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## Representations of female education in the newspaper 'O Exemplo' (Porto Alegre/RS, 1892-1930)

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**Abstract:** The text aims to analyze representations of women's education in the pages of the newspaper "O Exemplo" (Porto Alegre/RS, 1892-1930). This weekly publication identified in contemporary times as "Black Press", functioned as a cultural artifact, disseminating and circulating ideas. This research emerges as a possibility to update the developed productions, shifting the focus to a theme that has been largely undervalued, such as the representations of female education in the pages of a newspaper formed by an editorial board of "men of color". This discussion is situated within the field of History of Education, engaging with various themes and research objects, often, analyzed through unconventional documents and interdisciplinary theoretical approaches. The study adopts the theoretical and methodological perspective of Cultural History, which allows for an open historiographical approach to interpreting past sources, such as 'O Exemplo'. The mentioned print, shaped by desires, aspirations, rejections, and acceptances, established itself as a defined program, permeated by diverse interests and in dialogue with the demands of its historical context, among which education stood out. This is evidenced by the diminished presence of articles written by women regarding education. Nevertheless, for its time, the presence of female contributors encouraged other women to dedicate themselves to intellectual development or, in other words, to the pursuit of education.

**Keywords:** women's education; journalistic writing; newspaper 'O Exemplo'; Porto Alegre.

### 1 Introduction

Inserted into a new republican and post-slavery order, the newspaper *O Exemplo* (1892-1930) was published in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, with resonance in the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Belém, and Paraíba. Its title expresses its affiliation and ambition, "to be an example," establishing itself as a testimony to themes such as education. By this indication, the weekly demonstrates its potential as a cultural artifact and historical document in the diffusion and circulation of ideas, discourses, and representations. The interest of this study lies in presenting, based on the investigated empirical corpus, the references that the editors and, male and female contributors of the periodical *O Exemplo* imprinted regarding the education of women. To this end, 720 issues were surveyed, covering the entire investigated period (1892 to 1930), with interruptions and lacunae in some editions. Thus, the references to the theme are situated in four phases: the first from 1892 to 1897 (0



texts); the second from 1902 to 1905 (3 texts); the third from 1908 to 1911 (6 texts); and the fourth from 1916 to 1930 (3 texts). In this sense, throughout the investigation, 12 texts were located and analyzed that address aspects related to the desires and expectations concerning the education of the female gender published in this newspaper.

In its first issues, the editorial board of the newspaper *O Exemplo* (1892) and the historiography of Rio Grande do Sul affirm that the periodical was directed at the Black population of Porto Alegre, a privileged reading community for the publication, although not an exclusive one. In its first issue, the editorial board informs readers of its intention to place itself “[...] within the dominions of the capital’s journalism [...]” (*O Exemplo*, 1892, p. 1). The record indicates that the publication in question, permeated by desires and aspirations, rejections and acceptances, established itself as a defined program, filled with diverse interests and as a response to the demands of its context.

The article “*A Revista Feminina* (1914–1930) in perspective: the use of the press and archives to think the history of women,” written by Daniela Oliveira Ramos dos Passos and Rayane Silva Guedes (2024), provides indications for understanding the scenario of this research. It is important to note that, even in the years after 1888, Black women continued to work in the most devalued sectors, receiving low wages and appalling treatment, and were presented “[...] as extremely rude, barbarous, and promiscuous figures, therefore, devoid of any citizenship rights, which indicates to us that not all women were represented in the same way [...]” (Passos; Guedes, 2024, p. 3). Accordingly, *O Exemplo* wished to instill in the “woman of color” new behaviors in accordance with her new condition as a free person, but also to present and prescribe the places she should aspire to occupy in society. This change in position would occur through instruction.

Based on the foregoing, the present article aims to discuss women’s instruction from the perspective of the editors and male and female contributors of *O Exemplo* (Porto Alegre/RS, 1892–1930). This investigation is situated within the field of the History of Education, which, as pointed out by Maria Stephanou and Maria Helena Camara Bastos in the collection *História e Memórias da Educação no Brasil* published in 2011, is characterized as a multifaceted and pluridisciplinary field. Encompassing a wide range of themes and research objects, the area frequently resorts to unusual documents and interdisciplinary theories, highlighting the diversity of possible

approaches, especially in contemporary times. In this context, Sousa's thesis (2019) reinforces the relevance of studies on the press, particularly concerning the Black community in Southern Brazil.

From this perspective, considering the newspaper *O Exemplo* as a historical document allows for an update of the research already carried out, by directing the focus to under-investigated themes, such as the education of "men and women of color" in the period spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This discussion is based on the theoretical and methodological perspective of Cultural History, understood as a historiographical approach that allows for multiple possibilities of interpreting the past.

As a historiographical strand, Cultural History concentrates on reflecting about how people lived, acted, thought, produced, read, and expressed themselves in different eras. Such a proposal breaks with the traditional themes and objects of History anchored in great men and major political and economic events. Therefore, Cultural History seeks to understand cultural practices (in this case, reading and writing), the representations, and the symbols that were materialized in personal life and in artifacts such as periodicals.

For this purpose, we base ourselves on the contributions of the professor and researcher Roger Chartier, in his book *A História Cultural: entre práticas e representações* published in 1988. In this work, the author proposes to identify how, in different historical and geographical contexts, a certain social reality is constructed, thought out, and presented for reading.

Still within this perspective, the author Sandra Jatahy Pesavento, in the book *História e história cultural* published in 2008, indicates the need to decipher the reality of the past through its representations. In the same direction, Carlo Ginzburg (2007), in the work *O fio e os rastros: verdadeiro, falso, fictício*, suggests scrutinizing the clues, observing the information and data that are not obvious. In this sense, the challenge for the researcher who intends to be a historian implies investigating a multiplicity of human experiences related to their object of study.

Regarding the historian's craft, Alain Corbin, in the interview titled *O prazer do historiador* published in 2005, emphasizes that the historian's [of education] operation on the document would facilitate the adoption of a comprehensive perspective in relation to people and the past, or rather, in relation to their actions within a given

historical context. This sensitive professional fulfills the commitment to put themselves in the place of these subjects, in order to reconstruct the itinerary of each of the involved, of the communities or groups. Following this orientation, we have taken for appreciation and presentation an empirical corpus composed of twelve selected texts that deal with the theme of instruction, situated in different historical moments.

To analyze the articles of the newspaper *O Exemplo*, staffed by men until its last publication, the following questions were posed: why were women not part of the editorial board of this newspaper? Why did the editorial board of *O Exemplo* accept the publication of texts written by women? Did the newspaper, in fact, position itself in favor of "the fair sex"? These questions allow for the expansion of the debate throughout the research. It will also be considered that some of the female contributors wrote in the weekly using pseudonyms<sup>1</sup>, contributing short stories, poems, chronicles, notes, and other writings. This participation, even if almost imperceptible, allowed female readers and writers to share their voices and perspectives in the newspaper, making it more inclusive and relevant to the female community of the time.

## **2 The banner of instruction and women in the pages of the newspaper *O Exemplo* (1902 to 1905)**

In the first phase of the newspaper *O Exemplo*, which covers the years from 1892 to 1897, there are no texts that deal with the relationship between instruction and women. However, in the second phase, between 1902 and 1905, it was possible to find some writings that were transcribed and analyzed in this research, which deal with the banner of women's education in the pages of this hebdomadal.

The newspaper *O Exemplo* emerged in the press with the intention of propagating discourses that would provide opportunities for the moral and intellectual upliftment of the population of color. To achieve this purpose, it states that its program lies in the defense of the class and the improvement of its knowledge (Sousa, 2020). Thus, *O Exemplo* suggests a diversity of issues, of which two stand out: to be an example for its readers; and to defend instruction as a banner.

In this direction, researcher Ana Flávia Magalhães Pinto, when writing her

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the centuries, the use of male pseudonyms by women was a frequent practice, due to the prejudice female writers suffered, serving as a way to facilitate the acceptance and publication of the texts they produced.

dissertation titled *De pele escura e tinta preta: a imprensa negra do século XIX* (1833-1899) published in 2006, categorizes the newspaper *O Exemplo* as part of the "Black Press," as it discusses the interests of the Black Brazilian population, such as combating racism and racial discrimination, as well as inciting the moral and intellectual upliftment of the class, which included women (Pinto, 2006). To achieve this purpose, the "Black press" faced the barriers imposed by the "white press," which continued to advocate for the servitude of the Black population, remaining insensitive to the aspirations and demands of Black communities. In this sense, the newspaper *O Exemplo* counted on the contribution of texts from female contributors interested in the cause of instruction. Furthermore, there are writings from male contributors and the periodical's own editorial board, which was predominantly composed of "men of color".

The female voices are present in the newspaper *O Exemplo*, partially breaking with historically predefined spaces and with the view that the male sex "is worth more". At the same time, the documents present them as protagonists of a history, as they were attentive to the political and cultural transformations of an era that relegated their instruction to the background. This is because, throughout the Empire and in the early Republic, the instruction offered to women was defined according to the role they played in society.

Consequently, there is a diminished female presence in printed productions. This fact is not surprising, given, once again, the secondary and silenced place occupied by women in the literary world of the time, as will be demonstrated through excerpts from the newspaper *O Exemplo* in its different phases.

Nevertheless, it is also possible to note that women did not remain silent and used the periodical *O Exemplo* as a platform to disseminate their intellectual production and encourage the instruction of other women, as seen in a 1902 publication, in which the anonymous contributor named *Uma Democrata* wrote a poem titled *Soberano* (1902). In a brief fragment of the poem, the author writes: "I have the power of the world:/-I contain wisdom/ - I contain experience! / But who are you? cries science/- who are you, oh troublemaker?!/ I am the king of the world! / Silence! I am money" (*O Exemplo*, 1902, p. 1). In it, it is possible to identify the contributor's pride and competence in writing.

In the text "A escrita feminina no jornal *O Exemplo*: vozes-mulheres em cena (Porto Alegre/RS, 1902-1927)", Souza and Sousa (2021, p.28) state that:

[...] at the beginning of the 20th century, female writing began to appear in the newspaper *O Exemplo*, the result of female voices that preceded them, who did not accept remaining confined to the private space and fought for their basic rights such as presence and participation in public life. In this sense, it is possible to identify the powerful and revolutionary character of this newspaper through the presence of female voices.

In the piece *Por uma ideia*, authored by contributor Carmem d'Aguiar (1904), the opening of a popular teaching establishment was discussed, the creation of which was considered between October 1902 and January 1903. According to the author, "[...] to instruct our own is the first duty of those who understand our needs, and that is why I come in these lines to address an appeal to our associations". Such an appeal converges so that the members of the associations, especially those with recreational purposes, realize that "[...] it will not be difficult for all associations, with weak pecuniary aid, to support the night classes that we so much need and that will certainly constitute the improving agent of our intellectual conditions and our moral state" (*O Exemplo*, 1904, p. 1).

Carmem d'Aguiar (1904), attentive to the various themes debated in the newspaper *O Exemplo*, with special attention to those dealing with education, assures that the opening of a popular teaching establishment is something we need, as it enables the improvement of the intellectual conditions and the moral state of her fellows. She argued that everyone had the commitment to bring the light of instruction to the largest number of people who need it, especially the associations. In this endeavor, accepting the suggestion of *O Exemplo* to open night classes consisted of shedding light on the obscurity of ignorance and working for the improvement of the intellectual conditions of the population "of color".

In defending the banner of instruction, d'Aguiar (1904) becomes aware of the prejudice that "[...] will come to hurt the woman who, exceeding the grandiose mission of a housewife, stealing some time from the care of pots and mending [...]" (*O Exemplo*, 1904, p. 1), dares to enter the literary world of "men". The fragment is elucidating because it emphasizes multiple prejudices suffered by women who ventured to write articles, poems, and chronicles, especially for the press. Even in the face of these prejudices, the contributor Carmem positions herself in the domains of a white and male press, suggesting to other women that they venture into the "beneficial notions of knowledge".



According to Saffioti (1976, p. 16), when discussing the woman in class society, she states that there is a "[...] subvaluation of female capacities translated in terms of myths justifying male supremacy and, therefore, the social order that generated it". In this direction, the editors and contributors of *O Exemplo* present themselves as intellectuals, or rather, as "men of letters," which reinforces male supremacy. At the same time, they incite the need for the instruction of the female gender as cited in the text "*As mulheres*", written by the contributor Pepita<sup>2</sup> (1904) who, inspired by the example of Joan of Arc, makes a discussion against ignorance.

How different their existence would be if they sought to adorn themselves by enhancing their physical beauty and adding charms to their intelligence, if instead of wanting to hear, - She is beautiful - they sought to hear - She is educated; because beauty is lost, but instruction persists, and instead of isolation over time, they would always find themselves surrounded by those who would come to hear their concepts as educated women. [...] Instruction gives us a good past, will give us a very good present and an excellent future, because it will be said of us thus: she was studious and instructed and will be enlightened. Let not the young women who read what I write misinterpret my words, do not think that I want to insinuate them to abandon their personal care, and in the complete withdrawal from rejoicing, from pleasure, from those hours that represent half of their lives because from there (so they think) their future hangs. No. They will be mistaken if they think so, because I also like the ball, but the ball that instead of corrupting, instructs, that instead of depressing, elevates, instead of separating, unifies. And for the end of this desired unification, I come, making this string of observations, to teach you to exchange the multicolored rosettes of expensive and useless ribbons for the sublime pages of instructive books. The moment has come and presents itself clearly to us! Let us congregate with this committee of one of our associations that goes to its counterparts to ask for the necessary aid for the instruction of our people! let us do what is possible for the good reception of its propaganda, and then we will have shown that woman does not only want the beauty of clothes but is also concerned with the beauty of the soul. [...] Onward! let will and perseverance be our beacon! Let us await the occasion and, at the first cry of alert, let us exchange mirrors for books and do something for our people! (O Exemplo, 1904, p. 1).

The foregoing discussions point to criticisms and guidance woven by the contributor Pepita (1904) with the purpose that women could rise above ignorance, in the "sublime pages of instructive books". She also suggests that associations be spaces where they can receive the necessary educational aid for the improvement of the intellectual and moral state of the Black community (Zubaran, 2008). For this reason, numerous requests were made to those who could contribute to the crusade of bringing light to brains obscured by a crass ignorance prejudicial to progress and,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Moreira and Zubaran (2022, p. 1), Pepita is a pseudonym used by D. Sophia Ferreira Chaves, a contributor to *O Exemplo* and a public school teacher.

consequently, to the nation. In this sense, instruction, as a republican ideal, was a current discourse for the progress of the nation.

### **3 The benefits of instruction for women in the pages of the periodical *O Exemplo* (1908 to 1911)**

In the analysis of the third phase of the periodical *O Exemplo*, which covers the period from 1908 to 1911, it was possible to discuss how the editors and contributors inscribed the benefits of instruction for women. When analyzing the text *Rabisco*, published in 1909 and written by the contributor Arnaldo Dutra, it is perceived that, when addressing education, the author argues that, even recognizing the numerous difficulties affecting poor children, he warns that the neglect of parents regarding the instruction of their daughters is unjustifiable. This is because such carelessness contributes to the maintenance of their state of ignorance. Still according to the referred contributor:

[...] the exemplary head of the family, the good citizen, do not see that only by this means can one acquire obedient and honest daughters, that only with the salutary contest of knowledge are the women of the future formed, fit, by the education received, to perform with superiority the arduous and ennobling mission of a wife! It is time now for there to be more patriotism. Let us instill in the spirit of these infants the beneficial notions of knowledge, giving them intellectual nourishment, just as one gives the material food with which they sustain life, and thus we will have rendered relevant services to society, to the homeland (*O Exemplo*, 1909, p. 1).

The citation above emphasizes the benefits of instruction for the formation of the female gender. Nourished with the knowledge of instruction, women will play their role, already defined by society, of being useful to the family, to society, and to the homeland. Jessica Gustafson, in the book *Jornalistas e feministas: a construção da perspectiva de gênero no Jornalismo* published in 2019, states that it was only during the 19th century that Brazilian women began to have the right to literacy. And they used various strategies to break, in a way, with the ideology that reserved for them only the attribute of emotion in opposition to reason, which was destined for men. However, she emphasizes that "[...] it is never too much to point out that this access remained restricted, reached only by women of the dominant classes" (Gustafson, 2019, p. 115).

The editorial board of the newspaper *O Exemplo* (1910), in the article *Nosso objeto*, criticizes the defenders of the state of ignorance of the female gender. And, on this matter, it states: "*O Exemplo*' has as its object the education, the encouragement



of the study of Brazilians who have never had the happiness of cultivating, at least rudimentarily, the spirit, for lack of time and means" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1). It reaffirms, in this statement, the commitment to the instruction of men and women who find themselves in a state of ignorance.

According to Saffioti (1976, p. 98), this same society continuously offers numerous resistances to the instruction of women, as they grow and/or stand out on the educational ladder. In this regard, the contributor Arnaldo Dutra, in the text *Rabisco – Pela instrução* (1910), announces a series of conferences, held in different social spaces, offered by a group of ladies to incite the "poor classes" toward instruction:

A group of young ladies, led by the intelligent and tireless fighter Dulcinda S. das Dores, understanding the lack of instruction from which the poor, humble classes suffer, resolved to incite a series of conferences, in order to get our dramatic and dancing associations to found night classes for those who, humble by birth, did not find in childhood a charitable, friendly hand that would benefit them by helping them or giving them the greatest wealth we can aspire to – instruction (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

Among other initiatives for the improvement of the intellectual state of the poor population, it should be noted that these conferences were presented as a "prelude to a radiant sun" to shine on men and women. If on one hand, there is the presence of literate women, possibly from the dominant classes, educated and who inscribed themselves in the domains of letters; on the other, there is their presence in inciting other women to enlist in the cultivation of their intelligences. In this way, these female lecturers proclaim "[...] that knowledge is the indisputable basis of aggrandizement! Holy instruction! [...] let us instill in these ignorant spirits the salutary notions of knowledge [...]" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

In *O Exemplo*, instruction is inscribed as a light to drive away the darkness of ignorance, or even, as a key to open obscured brains, as well as being responsible for awakening the consciousness of women, clarifying their minds and contributing to the strengthening of their intellectuality, in the service of themselves, the family, and the nation. Regarding the contribution of Mrs. Dulcinda S. das Dores, previously referred to by the contributor Dutra (1910), on the subject, it is recorded:

[...] these courageous young ladies are worthy of praise, who, understanding the great necessity of instruction, who, despising this unjustified indifferentism that exists, launched such a noble, so elevated idea, which comes to mark a new era of aggrandizement in a milieu that unfortunately still lives, for the most part, under the cruel darkness of ignorance. May your example, intelligent young women, be imitated; your efforts crowned with the best possible

success; and receive our sincere applause (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

The citation exposes a denunciation and, at the same time, applauds the example of the intelligent young women in the action that aims to instill the benefits of instruction for the poor, the unfortunate, and women. Promptly, the lecturers are examples that deserve to be followed. Since, according to Saffioti (1976, p. 95), "[...] as the process of urbanization intensified [...]", it provided a wide network of sociability for the discussion about the roles attributed to women, even with the absence of a profound change in the female social position reserved for the private space.

The contributor Alcides Carvalho, in the article *Fatos e impressões I* (1910), when addressing the light of instruction against the darkness of ignorance, states that primary instruction in the country and, especially, in Rio Grande do Sul, has conquered an honorable place in the intellectual field. For him, the state government had not neglected this theme, being in "encouraging conditions, which portend a bright and prosperous future through the decrease of illiteracy and the consequent increase of the lights of the salons" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

Dialoguing with this theme, the researcher Alceu Ravanello Ferraro, in the book *História inacabada do analfabetismo no Brasil* published in 2009, emphasizes a process of inversion regarding the literacy and illiteracy rates between men and women. While, on one hand, historically, men presented high literacy rates, on the other, women had higher rates of illiteracy. From the mid-20th century onwards, starting with the younger age groups, the female population began to register higher literacy rates. However, this did not reflect a relevant change in relation to their role in Brazilian society.

In discussing the social position that women should occupy, the contributor Carvalho (1910, p. 1), denounces that, "[...] currently, society has followed the old prejudice, that the female sex should only occupy itself with domestic arrangements, [...] derived from the selfish character of man, which even seems like a law, established by nature". It is on this naturalization of the female gender that certain prejudices rest, which also extend to those who defend them, in the sense that they may enjoy their right in "scientific discussions" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

The aforementioned contributor further writes: "[...] why can she [the woman] not occupy a dignified and prominent position in the heart of society? Is her intelligence perhaps inferior to that of man?". Thus, "[...] it is necessary to let her be properly

educated, and prepare herself for the great struggles of civilization; let us not sacrifice female intelligences to our wills, and let us seek, rather, to let them cultivate the sciences, art, or music, according to their predilections" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

Hence, if there is ignorance or even denial of the Enlightenment ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity towards women in science, that is, their interdiction, there is concurrently the recognition that only through the instruction of the female gender is it possible to think about the progress of a society. In this regard, Saffioti (1976) assures that, with the loss of the rigid dimension of the patriarchal family, women are moving towards developing a diversity of activities and functions in the urban space.

Knowing the criticisms that fall upon him and all those who defend the right to female participation in any field of knowledge, Carvalho (1910), points out: "[...] every time that civilization contributes to the moral improvement of the predominant ideas in the spirit of society, we must reflect on the injustices that, little by little, are emerging or disappearing [...]" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1). For him, society reacted sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, in relation to the new positions assumed by the "fair sex". This intellectual clash became productive, in the sense of deducing and proclaiming, of dealing with and fighting for "the triumph of Right and Justice". According to the contributor:

We do not want to contest the aptitudes of the strong sex for the performance of high social functions, as this is not our thought ; we will only try to demonstrate that the aspirations of women should not only be summarized in marriage, she necessarily has the desire to shine before society, not only for her charms and physical beauties, but also for her intellectual gifts, for her moral superiority, for the renown possessed by those who dedicate themselves to the toils of intelligence (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1).

This contributor refrains from conflicts with the "strong sex," although he expresses his defense of women's aspirations for activities beyond domestic care. In a coincidental period, Edna Telma Fonseca e Silva Vilar, in the article titled *Imprensa e instrução: focalizando o periódico Germinal* (1909) de Penedo/AL published in 2015, indicates that, not only in the 20th century, but since the 19th, the discussion of themes related to the instruction of women and, above all, the aspirations of the female gender for intellectual cultivation, has been frequent, with journalism and the press being examples of these domains.

In the book *A história das mulheres no Brasil*, in the chapter written by Norma Telles, published in 2010, titled *Escritoras, escritas, escrituras*, there is a reference to

Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862-1934), a journalist and author of books. She began her career amidst various oppositions, acquiring, despite this, renown and prestige. She was an editor of *A Semana*, in Rio de Janeiro, and wrote for several periodicals such as *O Paiz*. According to Telles, Júlia "[...] campaigned in defense of the city, of women's education, of divorce, of the exhibition of flowers, just as she had defended Abolition and the Republic [...]" (Telles, 2010, p. 435).

The reference by Telles (2010) exposes a double prejudice: the first, of being a woman; the second, the domain of the written code. Interdicting access was becoming almost unavoidable, due to the growing literacy of women in the first decade of the 20th century. It is worth mentioning that instruction campaigns were widely disseminated in Brazil before the abolition of slavery, as the population "of color", whether men or women, knew the importance of instruction to get ahead of prejudices.

The historian Maria Cristina Cortez Wissenbach, in the article *Cartas, procurações, escapulários e patuás: os múltiplos significados da escrita entre escravos e forros na sociedade oitocentista brasileira* published in 2002, states that literacy implied the acquisition and use of a code that until then was the prerogative of whites, which adapted to the values and needs of the captives and the circumstances of being a slave and transformed into an element of social affirmation. This means that, despite the prohibitions on access to literate knowledge, enslaved people, men and women, were not unaware of the writing that circulated in prints, almanacs, periodicals, pamphlets, and the few available newspapers and books, even if they translated a picture of very sparse reading.

For contributor Carvalho (1910), female aspirations in the face of science and intellectual cultivation are targets of a prejudiced society, because the woman "[...] cannot play this role, without exposing herself to the fine ironies and subtle satires of those who intend to demean her," as well as she "[...] cannot dedicate herself to a scientific or literary career, without becoming a preferred target of the penetrating humor of witty chroniclers [...]" (*O Exemplo*, 1910, p. 1). Regarding the literary career, even if sporadic, performed by women in the writing of a poem or a chronicle in the press, derogatory concepts are found in the columns of newspapers. And, in this sense, the referred contributor states:

Little matter the demeaning judgments of great men or eminent scholars about the female personality; it matters little that Milton said that the misfortune of

man dates back to the birth of woman, or that Victor Hugo thought that woman is a very perfected devil, because these glorious geniuses, when uttering such phrases, did not remember that they were thus throwing at the sources of their mothers, a vile insult, a petty concept, that perhaps, they were far from deserving. They were moments of madness, the instants they uttered these words... Today, even religions try to dignify the female sex, and, the proof of this, is in the cult that Positivism renders to Woman (O Exemplo, 1910, p. 1).

As we can observe, the reference to positivism, present in the quote above, is close to the discussions presented by Professor Elomar Tambara, in his thesis *A educação no Rio Grande do Sul sob o castilhismo* (1991), when he addresses a differentiated instruction given to men and women. According to the author, this difference is "[...] a consequence of the sexual division of labor itself proposed by the positivist ideology, which attributed very differentiated social roles between the sexes". As an example, "[...] to the woman fell, especially, the function of affective education, while to men was attributed the function of working for the support of the family" (Tambara, 1991, p. 121). For women, more education and little instruction was enough, as the final objective was preparation for life.

Margareth Rago, in the text *Trabalho feminino e sexualidade published in 2010*, records the resonances of Augusto Comte's teachings in Brazil. For they understood that women should not possess money – a dirty, degrading, and essentially masculine object, therefore, contrary to their nature; women should restrict themselves to their "natural space," the home, avoiding all sorts of contact and activity that could attract them to the public space.

Returning to Carvalho's record (1910), we can infer that, if on one hand, men, considered the "strong sex," occupy a prominent position in the fields of intelligence; on the other hand, the discourse that the darkness of ignorance over women is nefarious and that there is a problem to be solved is evident. For Carvalho (1910), women should be educated to assume other posts, beyond the domestic sphere, and become "[...] fit for the exercise of intellectual, or even physical, toils, so that later, if their ideal is not realized, she can maintain herself with dignity, without throwing herself into the dark precipice of disgrace, without staining the name of her own family". The author concludes by suggesting that women should not only be educated for domestic life, but for "any branch of social activity [...] and there it is, why I think that feminism is a regenerating and profitable campaign" (O Exemplo, 1910, p. 1).

Thus, free and compulsory education provided to women would give them

unimaginable positions and occupations, contradicting the discourse of the "strong sex" that proclaimed their unnecessary intellectual cultivation. Incidentally, Dilza Pôrto Gonçalves, in her thesis *A instrução pública, a educação da mulher e a formação de professores nos jornais partidários de Porto Alegre/RS (1869-1937)* published in 2013, emphasizes that, if on one hand, the objective of the directors of the Normal School was to form "good" mothers and wives," on the other, they went far beyond that, as exemplified by former students like Ana Aurora do Amaral Lisboa and Luciana de Abreu who gradually conquered the editorial offices of periodicals in Porto Alegre (Gonçalves, 2013). A fact that demonstrates the strategies used by women to secure a space in the domains of those who excluded them.

In the text *Mulheres pobres e violência no Brasil urbano*, written by Soihet (2010, p. 398), it is recorded that, "[...] contrary to some traditional assertions, we saw women who fought, loved, hated, cursed...". Still according to Soihet (2010, p. 398), women, "[...] not a few, seeing themselves harmed in their rights and violated in their aspirations, did not hesitate [...]" and undertook diverse strategies in the face of situations "that they considered damaging to their honor". In this direction and, to conclude, Souza and Sousa (2021, p. 15) affirm that "literature about women placed them under the tutelage of fathers or husbands, without legal possibility of freedom in society in an active way," but, just like those who wrote for the referred weekly, in other contexts, they become precursors in the art of writing.

#### **4 It is a patriotic duty to care for and invest in women's instruction in *O Exemplo* (1916 to 1930)**

In the fourth and final phase of the referred periodical, which extends from 1916 to 1930, the care and investment in women's instruction as a patriotic duty is discussed. Instruction is inscribed as a counterpoint to ignorance, as well as to illiteracy. In the article *Rumo aos livros*, the female contributor, under the pseudonym M. F. (1919), writes about a war waged against illiteracy and prejudice against women in the matter of instruction:

It is necessary to keenly interest women in the happy desideratum of the ideal embodied in the war against illiteracy. The woman, who in the terrible cataclysm from which the world has just emerged, had the opportunity to reveal her brilliant capacity to replace man in life, surprising with examples of courage and abnegation all those who obstinately persisted in the erroneous prejudice that woman would rarely exceed her aptitudes for domestic service, the woman, we repeat, cannot fail to associate herself with the fight against



illiteracy. It is necessary to destroy the prejudice still encysted, unfortunately, in the minds of many people, that woman does not need instruction. Whoever supposes so is flagrantly mistaken, because with the natural evolution that the world is undergoing, the eminent role reserved for women in the social destination is increasingly refined. We must, therefore, equally care for the instruction of women, keeping the necessary relativity so that tomorrow, when occasional circumstances call her to exercise her activity in any branch of work, she is fit in the performance of the task assigned to her and we are not incriminated as improvident for having criminally neglected the problem of women's instruction (*O Exemplo*, 1919, p. 1).

The contributor also mentions the importance of women in the fight against illiteracy and criticizes the prejudiced defenders of the idea that "woman does not need instruction". She calls upon society to take care of female instruction, so that it can count on women as a "powerful factor of this gigantic enterprise that on the day it culminates victoriously among us, with the extinction of illiteracy" (*O Exemplo*, 1919, p. 1).

The referred writer emphasizes the instruction of women, indicating their belonging to the homeland and their equally necessary role in the world of work. This is shown in the second piece signed by her with the same previous title. She points out in the pages of *O Exemplo* that the women of Porto Alegre "belonging to the teaching staff of the Escola Complementar and who have just founded the *Liga Central Pró-Infância Desvalida*, have as one of their first aims, to incite love for illiterate children" (*O Exemplo*, 1919, p. 1). From this citation, we observe the association between the instruction of women and the benefits to the homeland. In this sense, investing in female instruction would be a patriotic duty, given the relevant services of care for destitute children that will be performed by them for the "glorious homeland".

For a homeland that longs to be great, it is necessary that women make a "[...] small sacrifice: do not want to be illiterate, learn to read and write, be instructed, in short" (*O Exemplo*, 1919, p. 1). In writing these words M.F. emphasizes that:

It is therefore incumbent upon our patriots and especially upon the descendants of the Ethiopian race, to run hastily to these establishments of free instruction and enroll, and not criminally allow such schools to close for lack of attendance. Let us take up the books and run to the colleges, the incomplete word of Instruction, which is the radiant light that will illuminate the great road of Glory and Progress to be trodden by our beloved Brazil (*O Exemplo*, 1919, p. 1).

With this reference, the cited contributor calls on everyone, not only the "descendants of the Ethiopian race," to seek means to become instructed, as she ratifies other authors published in *O Exemplo*, defending that the aggrandizement of a

homeland comes from an instructed population, or rather, from the lights of knowledge that enlighten men and women. In this regard, Eliane Peres, in her book *Templo de Luz: os cursos noturnos masculinos de instrução primária da Biblioteca Pública Pelotense* (1875 - 1915) published in 2002, when analyzing the *Biblioteca Pública Pelotense*, states that "it seems that [women] did not participate" in it. Men defined roles and female destinies and understood that "[...] instruction and 'enlightenment' for women were admitted, preferably as long as they were not wives, mothers, and housewives [...]" (Peres, 2002, p. 71). In this way, according to the author, this declaration marks the presence and/or the "[...] proximity of women to the child's world, and their removal from spaces of sociability [...]", in which the male presence stands out (Peres, 2002, p. 71). Moreover, in the face of the debates that involved such controversy, she adds that "[...] the valorization of female instruction as a way to 'qualify' the domestic space and the education of children is notable [...]" (Peres, 2002, p. 71).

In this discourse, it is possible to identify the conceptions about the instruction of women, circumscribed to the domestic space, for the education of children. This is, then, their duty: to educate the children of "our beloved homeland". In this respect, the text *Para entender a relação escola-família: uma contribuição da história da educação*, written by Faria Filho (2000), addresses that the woman, at the time, is identified as the one greatly responsible for ensuring good order in the home and, above all, for increasingly incorporating school references to manage the domestic world and the education of children. She is directly responsible for morally, intellectually, and physically educating her children. For this, and above all, women need to be educated, because, to educate well, it is not enough to love; it is necessary to know and understand the needs of children.

In the article titled *Instrução*, authored by the contributor Belardinelli (1924), she argues that "[...] the instruction [of women] is as necessary to life as food". The author even questions if there is anything sadder and more degrading than an illiterate person and states that it is horrible for a woman to be ignorant of the letters that make up her own name. To contextualize, she clarifies that, in other times, it was very common to find an illiterate young woman,

[...] unaware of the most rudimentary things in sciences, arts, politics, etc.; with the passing of the years, everything changed. The times have passed when schools for the female sex were in charge of educating women in a

completely useless way, in relation to the social end that the great divine and biological laws traced for them. The woman of now already has a conscience of herself; the one who studies knows to be a slave to her duties. Generally, the educated woman believes in the future, believes in God, believes in the immortality of the soul, believes in the justice that will one day be done to her, believes in science, believes in the arts, and believes in the intelligence that has given so many an immortal future. Above all, it is necessary that she be convinced in her work, that she does everything for it, even at the sacrifice of her strength and does not let herself die of hunger or need, relying simply on man. An educated person does not need to subject herself to these things. In her patriotic and altruistic duties, the modern woman needs to act (*O Exemplo*, 1924, p. 1).

Contextualizing in this way, the quote above indicates that the transition from a state of submission did not occur peacefully, but was marked by struggles against this "state of affairs". In this regard, the text *Do cabaré ao lar: a utopia da cidade disciplinar*, written by Margareth Rago (1987), mentions that it is possible to identify elements that indicate that the instruction of women should be directed towards training for the roles of mothers and wives. Thus, the knowledge they should acquire aimed to make them "[...] a more pleasant and interesting companion to man [...]" (Rago, 1987, p. 63).

Despite the minimal instruction reserved for them, women managed to perceive much more than they were destined to know. Thus, upon becoming aware of this, they sought to qualify themselves in knowledge that went beyond the rudiments of reading, writing, counting, and embroidering, because, according to the contributor Belardinelli (1924), "[...] we already have, fortunately, female doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, dentists, musicians, painters, poets, and prose writers. All this due to what? To instruction [...]" (*O Exemplo*, 1924, p. 1).

In this sense, for Belardinelli (1924), the progress of the homeland becomes evident in educated women, who can significantly influence their children to be patriotic. "In this way she will become, in morals and patriotism, as great as the ancient women of Sparta" (*O Exemplo*, 1924, p. 1).

The periodical records that now there are no more excuses to be made regarding the instruction of women. If before they argued that there were few schools and resources, in the context of the time, Brazil, through its prosperity, favors everyone, ensuring schools from the most "[...] civilized city to the suburbs of the most rustic village. There are everything from the great Universities to the most humble schools. Only those who do not want to, do not learn, because there are means, fortunately, for all classes" (*O Exemplo*, 1924, p.1).

From what has been mentioned, we can denote that the female contributors of *O Exemplo*, women, mothers, wives, workers, in short ; all knew the literature produced since the dawn of the French Revolution in 1789, because, as stated in the intellectual production of Pinto, in *Uma história do feminismo no Brasil* published in 2003, women fought for the right to access instruction, that is, "[...] they fought for their right to citizenship, to a legal existence outside the home, the only place where they had some kind of recognition as wives and mothers. Outside the limits of the house, they were left with religious life or the accusation of witchcraft [...]" (Pinto, 2003, p. 13).

## 5 Final Considerations

Over the course of the research, we perceived that the supposed intellectual incapacity of women, according to the dominant discourse, was the justification for keeping them away from access to instruction and maintaining them in a state of ignorance. It seems, based on the theoretical frameworks presented and the texts written by the male and female contributors, as well as by the editorial board of the newspaper *O Exemplo* itself, that the prohibition of women from instruction was due to the fear that they would come to hold the power of writing and excel in the domains of the press. Based on this premise, the article discussed, from a robust empirical corpus, the instruction of women from the perspective of the editors and male and female contributors of the referred newspaper.

Based on what was exposed throughout the article, we can infer that the editors and collaborators of the periodical, all men, wrote discourses and campaigns in favor of women's instruction for intellectual cultivation. Thus, we can identify a progressive stance in defense of women's instruction. However, a conservative tone appears regarding the care of the house and family, by indicating that these attributes "should" remain in the foreground. The reflection of this conservatism is the absence of women occupying spaces on the periodical's editorial board and, when they do appear in print, they are contributors who often use a pseudonym as a strategy for the acceptance of their participation.

In any case, the newspaper *O Exemplo*, in the context of the time, fulfilled its objective throughout its publications, by circulating discourses in favor of the instruction of women, in other words, of the female gender. Thus, the editorial board, the male and female contributors of the newspaper *O Exemplo*, throughout this time frame,

ensured that there is no ignorant people that can progress without instruction, including women, the "fair sex". Thus, not dispensing with the "beneficial notions of knowledge" becomes an imperative for society as a whole.

It seems that the female writing in the newspaper *O Exemplo* appears as a practice of non-tutored writing, because, in several published notes, the weekly informed that it was not responsible for the texts published by its contributors. This also indicates that the female contributors did not only address individual issues, but those of a collectivity around them, by making their voices echo in the world of the press. These women refused to remain confined to the private space and fought for their basic rights, such as presence and participation in public life.

The empirical *corpus* of the investigation signals that the participation of female writing follows several paths, deconstructing the mistaken view that women only wrote about very specific themes to their "authorized" experiences, such as the home and offspring, or even about romantic love, that is, genres related to the writing of poems, chronicles, fables, and others. We observed that the female contributors wrote and positioned themselves in the press with argumentative and dissertative texts that moved the reader's gaze towards the problems of the time, with examples of these themes being the issues of illiteracy and the opening of evening schools.

The highlighted themes were the object of the female contributors, the male contributors, and the periodical's own editorial board, who manifested in favor of the instruction of the class and the race. Consequently, the banner of instruction was an imperious requirement for the good national march of life, business, and the progress of this great homeland. Likewise, this female writing denounced the potent and revolutionary character of this newspaper through the presence of these female contributors – women, mothers, workers – in the domains of journalism.

Finally, it would be pertinent, from studies like this, to continue the investigation of other newspapers, or as suggested by the article by Weiduschadt *et al.* (2025), in the editorial of the *Revista de História da Educação*, titled *História da Resistência feminina – memória e história*, it is "[...] necessary to make a greater effort to highlight female struggles and trajectories – which are not and were not few!" (Weiduschadt *et al.*, 2025, p.1), especially of groups like women, who "[...] have been historically more easily relegated to subalternity [...]" (Weiduschadt *et al.*, 2025, p. 2). This research sought to contribute to the expansion of this debate in the field of the History of

Education, specifically on the instruction of women in Brazil in the first decades of the 20th century.



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