Natália Aparecida Morato Fernandes, Maria dos Milagres da Cruz Lopes

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY IN BRAZIL: FROM NÍSIA FLORESTA TO LÉLIA GONZALEZ¹

Introduction

European feminist thought has had a profound influence on women's actions and movements worldwide, including those in Brazil. From Mary Wollstonecraft's pioneering work, A Vindication of the rights of Woman (1792), which questioned traditional social structures and advocated education and equal rights for women, emerged a critical thinking that reverberated in different parts of the world. In Brazil, one of the first women to voice these ideas was Nísia Floresta, whose intellectual and literary career became a milestone in the dissemination of feminist ideas in the Brazilian context of the 19th century. Her reception of Wollstonecraft's proposals and their adaptation to local conditions helped lay the foundations for the construction of Brazilian feminist thought, albeit with its own characteristics and in dialogue with national issues.

Over the years, the feminist movement in Brazil has begun to incorporate new challenges and perspectives, especially during the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. This period was marked by an intensification of struggles for civil and social rights, which took place against a backdrop of political repression, with the military dictatorship imposing restrictions on freedom of speech and on the right to organize. Feminist thinking evolved to encompass issues of class, race, and sexuality.

Among the leading figures in this period, Lélia Gonzalez became an icon of the feminist movement, introducing elements to her analysis such as the conditions of socioeconomic inequality experienced by black women and the Latin American specificities, which made her a precursor of the black feminist movement in Brazil and of the intersectional approach, which marks the third-wave feminism and considers the multiple dimensions of oppression suffered by black women. Her work and writings made significant contributions to the reflection on the interactions between race, class, and gender in Brazil, inaugurating a new phase of struggle and understanding in the national feminist movement.

This article proposes a brief reflection on feminist philosophy from Europe and its reception in Brazil, highlighting the trajectory of Nísia Floresta and her contributions to

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Brazilian feminism. In addition, we aim to highlight the repercussions of second-wave feminism in Brazil, particularly in the context of repression under the military dictatorship, and to emphasize the significant contributions of Lélia Gonzalez, underscoring the role of intersectionality in contemporary feminist discussions. In undertaking this journey, the article aims to explore the interactions between Brazilian feminist productions and the global context of feminist thought, highlighting the local specificities and challenges that have shaped these trajectories.

1. Precursors of Feminist Thought

The history of feminism emerged in the 18th century, with its peculiarities and commonalities in its trajectory, including the demand for women's civil and political rights in the face of oppression and discrimination imposed by patriarchal societies, whether in Europe, North America, or Latin America, specifically in Brazil.

Starting from this historical context, we will briefly reflect on the legacy of feminist philosophy in Brazil, highlighting some prominent names and the influences of European thinkers, based on works that addressed the feminist struggle for women's equality in both public and private life. This phenomenon of social struggle, as reflected in the work of feminist thinkers, is what we intend to examine here.

Historically, we know that the feminist struggle for equal rights and gender equality was not easily understood or accepted by the majority. Their demonstrations confronted a society marked by stereotypes and prejudices, which relegated women to a position of inferiority and to the private space. In this sense, we highlight the driving force of women who broke the social limits imposed on them by publishing works that questioned the established order and laid the foundations for feminist thought. Among them are Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), a French feminist with multiple attributes, excelling in dramaturgy and politics, an active participant in the French Revolution, and an abolitionist, and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), an English feminist, writer, and philosopher.

Olympe de Gouges stood out during the French Revolution when she wrote the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen) in 1791, a document that challenged the exclusion of women from the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. She argued that women should have the same political rights as men, including the right to vote and to participate actively in government. Her militancy, however, led to her being sentenced to death during the period of the Reign of Terror, highlighting the risks faced by women who dared to challenge the social order.

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, one of the most influential texts in the history of feminism. Her primary assertion was that the education of women was a means of achieving intellectual and social equality with men. Wollstonecraft argued that gender inequality was not natural, but the result of a lack of educational opportunities for women. Her thinking influenced generations of feminists and served as a basis for later discussions on female emancipation.

These women raised the banner of feminism in Europe, mobilizing and sensitizing many others to social and political protagonism. Their ideal of struggle inspired changes in patriarchal society's behavior patterns towards women. The legacies of Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft helped many women become more aware of their

social and political roles in the historical context of the consolidation of capitalism and the spread of Enlightenment and liberal ideas.

However, the awakening of feminist thought in modern times was not restricted to England and France. In other regions, such as Latin America, some women began to stand out in the fight for women's rights, albeit in an incipient way, leaving records that strengthen the claim that these ideas existed before the movements of 20th-century women [Berruz 2023: 154]. In Mexico, for example, the poet and philosopher Juana Inés Maria del Carmen Martinez de Zaragoza Gaxiola de Asbaje y Ramirez de Santillana Odonojú, known as Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–1695), already defended women's educational and intellectual rights in the 17th century [ibid.: 153], facing resistance from religious and conservative sectors. Her writings attracted attention as part of the Latin American philosophical canon, and in 1951, her complete works were published.

In the Brazilian context, Teresa Margarida da Silva e Orta (1711–1793) stands out as the first Brazilian woman to publish a novel in Europe. Born in Brazil, Teresa Margarida settled in Portugal with her family at the age of six. The social and political context in which she lived in Portugal was marked by the effervescence of positivist ideas, as well as conservatism, which prevented changes in the historical process of domination over women, reducing them to the private space. Teresa Margarida, however, went beyond this space and is therefore considered the first woman to publish a novel in the Portuguese-speaking world and the first person born in Brazil to publish a book in Europe [ibid.: 153]. In mid-1752, under the pseudonym Dorotea Engrassia Tavareda Dalmira, she published the book *Máximas de virtude e formosura* (Maxims of Virtue and Beauty), which was reprinted in 1777 under the title *Aventuras de Diófanes* (The Adventures of Diophanes). Teresa presents a behavioral guide for the education of women, criticizes absolutism, and defends Enlightenment principles in this novel [Flores 2021: 191].

Nevertheless, the most crucial name as a precursor of feminist thought in Brazil is that of Nísia Floresta (1810–1885). Considered the first Brazilian feminist, Floresta was responsible for introducing Mary Wollstonecraft's ideals to the country, translating and adapting her work to the national reality. Born on October 2, 1810, under the name Dionísia Gonçalves Pinto, her career was marked by numerous adverse situations, including the political context of the city of Recife. This led her to adopt a romantically liberal attitude, marked by nationalist passion, the repudiation of tyranny, and the uncompromising defense of freedom [Margutti 2019: 16]. During this politically effervescent period in 1831, Nísia was invited by the French typographer Adolphe Emile de Bois Garin to contribute articles for the Espelho das Brasileiras [Brazilian women's Mirror], a newspaper dedicated to women from Pernambuco, addressing the condition of women and comparing it with various ancient cultures [Brazil, Schumaher 2001: 577].

Still in Recife, in 1832, impacted by the feminist ideals of Mary Wollstonecraft's work, she published *Direitos das Mulheres e Injustiça dos Homens* (The Rights of Women and the Injustice of Men), a free translation from French into Portuguese, under the pseudonym – customary at the time – of Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta. We can see that Mary Wollstonecraft's influence was decisive in Nísia's feminist thinking, both in the articles published in the *Espelho das Brasileiras* newspaper and in her free translation, *Direitos das Mulheres e Injustiça dos Homens*, works that show her critical capacity and her pioneering role in the fight for feminist ideals of equality and freedom

for Brazilian women. Her work significantly represented a significant advance against the conservatism of Brazilian society at the time [Margutti 2019: 336].

Nísia's light, free, and daring spirit made her sympathetic to the emancipatory ideals of Mary Wollstonecraft: a philosopher who produced radical reflections on the condition of women, focusing on moral and political issues [Margutti 2019: 174], and of Olympe de Gouges, with her notable contribution through the work *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791). These women stood out as feminists who acted actively in the political struggle for equality, opposing the dominant discourse of women's subordination to men. Furthermore, it is essential to note that these intellectuals initiated the age of feminism as a social movement that emerged alongside the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, safeguarding the republic and full citizenship for all [Moraes 2016: 16].

Other authors had a significant influence on Nísia's culture and knowledge, especially when it came to reflecting on feminism and the status of women, which led her to place herself on an equal footing with European thought, thus fulfilling the vital role of a link between foreign ideas and the national reality [Duarte 2019: 28]. Among these names are François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715), theologian, priest, writer and preceptor to the Duke of Burgundy, author of *Traité de l'éducation des filles* [Treatise on the Education of Girls, 1681]; François Poulain de la Barre (1647–1723), Parisian, theologian and priest, who wrote several works, the most important of which was *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (On the Equality of the Two Sexes, 1675); Sophia, author of *Woman Not Inferior to Man* (1739), a work published in England under the pseudonym Sophia, a Person of Quality; and Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who, in his work *Catéchisme Positiviste* (The catechism of Positive Religion, 1852), exerted an influence on Nísia, becoming, years later, her great friend.

Nísia, a woman of great itinerancy, lived in various regions of Brazil and later left with her family for overseas in July 1849 (she remained in Europe until she died in 1885, but she would make several trips to Brazil during those years). In Europe, she came into contact with Auguste Comte's Positivism and attended Comte's General History of Humanity course in Paris. This encounter fostered a great friendship, which continued through several letters.

Years later, Nísia attended the *Collège de France* and belatedly completed her higher education [Margutti 2019: 18-19]. Her time in Europe was marked by great friendships with intellectuals². Another significant mark of her experience on the continent was the publication of several of her own works, as well as hundreds of trips to various European countries. In this context, Nísia was characterized as a woman of action who wrote in response to her circumstances. The differences in emphasis and subject matter between her writings while based in Brazil and her writings while based in Europe are proof of that [ibid.: 342].

Nísia was considered not only one of the first women in Brazil capable of breaking the boundaries of the private space and publishing texts in mainstream newspapers, but also the first in the country to address women's right to education and work, as well as

² Portuguese writers Alexandre Herculano (1810–1877) and Antônio Feliciano de Castilho (1800–1875), Italian poet and playwright Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873), revolutionary leader Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882), French poet Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869) and zoologist Georges Louis Duvernoy (1777–1855) [Margutti 2019: 20].

demanding that they be recognized as intelligent and deserving of respect [Constance 2019: 28].

Therefore, it is worth pointing out that Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta was always a wise woman, with reformist stances and political positions, attentive to the political and social problems of Europe and Brazil, specifically in view of progress, emphasizing the emancipation of women as subjects of their own history and active participants in society. In addition, she was critical of slavery, raised anti-slavery awareness, and made her abolitionist stance clear.

In that manner, Nísia Floresta left an excellent legacy for the history of feminist thought in Brazil, and, in light of this historical recognition, as we take on the work of vertical research into women's thought and voices, we recognize the place of women in philosophy and bring their voices into the debate with reciprocity [Marques 2023: 336].

2. Repercussions and Specificities of Second-Wave Feminism in Brazil

Feminism, which developed from the women's liberation movements in the United States and Europe, exerted a marked influence on Brazilian intellectuals and activists, shaping their research, actions, and perspectives. Contact with global thinking, driven by the circulation of ideas and works, was fundamental to the construction of a critical and engaged feminism in Brazil.

The arrival of these ideas in the country, through books, magazines, and travel, coincided with a period of intense political and social effervescence. Attentive to international debates, Brazilian intellectuals and feminists adapted the emerging agendas to the national reality, taking into account the specificities of a context marked by the repression of the military dictatorship.

Works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex) became a reference for many women thinkers, offering theoretical tools for understanding gender oppression and the social construction of femininity. Betty Friedan, with *The Feminine Mystique*, exposed "the problem that has no name" of female dissatisfaction, resonating with women's search for autonomy and fulfillment in Brazil. Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics*, brought a critical analysis of patriarchy, inspiring denunciation of the power structures that perpetuated gender inequality in the country [Hollanda 2019].

In Brazil, this movement found fertile ground in the Social Sciences, which offered tools for analyzing the inequalities and power relations faced by women. In a scenario of military dictatorship, the search for critical analysis made this area an immediate space for feminist demands. Meanwhile, Philosophy, with a more gradual development, incorporated gender issues in a process of critical review of the canons and construction of new theoretical approaches, reflecting a different pace in the absorption of these ideas.

The work of intellectuals such as Eva Blay and Heleieth Saffioti exemplifies the impact of the second wave in the field of social sciences. Eva Blay, a sociologist and professor at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), was a pioneer in gender studies in Brazil. Inspired by the new feminist reflections, her research on the condition of women in the labor market and in Brazilian society was fundamental to the debate on inequality and discrimination. Heleieth Saffioti, also a sociologist and professor at Unesp (Universidade Estadual Paulista), has become one of the most excellent references of feminism in Brazil. Her work, *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes* (Women in Class Society), is a classic that analyzes gender oppression from a Marxist perspective and engages with critics of the sexual division of labor and the exploitation of women.

As Hollanda points out when highlighting the importance of Saffioti's work:

It is worth remembering that in 1967, the object of research 'woman' was not yet a legitimate question for an academic thesis. In this sense, Heleieth was strategic enough and carried out a Marxist study on underdeveloped capitalism, in which women's oppression was determined by their class status. Another interesting point is that in her writing or at public events, Heleieth emphatically refused to identify herself with feminism. She was just a left-wing woman intensely interested in the condition of women. [ibid.: 13]

In the field of philosophy, Marilena Chaui and Olgária Matos are two of the most influential contemporary Brazilian philosophers. Although they do not formally identify themselves as feminist philosophers, their work dialogues with themes central to the critique of patriarchal domination and social emancipation. Chaui, influenced by the thought of Baruch Spinoza and the Marxist tradition, analyzes the structures of power and oppression in society, also addressing gender inequalities in her critique of ideology. Olgária Matos, marked by her dialogue with Frankfurt School's Critical Theory and contemporary French thinkers, reflects on modernity, subjectivity, and resistance, including a critique of instrumental reason and forms of male domination. Reflections on patriarchy and gender roles permeate their analyses, although both position themselves as intellectuals engaged in criticizing power structures.

The influence of the second feminist wave extended beyond intellectual production. Many Brazilian intellectuals actively participated in social movements, such as the MFPA (*Movimento Feminino Pela Anistia* (Women's Movement for Amnesty)) and the MCV (*Movimento do Custo de Vida* (Movement Against Costliness)), incorporating these agendas into the struggles for democracy and social justice. The defense of human rights and the pursuit of equality in the job market, as well as control over their own bodies, were added to the resistance against state violence. The repression imposed by the dictatorship paradoxically strengthened the organization of Brazilian feminists, who found ways to express their ideas and demand rights in collectives, alternative publications, and spaces for debate [Ríos, Lima 2020; Biroli 2018].

The creation of discussion groups, feminist collective, and alternative publications, such as the newspapers *Brasil Mulher* (Brazil Woman), *Nós Mulheres* (We the Women), and *Mulherio* (Womenfolk), was also driven by the feminism of the time, which stimulated women's organization and mobilization. The diversity of perspectives within the Brazilian movement, marked by different currents of thought and specific agendas, reflects this phase of feminism, which valued plurality and women's autonomy.

In short, the second feminist wave, in dialogue with global thinking, exerted a profound influence on Brazilian intellectuals and activists, boosting intellectual production, participation in social movements, and the creation of spaces for debate. Their legacies continue to inspire and guide women's struggle for their rights in Brazil.

3. Lélia Gonzalez: Pioneer of Black Feminism and Intersectionality

The repercussions of the second feminist wave in Brazil, although significant, revealed essential limitations. Achievements such as the fight for reproductive rights and equality in the labor market marked crucial advances. However, the movement often neglected the complex intersections of race, class, and gender, prioritizing the experiences of white, middle-class women. In the Brazilian context, marked by structural

racism and colonial heritage, this exclusion became even more problematic [Hollanda 2019].

In response to these gaps, the third wave of feminism emerged, seeking a more inclusive and intersectional movement. In this scenario, Black feminism gained prominence, bringing to the forefront the specific experiences and demands of Black women. Lélia Gonzalez emerged as a pioneer in this movement in Brazil, anticipating central discussions of the third-wave feminism [Biroli 2018]. Her career as a philosopher, anthropologist, activist, and black woman allowed her to develop an indepth analysis of the multiple forms of oppression.

Lélia Gonzalez, born in Belo Horizonte in 1935, was a multifaceted intellectual with a degree in Philosophy from Universidade do Estado da Guanabara (now Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro – UERJ) and a Master's degree in Communication from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Her academic career has been marked by a deep interest in issues of political, economic, racial, and gender inequalities, influenced by thinkers from diverse geographical origins and political-epistemological perspectives.

Three significant influences on Lélia Gonzales' thinking came from Europe: feminism in its second post-war version, mainly through the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, in her acclaimed *The Second Sex*; Marxism – especially of the French school – which is fundamental to her thinking about classes in the social structure, as well as the concept of ideology and consciousness, so dear to the Brazilian intellectual generation under the military dictatorship; and finally psychoanalysis, which is incorporated into her reflections above all with regard to the cultural aspect of domination and subversion, in particular through language. [Ríos, Lima 2020: 12]

Other references in Gonzalez's studies include Caribbean intellectuals such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, as well as African authors like Amilcar Cabral and Cheikh Anta Diop. From Latin America and the Caribbean, Lélia Gonzalez established a dialogue and received interesting influences from feminist thought in American countries [ibid.: 12-14]. Gonzalez also dialogued with intellectuals such as Abdias do Nascimento, with whom she shared the struggle to value Afro-Brazilian culture and denounce racism. Her intellectual production spans several areas, including anthropology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, always to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives and value Black and Latin American epistemologies.

One of the central aspects of her thinking is the valorization of Afro-Latin American cultures and orality as a way of transmitting knowledge. Gonzalez constructs the concept of amefricanity, for example, in the essay "A categoria politico-cultural de amefricanidade" [Gonzalez 2020], to emphasize the richness of Black experiences and epistemologies, questioning the construction of a model of universal knowledge that marginalizes subordinated knowledge.

Lélia Gonzalez's thinking makes a fundamental contribution to feminist philosophy by articulating the specificities of black women's experiences in Brazil and Latin America. In this sense, Gonzalez's work anticipates and complements discussions on intersectionality, a concept later systematized by Kimberlé Crenshaw [1989], which highlights how different axes of oppression overlap and intersect, producing unique experiences of discrimination and resistance. Even though there are no records of

interactions between the two authors and Gonzalez's production predates Crenshaw's, the similarity in their conceptual construction is notable. In this way, Gonzalez's contribution to the intersectional perspective is twofold: on the one hand, she explains how the intersection between gender, race, and class structures inequalities; on the other, she proposes ways of building a feminism rooted in the experiences of black Latin American women.

In problematizing the influence of racism on the constitution of black women's identity, Gonzalez criticized the hegemonic tendency of Eurocentric feminisms, which have often neglected racial and class issues. For her, the experience of black women cannot be understood solely from an opposition to patriarchy. Still, it must also take into account the legacies of colonialism and slavery, structuring elements of contemporary inequalities. Her work resonates with the contributions of authors such as bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Patricia Hill Collins, who also denounce the intersections between gender, race, and class in the formation of inequalities.

While third-wave global feminism sought to make visible the differences between women and the multiple forms of oppression, Gonzalez offered a unique perspective by thinking about these issues from the Latin American context. Her analysis of structural racism and the symbolic violence suffered by black women is part of a broader debate on the coloniality of power. Thus, her approach not only broadens the horizons of feminist philosophy but also challenges Western epistemic hegemony, valuing the knowledge and practices of black women in Latin America.

Thus, in dialogue with contemporary feminist movements, Lélia Gonzalez's thinking remains relevant to understanding the dynamics of oppression and resistance in the current context [Biroli 2018]. Her legacy contributes to broadening the boundaries of feminism, challenging epistemic hierarchies, and promoting a more comprehensive look at the intersections between gender, race, and class in the struggle for social justice [Ríos, Lima 2020].

Final Considerations

Reflections on feminist philosophy from Europe and its repercussions on feminist thought in Brazil, from its precursors to contemporary debates, reveal the richness and complexity of this trajectory. Nísia Floresta, a pioneer in the dissemination of Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, laid the foundations for Brazilian feminism by denouncing the unequal treatment of women, highlighting the specificities of Brazilian society, and advocating for girls' education. The movements demanding equal rights for men and women expanded with the second-wave feminism. In Brazil, these movements assumed a distinct form, both in academia and within social movements, due to the country's political context during the military dictatorship's repression. The third wave, challenged to think about inequalities of race, class, and gender, gave rise to the intersectional approach to oppressions that affect vulnerable social groups, such as black women. In Brazil, even before the concept of intersectionality was systematized, Lélia Gonzalez identified and exposed these different axes of oppression by highlighting the specificities of black Brazilian and Latin American women.

Analyzing the interactions between Brazilian feminism and the global scene reveals the importance of dialogue and the exchange of ideas for building a plural and engaged movement. Brazilian intellectuals, by appropriating diverse theoretical references such as those of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Kate Millett, adapted feminist agendas to the local reality, taking into account the particularities of the Brazilian context.

The trajectory of Lélia Gonzalez, in particular, demonstrates the relevance of a feminism that dialogues with racial and class issues and that values black and Latin American epistemologies. Her intellectual production, by articulating the specificities of black women's experiences, contributes to the construction of a more inclusive and representative feminism.

Feminist thought in Brazil has therefore consolidated itself as a dynamic and constantly changing field of reflection, which is nourished by dialogue with global thought and local experiences. We believe that the analysis presented here contributes to understanding the richness and complexity of this trajectory and can also help overcome historical difficulties and injustices faced by women.

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Feminist Philosophy in Brazil: From Nísia Floresta to Lélia Gonzalez

This article deals with the trajectory of feminist philosophy in Brazil, from Nísia Floresta, who introduced Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas in the 19th century, to the reception of the second-wave feminism agendas among Brazilian activists and intellectuals, emphasizing the specificities of the national context, marked by the military dictatorship. It also presents the contributions of Lélia Gonzalez, whose pioneering works articulated gender, race and class from the experience of black Latin American women, expanding epistemic boundaries. Thus, the text contributes to understanding the interactions between Brazilian feminist works and the global scenario of feminist thought, highlighting the local specificities and challenges that have marked this trajectory.

Наталія Апаресіда Морато Фернандес, Марія дос Мілагрес да Крус Лопес

Феміністична філософія в Бразилії: від Нісії Флорести до Лелії Гонсалес

У статті розглядається траєкторія розвитку феміністичної філософії в Бразилії, від Нісії Флорести, яка познайомила публіку з ідеями Мері Волстонкрафт у XIX столітті, до сприйняття феміністичних програм другої хвилі серед бразильських активісток та інтелектуалок, підкреслюючи особливості національного контексту, позначеного військовою диктатурою. У ній також представлено внесок Лелії Ґонсалес, чиї новаторські праці висвітлювали гендер, расу та клас на основі досвіду чорношкірих латиноамериканських жінок, розширюючи епістемічні межі. Таким чином, текст сприяє розумінню взаємодії між бразильськими феміністичними працями та глобальним сценарієм феміністичної думки, висвітлюючи місцеві особливості та виклики, що позначили цю траєкторію.

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