

**A DISCUSSION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF THREE
BRAZILIAN WOMEN IN PORTUGAL AND THE IDEALS
OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY**

**UMA DISCUSSÃO SOBRE AS EXPERIÊNCIAS DE TRÊS
MULHERES BRASILEIRAS EM PORTUGAL E OS IDEAIS DE
LIBERDADE E DEMOCRACIA**

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Abstract

We are three Brazilian women researchers who undertook the Advanced Scientific Doctoral Internship at the Research Centre on Child Studies of the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal, and this paper arises from that six-month period, spent under the supervision of Professor PhD Fernando Ilídio da Silva Ferreira. Using an experience report as a qualitative method to provide reference data, our goal is to carry out a meaning-making analysis based on what we experienced, revealing the potential for new theoretical constructions within the socio-historical context of Portugal, as seen through our perspectives and learning. For this work, we selected everyday scenes that we have experienced in Portugal, and in our daily interactions with children, essentially seeking to understand signs

of freedom and democracy in the 49 years since the 25th of April Revolution. In the text, we discuss issues such as the safety and freedom of women in public spaces, the role of the state and civil society in promoting gender equality, and the importance of childhood in building a democratic society. We highlight the complexity of the experience we have each had of being a foreign woman in a country that has a history marked by struggles for rights and democracy. At the same time, we recognize the challenges and contradictions still present, such as the persistence of gender-based violence. In summary, we conclude that freedom is a continuous achievement that requires struggle and resistance.

Keywords: Women; Children; Democracy; Freedom

Resumo

Somos três investigadoras brasileiras que realizaram o Estágio Científico Avançado de Doutorado no Centro de Investigação em Estudos da Criança da Universidade do Minho, em Braga, Portugal, e este artigo resulta desse período de seis meses, passado sob a supervisão do Professor Doutor Fernando Ilídio da Silva Ferreira. Utilizando o relato de experiência como método qualitativo de referência de dados, o nosso objetivo é fazer uma análise de construção de significados a partir do vivido, revelando o potencial de novas construções teóricas no contexto sócio-histórico de Portugal, a partir das nossas perspectivas e aprendizagens. Para este trabalho, selecionámos cenas do quotidiano que vivenciámos em Portugal, e nas nossas interações diárias com as crianças, procurando essencialmente compreender sinais de liberdade e democracia nos 49 anos da Revolução do 25 de abril. No texto, discutimos questões como a segurança e a liberdade das mulheres no espaço público, o papel do Estado e da sociedade civil na promoção da igualdade de género e a importância da infância na construção de uma sociedade democrática. Destacamos a complexidade da experiência que cada uma de nós teve de ser uma mulher estrangeira num país que tem uma história marcada por lutas por direitos e democracia. Ao mesmo tempo, reconhecemos os desafios e as contradições ainda presentes, como a persistência da violência de género. Em síntese, concluímos que a liberdade é uma conquista contínua que exige luta e resistência.

Palavras-chave Mulheres; Crianças; Democracia; Liberdade

Introduction

At a significant stage in our careers, we decided to embark on a singular journey to carry out an Advanced Scientific Internship at the University of Minho, living for six months in the beautiful city of Braga, Portugal. Each of us had our own academic and research motivations, but the search for new experiences, personal growth and the opportunity to explore a different culture were common goals.

Three Brazilian women immersed in the streets of Braga, we absorbed the city's historical and cultural essence. Besides visiting museums, touring ancient monuments and exploring local markets, we also took part in community events celebrating the richness of Portuguese tradition and various demonstrations led by movements fighting for rights. The city, with its cosy squares and charming streets, became the stage for our experiences, contributing to a deeper and richer understanding of the world.

Now on the path of writing about our experiences in Portugal and relating them to the ideals of freedom and democracy present in the 49th anniversary of the 25th of April, we should consider situating our stories: Who are we? Where have we lived? What have we written and learnt about?

Writing, before any domain, is questioning. It's a quest to insert ourselves into the world with our stories, with our lives, which the world disregards. *Escrevivência* [writing of life experiences] is not about abstracting from the world, but about existence, about the life-world. A world that I seek to apprehend so that I can write myself into it, but with the understanding that the writing is not mine alone. That's why I'm repeating a reflective question that I asked myself one day when I was thinking about my own writing and that of others. I'm asking about the audacious act of women who break through imposed domains, particularly black women, and embark on the path of writing...Conceição Evaristo (IN: Duarte; Nunes; Lopes, 2020, p. 35)

So, who are we?

My name is Eliane Santos Alves, a black Brazilian woman and a maths teacher in the municipal public school system in Porto Seguro, Bahia. I have a bachelor's and a master's degree in Mathematics, and I am currently studying for a doctorate in the Postgraduate Programme in Mathematics Education at Paulista State University under the supervision of Professor Ana Paula dos Santos Malheiros. My doctoral research in Brazil focuses on the educational transition from the 5th to the 6th year of primary school. In 2023, I did an advanced scientific doctoral internship for six months at the Institute of Education at the University of Minho, supervised by Professor Fernando Ilídio da Silva Ferreira. During this time, I delved deeper into the topic of educational transitions, visited schools in Braga, analysed educational documents, interviewed teachers and took part in scientific events. This experience was essential for my academic, personal and professional development, enriching

my theoretical knowledge and providing contact with diverse educational realities and international research. The exchange of experiences with teachers in Portugal was especially enriching.

My name is Andreza Mara da Fonseca, a black Brazilian woman who lives on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. Mother, daughter, sister, teacher, researcher, and activist in education for ethnic-racial relations, I work in primary education in my city. I am a Pedagogue with a master's degree and I am currently a PhD student in Education in the Postgraduate Programme in Education at Paulista State University, where I am being supervised by Professor César Donizeti Pereira Leite, PhD. There, I am conducting research relating to childhood, education in ethnic-racial relations and Afro-Brazilian heritage in early childhood education. In Portugal, I did an Advanced Scientific Doctoral Internship in Child Studies, specializing in Art Education, under the guidance of Professor Fernando Ilídio da Silva Ferreira and Professor Sandra Susana Pires Silva Palhares. This research combined museum science and school education with black arts and culture, thus allowing me to immerse myself in the experiences and practices related to this field of study. The university provided the opportunity for these studies through PROPG/UNESP Notice No. 44/2022 for social inclusion, which represents an important stage in my academic training, enriching my repertoire of knowledge and skills.

My name is Vanessa Marques, a white Brazilian woman and granddaughter of Portuguese immigrants. My trip to Portugal was linked to my PhD Advanced Scientific Internship at the Centre for Research in Child Studies, in the Institute of Education of the University of Minho. I set out to research "Childhood and the right to housing in the city of Braga", with the co-supervision of Professor Fernando Ilídio. To do this, I carried out field research in the Lameiras Social District in Famalicão, with the intention of getting to know the children's day-to-day lives and understanding how the right to housing functions in Portugal and its historical, cultural and geographical context. This research arose from a larger project called "Fighting, living, caring: children and women fighting for housing on the outskirts of São Paulo and common collective perspectives", coordinated by Professor Márcia Gobbi from the University of São Paulo, with support from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPQ).

Motivations that led us to Portugal

For each of us the trip to Portugal was linked to an Internationalisation Project, described on the UNESP website as:

Internationalization is a transformative process that integrates the international dimension into institutional policy with the aim of developing skills, attitudes and values in the pursuit of academic excellence, with international

cooperation actions to promote cultural and scientific exchange with foreign institutions ¹

We were also interested in furthering our doctoral research at the renowned Centre for Research in Child Studies, in the city of Braga. According to the University of Minho's website² the Centre is a permanent research unit with a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, which aims to promote and coordinate scientific research in the field of Child Studies. Its main mission is to promote high level research and the gathering of scientific knowledge and skills to contribute to the improvement of children's wellbeing, development and learning.

Throughout this period, exchanges in the academic environment have taken place as well as in-depth studies in each of the research projects, thereby leading to countless lessons being learned. However, in this text we have chosen to revisit and recollect our memories of the experiences of living, seeing and feeling the city from the point of view of foreign women living in a welfare state, also paying attention to where and how children experience daily life in the city of Braga. We thus hypothesize that this paper has the potential for new theoretical constructions, by interconnecting the experience of foreign women in a context of upholding the ideals of freedom and democracy.

The city of Braga and the 25th of April: Some experiences and hints of the ideals of freedom and democracy

Braga is one of the most historic cities in Portugal with roots dating back over 2,000 years to Roman times, and numerous archaeological remains are still visible there today. It is also one of the oldest Christian cities in the world. Its distinctly young population led to its nomination as European Youth Capital by the European Youth Forum in 2012. According to the latest census, a significant fact is that foreigners account for 7% of the 193,324 people living in Braga, the majority of whom are said to be Brazilian (INE- Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2021). Braga is a city full of culture and tradition, where history and religion live side by side with the technology industry and university life. Attracted by its international reputation as a tourist centre, visitors to Braga are charmed by all the city has to offer; its impressive monuments, churches and gardens, together with its delicious gastronomy and wide range of cultural events and traditional festivals. such as the Festival of Saint John, Roman Braga and Holy Week.

Another important day celebrated in the city is the 25th of April, which we were able to witness while on our stay in Braga. In every street and alleyway and on every corner and wall of the city, we could see and feel the democratic atmosphere. These annual festivities once again highlighted Portugal's democratic

¹ Available at: <https://ib.rc.unesp.br/#!/instituicao/divisao-tecnica-academica/secao-tecnica-de-apoio-ao-ensino-pesquisa-e-extensaotaepe/erapi---escritorio-regional-de-apoio-a-pesquisa-e-internacionalizacao/apresentacao/>

² Available at: <https://www.ie.uminho.pt/>

recovery and commemorated the victory of freedom. This date refers to the 25th of April Revolution in 1974, also known as the Carnation Revolution, which marked the end of the long Salazar dictatorship in Portugal (Antunes, 2017), thereby ushering in democratic rule. Perhaps it was no coincidence that the April 25th celebrations in 2023 took place in the famous Praça da Liberdade in Braga. And we were there.



Figures 1, 2 and 3. Commemoration and struggle of the 49th anniversary of the 25th of April. Source: researchers' personal archive

It was April 25th, 2023 and the city of Braga was once more celebrating this special day. Red carnations were everywhere to be seen, scattered on drawings and posters along Avenida da Liberdade, dangling from people's hair and pockets, and being waved by people holding them in their hands. A whole host of people from different nationalities and political movements were all present that day; people young and old, women, men and parents with their children. Smiling, they recalled the importance of this date for Portuguese people while, at the same time, raising concerns about the current challenges which could be seen in the protest posters and the words on the children's drawings: "Houses to live in, not to speculate in", "Fulfil April, build the future", "The right to work and be a mother, without discrimination, without inequality! More than half a century fighting for maternity rights", "25th of April always, fascism never again".

At the University of Minho, we also had the opportunity to experience events related to the 25th of April. CIEC organized an event to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the 25th of April, for which we had the honour of being part of the organizing committee. Entitled "Childhood(s) Freedom and Democracy: 49 years of April", the event took place from April 26th to May 24th, 2023, in the auditorium of the university's Institute of Education, under the coordination of Professor Fernando Ilídio da Silva Ferreira (CIEC/IE/UMINHO, Portugal) and Professor Cleriston Izidro dos Anjos (UFAL, Brazil). Featuring a series of seven lectures given by research professors from both Portugal and Brazil, the event provided an enriching environment for sharing knowledge and experiences.

As well as learning about the role of childhood in consolidating freedom and democracy, we had the opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by the Portuguese people during their quest for freedom. Through the lectures and discussions, we were able to better understand not only the history, but also the fundamental values that define Portugal's identity and spirit of resistance. This event was undoubtedly a unique moment of learning and reflection that contributed significantly to our formation as conscious citizens committed to democratic and libertarian ideals.

The democratic environment and respect for freedom of speech, which we mentioned earlier, were fully evident. It was an effervescence of people of different ages, building on the memory of this struggle to update the message and forthrightly face the challenges of today, as one of the protest posters revealed: "fulfil April, build the future". Anthropologist Lilia Schwarcz makes an argument about the differences between history and memory:

History and memory are ways of understanding the past that are not always confused or even complementary. History not only carries with it some gaps and misunderstandings about the past, but often behaves as a field of clashes, disagreements and disputes. Memory, on the other hand, invariably brings a subjective dimension to the centre of analysis by translating the past into the first person and devoting a particular memory to it: that of the person who produces it. In this way, it recovers the "present of the past" and turns the past into the present (Schwarcz, 2019, p. 20).

Thus, looking back on the 25th of April can be understood as a way of reviewing the present with a view to the future, in a constant movement of struggle in which past, present and future are interconnected and sustained. In this respect, feminist studies³ also make a contribution by explaining that democracy, or rather the forms of democracy experienced, are interconnected with constant struggles. In the words of Angela Davis, "There is a lot of struggle to affirm democracy" (2023, p. 22) and, consequently, to experience freedom. In the same vein, Silvia Federici (2023) argues that the way to experience democracy, whether in a particular locality

³ Feminist studies have many strands, and in this text, we will discuss black feminism and the autonomous Marxist feminist tradition.

or historical time, is only possible through strong struggles. From this brief contextualization, we can say that memory is a hint that can help us make sense of the impressions and experiences that we feel in our skin and which we take from that experience into our lives.

Methodological approach adopted: An experience report

In this text, we collate a series of impressions, relationships, learnings and experiences based on certain ideas of freedom and democracy. The study followed a qualitative approach using experience reports (ER) as well as written experiences. This is a methodology for building scientific knowledge that presents experiences in a descriptive and critical-reflective way, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of the actions taken (Mussi, Flores, Almeida, 2021, p. 62). Therefore, the experience report is understood as a means "[...] used intentionally to understand, criticize and reflect on events, in other words, the analytical constitution of knowledge" (2021, p. 64).

With further regard to the method of using an experience report, researchers Monica Dalton and Anna de Faria (2019) emphasize that it is a qualitative approach to research and that, although it has a strong emphasis on description, it leads to an interpretative and comprehensive process of phenomena, within a socio-historical context intersected by the gaze, experiences and learning of the researcher. It should be stressed that SR is not thought of in advance as a research project, but is the result of a process of signification based on a lived experience that reveals the potential for new theoretical constructions, thus differentiating itself from other methodologies which involve planning and organising research instruments before entry into the field, such as case studies, action research or field diaries.

It is on the basis of this conceptual and methodological foundation that we present some of the experiences that we, Brazilian women researchers, have had in Portugal. Therefore, to continue this reflection, we now present a series of scenes from the daily lives of three foreign women and children living in Portuguese territory.

Scenes from the daily lives of three foreign women

Scene 1

I was alone in Braga Parque [shopping centre] and decided to walk home - it would take about 20 minutes. As I walked out of the shop, I realised that it was already dark. I didn't look at my watch and started walking. Almost halfway along, I noticed that the street was quite empty. At that moment, I felt like checking the time and, to my surprise, it was almost 11pm. I felt a chill in my stomach and a certain fear - after all, I was a foreign woman walking alone. I thought about going

back to Braga Parque and calling an Uber. However, I stopped, took a deep breath and considered: "I think it's safe to keep walking and go home. People say it's very safe here. Nothing will happen. I kept walking and got home peacefully.

Scene 2

"But isn't it dangerous for a woman to walk alone in this place?" "What are you talking about when you say danger?". Both sentences were part of the experience of a foreign woman in Portugal for six months, and the question about "danger" intrigued me, as there seemed to be an apparent lack of understanding of the meaning of danger and being afraid.

Scene 3

Around midnight, on my way home from the Braga Romana Festival with a colleague from the University of Minho, I came across three animated elderly women smiling and chatting about the festival. I passed them at the narrowest part of Avenida da Liberdade and noticed that one of them was wearing a pair of heels. Apart from the beauty of seeing each woman dressing and grooming herself the way she wants, it made me think that there is a city that takes care of people of different ages and physical needs. What a strange feeling to see women of different ages walking freely through the streets!

... ..

The two words highlighted in bold with regard to the sensations of walking and living in the city - fear and danger - were not chosen by chance. They are marked by the fear of violence and harassment against women, which are revealed in countless cases around the world. For instance, the city of São Paulo has a very high rate of violence against women, and Brazil is the ninth most unequal country in the world (PNDA, 2022). Braga, on the other hand, is considered to be the third most violent district against women in Portugal, according to a report by the National Observatory on Gender Violence⁴ (2021).

From this brief contextualisation, we can appreciate the feeling of fear and constant danger of a woman walking by herself on the streets, whether in her own city or in another country. Going a little further, based on feminist studies, Silvia Federici (2017) shows that discrimination - and also violence - against women is one of the foundations of the capitalist system, in which women's bodies are "[...] the main terrain of their exploitation and resistance, insofar as the female body has been appropriated by the state and by men, forced to function as a means for reproduction and the accumulation of labor" (2017, p. 34). One of the interpretations refers to the objectification of women's bodies by the male universe, with a "supposed" right to others' bodies.

⁴ Available at: <http://www.umaronline.pt/>

In the same vein, Heleieth Saffioti argues that the patriarchal, racist and capitalist system "is anchored in a way for men to secure for themselves and their dependents the means necessary for daily production and the reproduction of life" (Saffioti, 2015, p. 105). However, Hooks (2019) argues that gender-based violence is one of the foundations of the feminist movement's struggle, although she points out that it is not restricted only to violence by men against women but is part of a larger movement to end violence, interconnecting the categories of class and race.

These authors, from different conceptions of feminist studies, reveal how the fear of violence against the female body - which we feel every day on the streets of Braga, but also in the cities where we live in Brazil - is linked to the basis of the capitalist system and to inequalities of class and race. And that is why it is one of the pillars of the feminist struggle.

Although we can see and feel signs of structural patriarchy in our bodies as foreign women, it is notable that there is a tension between danger/fear and three other words that were emphasized in the scenes presented: safe, strange and freely. For six months, the three women researchers walked around the streets of Braga at different times of day and night and in different seasons - with empty or busy streets. It was common to come across a woman walking inside the University of Minho after dark and meet her eyes with an exchange of smiles. There was something different about that experience: the fear in a foreign woman's body remained, but apparently the danger was different.

What can this tension between fear and security - or danger and freedom - tell us? When we walk around the city of Braga, we feel a sense of strangeness and, at the same time, a sense of freedom. And it is this tension that we will try to understand and refine our knowledge about the experience itself.

When we talk about security and freedom, the first important thing to know is how the law and the Constitution define them. Article 27 of the 1976 Constitution of the Portuguese Republic states that everyone has the right to freedom and security. In 2014, the 5th National Plan for Gender Equality, Citizenship and Non-Discrimination presented gender equality as a fundamental aspect of a full democracy, and it is the government's role to create the conditions for this to happen. It is also Portugal's role to be a welfare state, i.e. to fulfil the fundamental needs that must be guaranteed to all citizens.

Another instrument of the Portuguese government on this issue of security and freedom is the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality⁵. It is responsible for ensuring that citizenship policies and the defence of gender equality are put into effect, since "Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, and it is the fundamental task of the State to promote it"⁶.

⁵ Available at: <https://www.cig.gov.pt/>

⁶ Available at: <https://www.cig.gov.pt/>

Here we can already see hints of the sense of security and freedom we experience in our daily lives when walking the streets. However, Portuguese researcher Ana Cristina Pereira (2019) points out that the law has brought about significant changes to women's everyday lives in Portugal, but it will still take a long time for the transformations to really take hold for everyone.

In exploratory research, we came across two more layers that could be clues for thinking about the issue of security and freedom in the case of gender-based violence: the place of universities and citizen associations. One of them is the National Observatory on Gender Violence⁷ at the University Nova de Lisboa in 2008, which is an interdisciplinary centre made up of researchers from all areas of knowledge. One of its main aims is to survey and critically analyse the different forms of violence against women, as well as promoting studies to understand the possible causes and acting as a support for the prevention and intervention of this issue in Portugal.

On the subject of Portuguese associativism, researcher Fernando Ilídio Ferreira (2010) makes an important point about the meaning of citizenship not being something natural or even given. The author thus explains that citizen associativism is both a thought and an action of resistance and possibilities for facing challenges, in the quest "to combat social inequalities and all forms of exclusion, to promote social cohesion; to revitalise democratic citizenship; to fight for human dignity" (Ferreira, 2010, p. 52), stressing that it should not just be a theoretical discourse, but a movement in the struggle for social transformation.

Among the countless associations related to feminist studies and gender violence in Portugal, we have selected two created more recently that have established a network across Portuguese territory. One of them is the Democratic Women's Movement⁸, founded in 1968, which is an association of progressive, democratic, anti-fascist and revolutionary women whose aims is to unite women in defence of their rights - political, economic, social and human rights, to denounce and fight against forms of violence, among others. This association is currently a member of the Economic and Social Council, with a great deal of power to act and intervene in Portugal. Another association is the Alternative and Response Women's Union, created in 1976, which seeks an ethic of solidarity, equality and care on issues related to gender, gender equality, among others.

For us, as foreign women who have lived in Portugal for six months, there are countless lessons to be learnt from experiencing these ideals of democracy and freedom. It is a sense that there is a possibility of other ways of living, with fewer social inequalities. Trying to understand some aspects of this sense of freedom and security, it is clear to see a strong role from the state, as well as interventions and struggles by civil society from different perspectives: demonstrations, petition

⁷ Available at: <https://onvg.fch.unl.pt/legislacao-documentos-estrategicos/documentos-oficiais/>

⁸ Available at: <https://www.mdm.org.pt/>

writing, meetings, content writing, study groups, as well as participation in government commissions and councils. On the other hand, we have also seen and experienced the challenges that Portuguese society has faced, including in relation to gender-based violence.

Scenes from everyday life with children: Evidence of democratic experience and freedom in the city

Scene 1

Under a late afternoon sky of various shades and colours in Braga, my hand wrapped around my son's small hand as we walked along the tree-lined paths of Parque da Ponte. The sun was pouring down its rays, creating a cosy atmosphere, harmonising nature and motherhood in a peaceful and safe environment. The child's steps were quick, full of enthusiasm, and his spontaneous laughter echoed through the green spaces. With a serene look and a smile on my lips, I followed my son's every step. The Park, a green oasis in the heart of Braga, offered vibrant opportunities - colourful flowers, aged wooden benches, a pond, a fountain and the lush green of the grass. As we approached the playground, his curious eyes lit up with anticipation. He was ecstatic to experience that essential freedom necessary for children's play, witnessing simplicity, beauty, discovery and joy.

Scene 2

The sun was bathing the day with its warmth as a lively group of children, hand in hand, lined up with their water bottles and caps, headed enthusiastically from the school towards the museum a few streets ahead. The buzz of children's laughter and chatter filled the air, creating a cheerful soundtrack for the journey ahead. Every step the children took revealed the excitement in their bright eyes, eager to get to know the museum's artists and artefacts. The route to the museum was punctuated by trees, pavements, streets and avenues. They were full of expectation and curiosity, crossing the streets and showing uncomplicated joy on the way. The children's voices echoed in the surroundings, a joyful mix of excitement and curiosity.

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When examining Braga beyond adult perspectives, issues arise concerning children in the city and about the commitment that must be shared with the whole society:

The discussion on children and cities refers to the great political impact that requires everyone to take responsibility for children, greatly modifying relationships in the city, as they no longer belong to a single family and are now welcomed by everyone. These ways of thinking and proposing the city have repercussions on people's commitment to children from the moment they are born (Gobbi, Anjos, Seixas, Tomás, 2022, p. 18-19).

This discussion is in line with the commitment closely linked to the ideals of freedom and democracy, and these examples from everyday life in scenes 1 and 2 can help us realise this relationship. Where are the children? What are they doing?

City children need a good number of places where they can play and learn [...], but they need a place close to home, outdoors, with no specific purpose, where they can play, move around and acquire notions of the world. This is the kind of informal recreation that pavements provide, and the busy pavements of the city are very well suited to this. (Jacobs, 2000, p. 80)

The vibrant scenes of children playing in public spaces and a group of children visiting a museum not only illustrate the search for leisure or knowledge, but also highlight the joy and enchantment that permeate the path of learning. They also suggest a commitment to freedom and democracy, a symbolic act of guiding and accompanying children along paths that lead to a future when mutual respect flourishes.

By observing children from different parts of the world playing in public parks, understanding that true democracy is built on the foundations of diversity and mutual respect, we agree with Maria Walburga dos Santos and Larissa Lins when they say that "children inhabit childhood and childhoods: due to the singularities that are their own (time, space, reactions), and at the same time due to the pluralities, referring to the history and individual experiences of the most diverse children" (Santos; Lins, 2022, p.283).

These children must live cultural values to the full and experience democracy from an early age, thus providing an opportunity for the next generation of engaged citizens, understanding that the concept of democracy unfolds in simple gestures and daily interactions. Braga, with its public spaces, stands as a tangible symbol of children's constant search for freedom and democracy in the city. These public spaces became more than just a place for leisure - they were open-air learning spaces where the fundamental principles of democratic society were experienced in a practical and intense way. By guiding my son through these spaces and accompanying the children in the museum, I was not only sharing precious moments of leisure, culture and interaction, but also sowing and sharing the seeds of a society where freedom and democracy flourish in every space and in the children who frequent them.

Final considerations

Three Brazilian women. From three different places in Brazil. We immersed ourselves in the streets of Braga, absorbing aspects of the historical and cultural essence that the city offered and building a framework of learning, both in terms of research and the experiences of living daily life in another country.

One of the lessons we wanted to demonstrate and reflect on in this experience report was the feeling of freedom and security experienced in the bodies

of three foreign women. In refining our knowledge about this experience, we came across the strong support of the state, or rather the welfare state, and the countless actions of civil society, one of which is citizen associations. An interesting point recalled by Ferreira (2010) is that citizenship is not given or innate, but requires a continuous process of struggle, resistance and negotiation; this can even be seen in the national commemoration of the 25th of April. It should be emphasized that living a daily life based on the ideals of democracy and freedom does not mean a way of life without problems or challenges, including in relation to gender violence. On the contrary, it reveals a continuous exercise of struggle and resistance so that everyone has the right to be and live with dignity.

Finally, a question hangs in the air: if we add the markers of race and class, would the experiences of freedom and security be similar? Could it be that being in a university environment has somehow had an impact on this feeling of safety and freedom? We end with Davis' problematization that "Freedom is, in fact, a constant struggle" (2023, p. 40).

When we think about children and their childhoods in this constant struggle, it is appropriate to paraphrase the titles of the conferences held at the event to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the 25th of April to ratify the commitment to the ideals of freedom and democracy. Thus, to have childhood(s) as a common good, with the right to inhabit and live in the city, it is essential not to impede children but to allow them to live fully and freely, able to listen and tell, to sing and express themselves in artistic play, and to truly feel the spaces around them and thus to embody democracy and the experience of freedom.

The experience of taking part in demonstrations and events in the city proved to be a unique opportunity to express our opinions and get actively involved in local and global issues. The democratic environment and respect for freedom of expression provided a renewed sense of empowerment, connecting us not only with the local community, but also with the ideals of democracy and freedom that permeate Portuguese society.

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Received: August 2024

Published: December 2024