola Raízes Indígenas* were expanding in the region characterized by informality and total lack of resources, as Helena Potiguara tells us that: “There was no lunch, no material, nothing, just the willpower and people who believed” (GOMES, 2020, our translation). The classrooms functioned in community headquarters and in the homes of indigenous teachers and, confirming the narrative of indigenous educator Helena Potiguara, there was no teaching material, school meals for the children, or even payment of salaries to teachers, who were usually volunteers. When public resources were finally won to pay teachers' salaries, these took eight months to be granted.

It is important to highlight an important help, from a bank, who provided paper used only on one side: “[...] a girl who worked at Banco do Brasil, Socorrinha Sales, told me: Helena, I'm going to gather paper, used paper for your little school. Then every Friday I went there to get wads of used paper from the bank. We took what we could” (GOMES, 2020, our translation).

Helena Potiguara reveals enthusiasm when she recalls the beginning of a differentiated indigenous school organization:

And it was so... it was a success, right?! Everyone wanted it, those inside the school. Then later, years later, we spread to other neighborhoods; neighborhood of Maratoan, neighborhood of Altamira, Planaltina, Nova Terra, Terra Livre, Vila Vitória. All were camps that we had encouraged people to do. Then we installed a lot. I took it to the Novo Oriente. Today the school there is called Antônio Gomes. It was beautiful too. Then we did it and the parents liked the school so much that they thought it was important to put the young children. That's when we also started with small children.

In the space where parents studied at night, parents placed their children during the day (GOMES, 2020, our translation).

Education initially for adult indigenous people soon expanded to children. Faced with considerable demand, in 1999 Helena Potiguara went to the house of Dom Jacinto, who, after Dom Fragozo had left, was the current bishop of the diocese of Crateús, to write a project about the payment of indigenous teachers, as the author Lima (2010, p. 181, our translation) transcribed the speech of Helena Potiguara:

We took (the project) to present in Caucaia with all the indians. We knew that Napolini (Antenor Napolini, Secretary of Education of the State) was going to be there. Then we took it there. I presented. Teka said: - Helena you present and I'll defend if necessary. After we presented it, Napolini said that it was impossible to regularize payment for an indigenous teacher and build a school. "This is impossible to accomplish. I was born and raised dreaming of catching the sun as soon as it came up and that never happened. Until today I still haven't caught it". He made that little joke, but we went ahead and defended our fish, we said it was possible. Until at the end he said: I can take this project and present it there in Brasília, but without any commitment. That's when Mazé (SEDUC employee) said that since he was willing to take the project to Brasília, she suggested that we expand it, put it at the state level and no longer at the level of the Crateús region. We expanded and it was a victory. It was this project that gave the opportunity. Then it was necessary to create the associations quickly. We already had CINCRAR. Through the association, the payment of teachers was to come. We made an agreement between us that all teachers, regardless of formation, per shift, would earn two hundred reais. We signed for two years. It was good because CINCRAR was already on point.

Project approval was achieved, but it was necessary to overcome all the required bureaucracy. Helena Potiguara explains that to build the school, it was argued that the indigenous people already had to have the piece of land on which the school would be built, however, their people did not have it, as they lived on the outskirts of the urban area of the city of Crateús. "So, we repossessed a piece of public land and it was about 100 square meters and we built a very nice and pretty school. The government of the state of Ceará took care, through the Department of Education (SEDUC)" (GOMES, 2020, our translation).

Demands about equipment, construction of the school building, payment of salaries and teacher formation, maintenance of students, were led by the indigenous Helena Potiguara: "We had our school after a lot of struggle. The school building was only built by the state government in 2008. And the state government opened it in 2009" (GOMES, 2020, our translation). Currently, in 2020, Helena Potiguara is studying in the Indigenous Intercultural Teaching course at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC), and is the director of the School

Raízes Indígenas of Crateús, in the Campo Velho neighborhood, which has more than 400 enrolled students, 90% of them of indigenous origin.

Final considerations

The study questioned how an indigenous woman living in the city of Crateús-CE managed to get schooling to become an indigenous teacher and rise to a position of community leadership recognized for her differentiated educational practices and policies. This concern was answered from a scientific biographical research, with the scope of understanding the educational formation and the political practices, woven by the educator Helena Potiguara, which gave her prominence in the Potiguara community (1954-2009).

The life story of Helena Potiguara allowed us to observe that she broke paradigms by claiming her ethnic identity, gaining notoriety and collaborating for the collective struggle of her region, especially in the educational sphere, as it triggered a process of community awareness that culminated in the promotion of a differentiated school process for the indigenous peoples of the Crateús region. After all, it was through the activities carried out - mobilizations, surveying the history of families and the taking of public lands - that there was a break in the silencing of ethnic identity and the organization of the local indigenous movement, which culminated in the structuring of schools and the model of differentiated indigenous education.

What we can infer is that the political and educational practice of Helena Potiguara gave rise to a leading role in Crateús, since even the educator having woven her pedagogical path in non-indigenous formal school spaces, she glimpsed a differentiated indigenous education focused on social and cultural reality of her people, which gave her prominence. It is also understood that Helena did not pursue her educational path in indigenous schools, as these did not exist in the state of Ceará, after all, according to Pereira (2020), the first school of this nature was only implemented in 1991, by the indigenous educator Raimunda Marques do Nascimento, of the Tremembé ethnic group, in Itarema. However, she defended an education that was different from the traditional model adopted in the regular schools in the vicinity, which did not consider the history and memory of her people.

It is noticed that it was initially through the movement initiated by the pastoral, later led by the indigenous Helena Potiguara, that a social mobilization was initiated that resulted in the construction of 8 more indigenous schools in the region of Crateús and its surroundings, managed by the Regional Development Coordination of Education (CREDE 13). The schools

are distributed among the Potiguara, Kalabaça, Kariri, Tabajara and Tupinambá ethnic groups. In terms of educational content, schools have classes that seek to rescue indigenous descent through the cultures of their ancestors, with the specificity of strengthening themselves as ethnic groups that have sociocultural and historical particularities that need to be preserved and valued.

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