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Maria Fiuza da Rocha and the Normal School of Ouro Preto (MG): intertwined paths (1872-1915)

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Abstract: This article aims to present aspects of Maria José Fiuza da Rocha's academic, personal, and professional trajectory as well as her relationship with the Normal School of Ouro Preto (Escola Normal de Ouro Preto), the first institution for training primary school teachers created in Minas Gerais. The time frame covers the young woman's entry into the Normal School (Escola Normal) in 1872 until the last information found about her in the sources in 1915. The theoretical framework includes authors who discuss the feminization of the teaching profession in Brazil and life trajectories. Methodologically, the onomastic perspective by Ginzburg and Poni (1991) is used, based on a varied set of sources such as: school records, public administration documents, almanacs, and newspapers from Minas Gerais. From the analysis of the sources, the intrinsic relationship between Maria Fiuza and the Normal School was observed. Both trajectories intertwine as she was part of the institution's first class of women graduates and one of the first women to be part of its teaching staff. Maria Fiuza's trajectory is also characterized by her participation in religious brotherhoods and her involvement in the abolitionist movement in Ouro Preto. A pioneer in many aspects, she faced challenges throughout her career and persevered in a historical context in which women's participation outside the domestic sphere was still viewed with suspicion by conservative sectors of society.

Keywords: normal school; feminization of the teaching profession; life trajectories; Maria Fiuza da Rocha.

1 Introduction

The first normal schools for training primary school teachers in Brazil were established in the 1830s¹. The Ouro Preto Normal School (ENOP)² was created within this context, specifically in 1835, and began operating five years later in Ouro Preto, the capital of the province of Minas Gerais³ then. However, as was usual in the country

¹ The first Normal School operating in Brazil was in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, in 1835. According to Villela (1992), its creation was conceived by the conservative political group after the Additional Act of 1834, which granted administrative autonomy to the provinces. The author adds that, initially, the institution, which aimed to train primary school teachers, was focused on the moral and religious education of teachers and on teaching methods rather than on the actual content to be taught.

² Throughout this article, the abbreviation "ENOP" will be used to refer to the Normal School of Ouro Preto.

³ Ouro Preto was the capital of Minas Gerais until 1897. After that, the capital of Minas Gerais was transferred to the newly created city of Belo Horizonte on December 12 of that year.



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at that time, the institution experienced periods of intermittent activity, characterized by closings and reopenings throughout the 19th century⁴.

In its third phase of operation, beginning in 1872, the ENOP began to more systematically admit female students into its student body, among them Maria José Fiuza da Rocha⁵. After graduation, the normal school graduate began her work as a professor at the institution, remaining in this position until her retirement in 1891. This study aims to present aspects of Maria Fiuza da Rocha's academic, personal, and professional trajectory and her relationship with the ENOP, in which both trajectories intertwine, amidst the context of the feminization of normal schools and primary school teaching in Brazil⁶.

As for the theoretical framework, this article is based on studies discussing the feminization of the teaching profession in the final decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries in Brazil. According to Louro (2004), women began to enter primary school teaching in greater numbers for two main reasons: either due to financial needs or to broaden their intellectual universe, which was restricted at that time. Vidal and Carvalho (2001), in turn, argue that not only the insertion of women into teaching contributed to its feminization process, but also the new characteristics attributed to the profession, such as patience and affection, typically considered as feminine during that period. Freire (2011) emphasizes that this participation was not entirely peaceful and faced various form of resistance, as it was believed that women working outside the domestic sphere could pose risks and destroy the family. Furthermore, women's intellectual capacities to perform the profession were also questioned. Therefore, rather than a male concession, female teaching was considered an achievement by women through extensive struggles and advocacy.

⁴ As Tanuri (2000) argues, broadly speaking, the first Brazilian normal schools underwent successive periods of closings and re-establishment until they were consolidated as teacher-training institutions during the final decades of the 19th century.

⁵ The name Maria Fiuza is cited diversely throughout the analyzed sources: Maria Fiuza da Rocha, Maria Fiusa da Rocha, Maria José Fiuza da Rocha, Maria José Fiusa da Rocha, Maria Fiusa da Rocha e Oliveira, Maria Fiusa de Oliveira, Maria José Fiusa de Oliveira, and Maria José Fiusa da Rocha e Oliveira. In this paper, we have opted to use its most recurrent spelling: Maria José Fiuza da Rocha.

⁶ This article is based on data collected for a doctoral dissertation which aimed to understand how teaching was constructed for young women who graduated from the Normal School of Ouro Preto (ENOP), Minas Gerais, between 1877 and 1889. Throughout the doctoral research, the constant presence of Maria Fiuza's name in documents related to the ENOP was noted, which motivated the search for more details about her trajectory (academic, professional and personal) and the elements permeating her long and intense relationship with the institution.

This paper also draws on authors who address the theme of life trajectories. For Bourdieu (1996), a trajectory is formed by a series of positions successively occupied by subjects. Thus, according to the author, a trajectory cannot be understood in isolation without understanding its social context and the various agents involved in it. Similarly, Le Goff (1999) states that the individual only exists within a diverse network of relationships. Consequently, the reconstruction of a trajectory requires a detailed understanding of the society in which it is embedded.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, the name was central to reconstructing Professor Maria José Fiuza da Rocha's trajectory. In this sense, based on the assumptions presented by Ginzburg and Poni (1991), the name was used here as a "guiding thread" in the search for information about the teacher and her social universe. The sources include documents produced by the ENOP, such as correspondence, minutes, maps and lists, in addition to public administration records from Minas Gerais: teacher enrollment books and reports from the Presidents of the Province to the Provincial Legislative Assembly. Minas Gerais newspapers, yearbooks and almanacs from the period were also consulted.

2 The feminization process of the Normal School of Ouro Preto

According to Castanha (2008), the period between 1840s and 1850s were crucial for expanding the discussions on the importance of establishing normal schools for teacher training in Brazil. In this context, Tanuri (2000) explains that the provinces were responsible for the first effective initiatives, as after the Additional Act of August 12, 1834, they became responsible for primary and secondary education, while the imperial government was in charge of education in the Court and higher education. It was within this context that the Normal School of Ouro Preto was created, in Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais.

The ENOP was established by Article 7 of Provincial Law No. 13, of March 28, 1835 (Minas Gerais, 1835). However, the ENOP only started its operations in 1840. It was active for two years and then closed its doors, thus ending its first phase. The second experience began in 1847, through Law No. 311 of April 8, 1846 (Minas Gerais, 1846). It operated for five more years, interrupting its work again in 1852.

In its early years, the normal teacher training course in Ouro Preto lasted an average of two months and was almost always intended for teachers already working

in the field. The normal course aimed, among others, to train primary school teachers in the most popular teaching methods of that period, and in terms of basic knowledge, which broadly included: the four arithmetic operations, reading and writing, Christian doctrine, and moral values. Most of the individuals attending the course during this period were male, and female enrollment was rare (Gouvêa; Rosa, 2000).

Following its second interruption in 1852, the ENOP remained closed for twenty long years. Despite the inactivity, discussions about the importance of re-establishing the school were intense within Minas Gerais public administration during that period. Thus, by the end of the 1850s, the theme reappeared in discussions at the Provincial Legislative Assembly, and in the following decade these discussions were intensified, culminating in the ENOP restructuring project in the 1870s (Pedruzzi, 2016).

As Tanuri (2000) points out, during the late 1860s and early 1870s, a series of ideological, political, and cultural shifts occurred both in Brazil and abroad, culminating in the emergence of new ideas that would grant education an unprecedented level of importance. Therefore, the search for effective measures for the creation and re-establishment of normal teacher training courses gained increasing support in the Court and in the Brazilian provinces (Castanha, 2008). From the 1870s, these institutions finally began to function with greater stability and durability in the country. Thus, as Tanuri (2000) clarifies, if in the year 1867 there were four of these establishments in Brazilian soil, by 1883 there were already twenty-two public normal schools in operation, among them the one in Ouro Preto, which was re-established by Provincial Law No. 1,769, of April 4, 1871 (Minas Gerais, 1871).

Although its legal basis was established in 1871, the ENOP's activities were only effectively resumed in April 1872. As Gouvêa and Rosa (2000) highlight, from that moment on the institution underwent a series of changes, with the expansion of the curriculum, the teaching staff, and the duration of the course. Two practical schools were also established attached to this institution, so that the normal students could practice teaching during their training. Among the changes, the increasing number of female students stands out.

Starting in 1872, the ENOP effectively began to admit female students. In the following decades, they occupied increasing space within the institution's student body, enrolling in greater numbers, showing lower dropout rates, and achieving higher

graduation rates. This period was also accompanied by what was happening in the rest of the country. As Tanuri (2000) points out, simultaneously with the increased value placed on normal schools and the expansion of their curricula, these institutions increasingly admitted more female students. Therefore, the idea that primary education should be for women, with the justification that they were "naturally" more suited to dealing with children, was advocated by politicians, educators, and intellectuals of that time.

As an example of this shift, Hahner (2011) highlights that the percentage of female students enrolled in the Normal School of the Court in Rio de Janeiro grew rapidly in the latest years of the Empire. Similarly, Campos (2002) points out that, in the 1880s, the entry of male and female students into the Normal School of São Paulo was becoming more balanced, with the female enrollment contingent in some years exceeding the male contingent.

Nevertheless, the feminization of normal schools also occurred in Brazilian primary education in general. Thus, according to Vianna (2002), in the main Brazilian provinces, the presence of women in primary education gained prominence in the latest years of the Empire. In the specific case of Minas Gerais, for example, Faria Filho and Macedo (2004) recall that late 19th century, there was a significant increase in the presence of women in primary education teaching.

Investigations have not yielded the ENOP's enrollment books from its reopening in 1872 until 1876. However, some evidence suggests that young women were already present at the institution since its re-establishment. One example is found in the 1873 report by the acting inspector general of public instruction in Minas Gerais, Antonio de Alphis Martins. He stated, "[...] by the end of this year we can count on 4 or 5 teachers worthy of the profession, due to their impeccable conduct and professional qualifications" (Minas Gerais, 1873b). Similarly, in a letter addressed to the provincial public inspector on November 30, 1873, Professor Camillo de Brito wrote: "The students are distinguished by their intelligence, study, and moral qualities. The examination will show their great advancement in the subjects I taught" (Minas Gerais, 1873a).

An analysis of the enrollment records between 1877 and 1889 reveals that, for the most part, women were the majority in the first and second years of the normal teacher training course in Ouro Preto, as indicated in the following tables:

Table 1 – Students enrolled in the 1st year of the ENOP (1877-1888/1889)⁷

Year	1877	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883/ 1884 ⁸	1884/ 1885	1885/ 1886	1886/ 1887	1887/ 1888	1888/ 1889
M	8	8	8	7	8	7	7	5	4	13	17	12
W	19	11	10	9	3	8	21	21	33	47	30	42
T	27	19	18	16	11	15	28	26	37	60	47	54

Source: author's database.

Table 2 – Students enrolled in the 2nd year of the ENOP (1877-1888/1889)

Year	1877	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883/ 1884	1884/ 1885	1885/ 1886	1886/ 1887	1887/ 1888	1888/ 1889
M	3	2	3	0	3	4	0	1	1	1	0	1
W	1	10	3	8	10	2	6	9	6	11	12	7
T	4	12	6	8	13	6	6	10	7	12	12	8

Source: author's database.

Similarly, in the 3rd year of the course, which had its first class only in 1884, male enrollment is rare. Between 1884 and 1888, only two male students reached the 3rd year, one in 1886 and the other in 1887 (Minas Gerais, 1883-1890). Furthermore, fewer female students dropped out over time and graduated in greater numbers. The entire period indicated, 54 women and only 14 men completed the course (Minas Gerais, 1877-1883).

Maria José Fiuza da Rocha attended the ENOP during a transitional period in teacher training, when women began to surpass or equal men in number. In this sense, she stands out as one of the pioneers to complete the normal teacher training course for primary school teachers in Minas Gerais, navigating a context of paradigm shifts and challenges.

In the 1870s, the province of Minas Gerais was the most populous in the Brazilian Empire, and its central region where the capital Ouro Preto was located, was the most densely populated (Lott, 2009). According to the Brazilian census conducted in 1872, the municipality of Ouro Preto (at the time composed of 11 parishes) had 42,582 free inhabitants and 5,632 enslaved people (DGE, 1872). Its urban center consisted of 14,078 individuals, which corresponded to about 30% of the total

⁷ In the tables, the initials M: Men; W: Women; and T: Total are used.

⁸ Through Regulation No. 100 of 1883, the duration of courses at the Normal Schools of Minas Gerais was extended from two to three years. Furthermore, the academic year was changed, beginning in November of one year and ending in July of the following year. Therefore, the academic periods listed in the tables shift from single-year entries (1877) to combined two-year intervals (1883/1884).

population of the municipality. The entire apparatus of the provincial public administration was located in the city center. Ouro Preto was also characterized by its diversified commerce, the presence of many self-employed professionals, banking institutions, and a vast number of periodicals. It also offered leisure and entertainment options, such as theater, gardens, club, bars, squares, among others (Lott, 2009).

In this historical and spatial context, the *Liceu Mineiro* and the *Escola Normal de Ouro Preto* (ENOP) were simultaneously reopened⁹. The re-establishment of the two institutions took place in a solemn celebration on April 18, 1872, attended by representatives from the economic, political, and educational sectors of Minas Gerais, including the Provincial President at the time, Dr. Joaquim Pires Machado (Minas Gerais, 1872a).

During that period, Maria José Fiuza da Rocha spent her youth and began attending the ENOP. As already explained, the institution's enrollment books for the first years of its third phase of operation have not been located; however, newspaper reports suggest that the young woman had already been part of its student body since 1872, that is, she was part of its first class after the reopening. Thus, a note published in the section on the government secretariat of the Ouro Preto newspaper *Diário de Minas*, in the August 31, 1875 edition stated that the inspector general of public instruction had confirmed to the provincial president that Maria Fiuza had passed the 1st and 2nd years of the ENOP course, precisely between 1872 and 1873 (*Diário de Minas*, 1875c).

Another report published by the same newspaper, in its December 20, 1873, edition, reported on a solemn celebration held at the ENOP building to reward primary school students and normal students studying in the city for their good academic performance in the end of the year. On that occasion, nine ENOP students were awarded prizes, four from the second year and five from the first year. Maria Fiuza da Rocha was awarded the first prize among the second-year students (*Diário de Minas*, 1873b), which confirms, once again, that she was part of the first group of students to attend ENOP in its third phase of operation.

Maria Fiuza was honored with the first prize for her excellent performance, demonstrating her commitment and success as a student in the normal teacher training

⁹ The *Liceu Mineiro* was a secondary education institution. Like the ENOP, it was created based on Article 1 of Law No.1,769. Both institutions opened their facilities on April 18, 1872.

course. In addition to the prize itself, she was the only student to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of her classmates. In her speech, she thanked the teachers, the Provincial President, and the other individuals present. She also discussed the importance of that moment and the need to expand education for women, as expressed in the following excerpt from her speech¹⁰:

Condemned for a long time to professions hidden in the shadows of the home, victims of the weakness and harms that the power of force has imposed on our sex; how many still doubt that we can enter the temple of science? From the hands of the creator we come as perfect in our faculties as those who pride themselves on governing the world: why then can we not participate in the moral and intellectual domain? (Diário de Minas, 1873b, p. 4).

The excerpt reveals that the normal student questioned those who doubted women's capabilities for scientific studies and advocated for more active participation of women in science. In this regard, as highlighted by França (2021), in the 19th century, based on Enlightenment ideals, discussions about the need for a "science for all," that is, for the expansion of scientific knowledge, were broadened. Thus, this perspective seems to align with the questions raised in Maria Fiuza's speech, insofar as she emphasized women's capabilities to enter the "temple of science."

The normal student also denounced the impositions made on women throughout history, argued for the equality of faculties given by God to men and women, and demanded greater female participation in the society of the time. In a context where studies for women were only beginning to be encouraged, Maria Fiuza's words were, in a way, avant-garde. Although she was not the author of the text, her explanation demonstrates courage and leadership in uttering it, as well as her desire for the expansion of female participation in other spaces and social segments, beyond the domestic sphere, especially teaching.

3 From student to teacher: Maria José Fiuza da Rocha's trajectory as a professor at the ENOP

In contrast to its first two periods of operation, the third phase of the ENOP was characterized by students who, for the most part, lacked teaching experience. Maria Fiuza's trajectory aligns with this pattern, as records of her presence in teaching

¹⁰ As this research falls within the field of History of Education, methodologically, we have opted to maintain the original expressions of the consulted documentary sources.

were only found after her completion of the normal course, notably in 1874. This suggests that she probably had not taught before completing her normal training.

The first record found regarding Maria Fiuza's work as a teacher dates from April 25, 1874. According to one of the registration books for public school teachers in Minas Gerais, the normal student occupied the male position in the parish of Antônio Dias, in the municipality of Ouro Preto, replacing its owner who was, at that moment, unable to perform the duties of the position (Minas Gerais, 1849-1885). The following year, however, she joined the ENOP's teaching staff and only left this position at the institution about 16 years later, in 1891, upon her retirement (O Estado de Minas Geraes, 1891).

During her trajectory at the ENOP, Maria Fiuza was initially appointed to work as a substitute teacher for the male practical classes¹¹ on June 15, 1875, as the professor in charge, José de Queiroga, had requested medical leave (Minas Gerais, 1872-1879). However, the professor did not recover from his illness and passed away on August 14, 1875 (Monitor do Norte, 1875). Consequently, the normal school student formally assumed the tenured chair on August 23, 1875 (Minas Gerais, 1872-1879).

It is noteworthy that Maria Fiuza was not the first woman to be part of the ENOP faculty, as this position was previously held by Professor Amalia Ethelvina Bernhaus, who took over the practical classes for female students at the School in 1872 and remained in the position until her retirement in 1889. However, Maria Fiuza was the first female graduate of the normal course in Ouro Preto who, after graduating, began working at the institution. The normal student thus proved to be a pioneer in this regard. Her teaching career was successful, but also full of challenges.

As previously stated, Maria Fiuza da Rocha joined the ENOP faculty, initially as a teacher of practical classes for male students, remaining in this position for many years (Minas Gerais, 1882-1883). After Amalia Ethelvina Bernhaus retirement, however, she became the responsible professor for the female tenured chair (Ouro

¹¹ Regulation No. 62 of 1872 mandated that practical classes for each sex be annexed to the Normal Schools Minas Gerais. In these settings, both male and female student-teachers would practice primary instruction under the supervision of institutions' professors. Thus, in accordance with this regulation, the ENOP maintained one practical class for males and another for females, and later, a mixed-sex class serving primary students of both sexes.

Preto, 1890) and, finally, the mixed-sex class (Minas Gerais, 1891-1910), which was the one that admitted students of both sexes¹².

After Maria Fiuza's arrival, many other ENOP alumni taught at the institution in the latest decades of the 19th century. However, all of them worked in practical classes annexed to the Normal School, either as owners, assistants, or substitutes. Regarding the other subjects, that is, the theoretical subjects of the course - arithmetic, Portuguese, pedagogy, geography, and history - these were taught, except for some sporadic substitutions, exclusively by male teachers, a phenomenon also observed in other normal schools in Minas Gerais during that period.

In the Normal Schools of Diamantina, Montes Claros, Sabará, Campanha, Uberaba, and São João del-Rei, between 1891 and 1910, women only taught the annexed practical classes for women, men, and mixed-sex groups, not the theoretical subjects (Minas Gerais, 1891-1910). Clearly, although women were the majority of the student body in these institutions, they were not yet the majority among the professors, especially in theoretical subjects, considered more complex and therefore more suited to men at that time. As seen, female teaching was growing, but with certain limitations, for specific audiences and for knowledge transmission considered compatible with their mental faculties.

Despite gender-related obstacles, Maria Fiuza achieved a feat uncommon for a woman at the time, becoming the ENOP's interim Head in the absence of its titular Head in 1890. In a letter addressed to the General Inspectorate of Public Instruction, dated June 4 of that year, the teacher herself informed that, since the Head of the institution, Randolpho Bretas, had left to attend an educational event at the request of the provincial government, he had designated her to replace him in his absence until the inspectorate made a decision on the matter (Minas Gerais, 1884-1890).

This episode is relevant because, as Louro (2004) explains, directorships and inspections remained under male responsibility. In other words, even with the feminization of the teaching profession, men remained in positions of power within the educational environment. Thus, having held the position of director of a normal school, even temporarily, reveals something atypical for the period, suggesting that the work

¹²With the emergence of more systematic advocacy for coeducation, mixed-sex primary schools became increasingly common in the late 19th century.

of the normal school teacher was well regarded in the institution and that the Head trusted her enough to have appointed her on an interim basis.

Nevertheless, as one of the first female student and professor at the ENOP, Maria Fiuza's trajectory was also marked by a series of challenges, mistrust, and difficulties. As an example, an event that occurred in 1875 can be mentioned; the year she joined the institution as a professor was widely debated by the Ouro Preto press at the time.

The discussions began with a note published in the newspaper *Diário de Minas* on July 7, 1875. Signed with the pseudonym "The Family Man" and titled "The Lyceum from Minas", the author presented himself as a citizen who loved his country and was zealous for public education institutions. He denounced to the press irregularities that, according to him, were occurring at the *Liceu Mineiro*, which at the time operated in the same building as ENOP. According to the author, insults, abuses, and immoralities were being practiced by the *Liceu* students, which was affecting the honor and reputation of female students of the normal school: "The students of the normal school, poor things! Young, inexperienced, they are rudely insulted by two groups of boys, who wait for them at the door of the building, to make snide remarks, throw flowers, little notes, etc!" (Diário de Minas, 1875a, p. 4).

It is worth recalling that the *Liceu Mineiro* was a secondary school that admitted young male students. The normal school, on the other hand, was coeducational, meaning it admitted both females and males¹³. However, according to the legislation in force at the time, classes in the normal course had to be taught alternately to each sex, for reasons of safety and morality¹⁴. Nevertheless, since the ENOP operated in the same building as the *Liceu*, even though the women did not have direct contact with the male normal students, they did have contact with the secondary school students, a fact that generated the aforementioned controversy.

According to Castanha (2015), coeducation the country gained momentum in the latest 19th century, notably from the 1870s, becoming the subject of great debate among intellectuals, politicians, and educators. Proponents of the system, mostly inspired by North American ideals, believed it could prepare young men and women

¹³According to Hahner (2011), out of the twenty-two existing public normal schools in Brazil in 1882, fifteen were coeducational, five for males and two for females.

¹⁴As Castanha (2015) highlights, in the provinces of Rio de Janeiro and Mato Grosso, normal classes were also taught alternately to each sex.

for a life together in the future, in addition to representing savings for public finances, with the use of the same physical space, furniture, and professors. Opponents, however, argued that this contact would bring moral risks, especially for females (Almeida, 2007).

However, Hahner (2011) points out that, while coeducation of children generated fears and was viewed with suspicion by some sectors of society, that of young people was even more worrying, since they were already of marriageable age. These elements help to understand the situation that occurred in Ouro Preto and the strangeness caused by the use to study of the same physical space for young people of both sexes.

The response from the normal student to the "Family Man" was published two days later by the same newspaper, on July 9th. Titled "By Request," the ENOP students wrote a statement denying what was reported in the anonymous publication, defending themselves and the *Liceu* students:

[...] we regret that they disrespectfully attributed to the students facts that would result in our dismissal from the classes where we received instruction directed by the worthy and illustrious professors; it would be to ignore the chivalry and attention with which we are treated in that establishment not to come to the defense of the distinguished young men, known for their education and families, who were vilely insulted by those who perhaps find strange the education that was denied to us in other times. We wish for our female companions of the same age the same benefits that our intelligences receive there (Diário de Minas, 1875b, p. 4).

The text was signed by twelve female students attending the normal school and by Professor Maria José Fiuza da Rocha. Given that she had just joined the institution as a professor and was likely still a young woman, it is plausible that she was also a target of the accusations. Another possibility is that she signed the text along with the students to demonstrate her support for the attacks they were suffering. In any case, clearly, the professor did not remain silent and was concerned about the repercussions that the accusations the "Family Man" could have on the education of the young women of Ouro Preto.

As seen in the response, the signatories implied that the real reason for the accusations was not concern for their reputation per se, but rather for an intention to have them removed from the normal school. Furthermore, the criticism stemmed from their unease regarding the educational content offered to the young women within the course, content that had historically been denied to them until that moment. The young

women, including Maria Fiuza, also expressed concern that the defamation would cause other young women not enrolling in the normal school out of fear from their parents, denying them the content and teachings offered there.

The discussions publicized through the press did not end with the response from the female students; on the contrary, they extended for several days. In subsequent editions of *Diário de Minas* newspaper, the "Family Man" continued to publish harsh criticisms of the young women, focusing on female morality and honor, while little was questioned about the conduct of the students at the *Liceu Mineiro*. At the same time, responses signed by the *Liceu Mineiro*'s students, ENOP's professors, and even the Inspector General of Public Instruction in favor of the young women were published, demonstrating that the matter likely became quite controversial and had negative repercussions, extending beyond the pages of the newspaper.

Consequently, it may be that the issue of maintaining female morality and honor could, in fact, be an excuse for another concern emerging during that period: the increasing access of girls, young women, and women to the literate world and to a more lasting and complete institutionalized education.

Thus, it is not surprising that in Minas Gerais in the late 19th century, a region strongly attached to traditional customs and Catholic religiosity, the first experiences of coeducation of young people were viewed with strangeness and resistance, mainly by more conservative sectors of society. In this sense, it is supposed, also, that in the following years, there were other discussions on this subject.

Nevertheless, approximately seven years after the event, the topic of coeducation continued to be the subject of debate, this time within the General Inspectorate of Public Instruction of Minas Gerais. In a report written by the inspector general José Aldrete de Mendonça, attached to the speech of the president of the province, Theophilo Ottoni, and addressed to the Provincial Assembly on August 1, 1882, he expressed his opinion on the subject, expressing to be against a situation that had been occurring in the practical classes annexed to the ENOP (Minas Gerais, 1882). José Aldrete, in his text, explicitly stated that he viewed with disapproval the fact that a young woman was teaching the practical classes annexed to the male students of the institution:

[...] a singular anomaly I observed in the school of this Capital, of the students, young man aged 18 to 20, practicing, under the direction of a young female professor, whose weakness and condescending kindness could be abused by those who least know how to restrain themselves within the limits of delicacy and respect (Minas Gerais, 1882).

The young professor mentioned by the inspector was none other than Maria José Fiuza da Rocha; that is, once again, the Ouro Preto community's unease regarding coeducation jeopardized the professor's work or at least involved her name in debates on the subject. Thus, for the second time – as could be ascertained from the sources – the normal school graduate had to face challenges arising from gender issues to carry out her profession.

According to the excerpt, Maria Fiuza was attributed characteristics considered typically feminine at the time, such as weakness and kindness, which would put her at constant risk through excessive contact with young men who might not be able to control their instincts. According to Almeida (2007), for those opposed to coeducation, placing men and women in the same physical space could contaminate the purity of the latter, as well as hinder the former in their studies. Furthermore, according to the author, for those against coeducation, contact with female colleagues and professors, precisely because of their feminine beauty and seduction, could distract and divert the young men's attention from their academic duties.

It is worth highlighting that many discourses of the period considered women to be intellectually incapable of instructing individuals of the opposite sex, since they supposedly had underdeveloped brains due to their "disuse" over time (Louro, 2004). In this sense, it may be that the inspector's discomfort, although not clearly stated, was related to apprehension regarding the ability of a young woman to teach young men of similar ages.

Therefore, it is plausible to assume that the inspector's speech and indignation were motivated by the thoughts and discourses frequently disseminated at that time. Nevertheless, the investigation found no evidence that Maria Fiuza left her post after the publication of the report; that is, despite opposing opinions, her work was maintained, demonstrating that her intellectual capacity, teaching practice, and moral conduct were approved despite the suspicions. The hypothesis also arises that opposing discourses began to compete with new ideas arriving in Brazil, mainly from Europe, which advocated for women as more suited and capable of educating young people.

Finally, the two described situations suggest that, despite her successes and long career at the ENOP, Maria Fiuza faced a series of challenges simply because she was a woman and one of the pioneering female normal student and professor in the normal school of Ouro Preto. Experiencing the context of the feminization process of teacher training and the teaching profession in Minas Gerais and Brazil, the normal professor had to face distrust and obstacles from different areas, mainly involving her ability, morality, and reputation, which was probably not easy for her, considering the conservative society she was immersed.

Furthermore, as observed in the next section, Maria Fiuza married, became a mother, acted as an abolitionist, and actively participated in the religious life of Ouro Preto, demonstrating that, despite opposing movements, she resisted and participated, in ways that were permitted and accessible to women at the time, in the social conventions, public life, and political discussions that permeated Ouro Preto in the latest decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

4 Marriage, motherhood, religiosity, and abolitionism: other aspects of Maria Fiuza da Rocha's career

The search performed during the investigation failed to identify the exact date of Maria José Fiuza da Rocha's marriage; she married Major João Paulo de Oliveira Carvalho, and began to be referenced by her husband's surname from 1886 onwards (Liberal Mineiro, 1886a). In 1911, however, she was already a widow (Correio da Manhã, 1911). Thus, at least during part of her teaching career at the ENOP, the normal professor performed both her teaching duties and the social roles of a wife and homemaker.

Vidal and Carvalho (2001) highlight that many debates took place in Brazil until the first half of the 20th century regarding the compatibility of female teaching with marriage. According to the authors, based on the case of Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and 1930s, although female pedagogical celibacy was not mandatory, many teachers ended up marrying later in life, or were widowed early, or remained single throughout their lives. Similarly, Tambara (1998) states that the stigma of the primary school teacher as an "asexual" being, a "spinster" dedicated exclusively to her students, was reinforced in the country over time.

Therefore, one can infer that balancing teaching with the roles of wife and homemaker, remaining in the profession even after marriage, constituted yet another challenge in her career, given that women working outside the domestic sphere was still viewed by conservative sectors of society as suspect and incompatible with the traits considered "essentially" feminine at that period.

Although the exact number has not been confirmed, it is known that Maria Fiuza had children (Jornal do Brasil, 1901; Correio da Manhã, 1907; O Paiz, 1910). Just as the relationship between marriage and teaching, motherhood and teaching was also focus of discussion. According to Vidal and Carvalho (2001), many debates in Brazil, until the first half of the 20th century, questioned the compatibility of female teaching with motherhood. Some argued that primary school teaching was a kind of continuation of motherhood, and therefore naturally destined for women, while others argued that the two roles were incompatible, with the justification that primary school teachers should dedicate themselves exclusively to their profession, as a mission and a vocation, and could not split their attention between students and children.

Maria Fiuza's teaching profession and personal life were clearly embedded in a context of numerous discussions about the social and professional roles of women, reinforcing the challenges she likely faced and overcame throughout her career. Even amidst her journey, the normal professor experienced other complex processes, such as the emancipation of enslaved people in Brazil. She participated in the abolitionist movement in Ouro Preto in the years leading up to *Lei Áurea*, which occurred on May 13, 1888.

According to information published on December 31, 1886 in the newspaper *Liberal Mineiro*, Maria José Fiuza da Rocha was a member of the Ouro Preto Liberation Society and was part of the commission responsible for promoting the liberation of captives from Rua Direita and Ouro Preto Main Square. The commission also included two other women – Viscountess of Camargos and Altina Alves de Brito – and three men – José Isidro de Magalhães Drumond, Henrique Horta, and Emílio Balena (*Liberal Mineiro*, 1886b).

According to Cota (2025), Ouro Preto, then the capital of the province of Minas Gerais, was the radiating center of the abolitionist movement in Minas Gerais in the decades immediately preceding abolition, concentrating the majority of newspapers defending the emancipation of enslaved people in the province. It was also in the

capital that the largest number of abolitionist societies were located, among them the Sociedade Libertadora Ouropretana, of which Maria Fiuza was a member. According to the author, all these associations publicized their actions through local newspapers, informing about meetings, statutes, and public events for the liberation of captives.

According to Cota (2013), the Ouro Preto Liberation Society was created in 1886 to promote the liberation of the remaining captives in the capital until the inauguration of the railway branch line under construction in the city. Among its actions was the formation of commissions to survey people that were still enslaved in Ouro Preto, seeking their liberation either free of charge or through the provision of services. Cota (2013) also argues that the Ouro Preto Liberation Society was formed by a large and heterogeneous group of individuals, including doctors, politicians, lawyers, artists, judges, public officials, military personnel, and teachers, including those from the School of Minas, *Liceu Mineiro*, and, as seen, the Normal School itself.

In fact, many ENOP teachers – almost always the same ones from the *Liceu Mineiro* – participated in abolitionist movements in the city during the 1880s. The main ones were: Bachelor Camillo Augusto Maria de Britto, who often acted, pro bono, as a lawyer in the fight for the liberation of captives; Samuel Christiano Brandão and Affonso Brito, who founded an abolitionist newspaper in 1884 entitled *Vela do Jangadeiro*¹⁵, considered one of the first and most important abolitionist periodicals in Minas Gerais. In addition, ENOP professors usually offered free evening classes to enslaved people, with the consent of their masters (Pedruzzi, 2016).

In general, the participation of professors, both from higher education and secondary schools in Ouro Preto, in abolitionist actions during the 1880s was recurrent. These professors, often concurrently with their teaching, also worked in other professions, such as Law and Journalism, or even in spheres of Minas Gerais' public administration; that is, they were part of a literate group that considered slavery inadmissible in the country at the end of the "Age of Enlightenment". Therefore, ideas in favor of emancipation were likely circulated in the corridors of these educational institutions, and the courses were possible centers for spreading the abolitionist cause in Ouro Preto.

¹⁵ According to Jácome (2021), the newspaper was named in honor of the abolition that occurred that year in Ceará, where raftsmen (*jangadeiros*) refused to transport enslaved people.

Regarding the Ouro Preto Liberation Society, according to Cota (2013), although its actions did not achieve the desired successes and the completion of the railway branch occurred after abolition, in July 1888, the importance of female participation in the Society is undeniable, especially for fundraising. According to information gathered, women were present on all the formed committees, in groups of three, as were men, totaling a large contingent of individuals. Within these groups, there were married women both acting with their husbands and many unaccompanied, demonstrating female autonomy in the Society's actions.

According to Silva and Barreto (2014), from the second half of the 19th century, women's participation in the abolitionist campaign became increasingly visible in various parts of the country through the creation of foundations and associations, the promotion of charity parties and soirées, the production of speeches and poems, among other actions, occupying social spaces that, until then, had been considered typically masculine. In the specific case of Minas Gerais, as Macena and Muniz (2017) elucidate, this scenario was no different, although only very recently has historiography considered the importance and leading role of women in the Minas Gerais abolitionist campaign.

According to Macena and Muniz (2017), using the strategies available to them at the period, without deviating from the historical and traditionally attributed behaviors of the female gender, many women from Minas Gerais (especially white women from middle-class backgrounds and with some literacy) actively participated in the political struggle for abolition, promoting parties, charitable actions, concerts and soirées, and gradually entering other spaces considered masculine, such as associations and societies:

They thus shared the widespread abolitionist sentiment in the province, advocating for the end of slavery through actions authorized for their sex, identified as belonging to the female sex, as an extension of the domestic sphere. And they broadened this spectrum by joining clubs and associations, entities considered and recognized, in historiography, as formed exclusively by men (Macena; Muniz, 2017, p. 51).

In addition to her role as a professor in the normal school in Minas Gerais, Maria Fiuza da Rocha was also formally involved with the abolitionist movement, acting in the way that was possible and socially permitted for her gender in that context, in the struggle for the liberation of enslaved people. She therefore demonstrated her

public stance on an important and widely debated issue at the time, through her affiliation with and action in collective organizations, showing that she was not detached from the political issues of her period, acting, on the contrary, in the public sphere for the causes she defended.

Catholic religiosity constituted another area of activity for Maria Fiuza throughout her life. As shown in newspaper articles of the period, the professor participated in several brotherhoods¹⁶ in Ouro Preto, such as *Nossa Senhora das Dores* (Minas Geraes, 1896), *Bom Jesus dos Passos* (A Província de Minas, 1886) and *Nossa Senhora das Mercês e Perdões* (Diário de Minas, 1873a). She also participated in campaigns to raise donations for the renovation of religious spaces, such as the chapel of São Sebastião, also in Ouro Preto (O Estado de Minas Geraes, 1896).

According to Boschi (1986), present in Minas Gerais territory since the colonial period at the beginning of gold mining, Catholic brotherhoods and confraternities were agents of group solidarity, bringing together welfare and spiritual responsibilities. According to Teixeira (2021), belonging to these institutions legitimized social, political, and religious practices through mutual aid among their members. Furthermore, brotherhoods and confraternities were privileged spaces of sociability in Minas Gerais during the 18th century.

Throughout the 19th century, brotherhoods maintained great importance in the mining context, especially in Ouro Preto. Maria Fiuza's participation in various associations of this nature indicates that she moved through different social spaces in her context. Moreover, the professor was also a constituent element of the administrative boards of these institutions, which were composed mostly of men, highlighting her prestige and recognition within the social composition of local Catholic religiosity.

Another relevant aspect of Maria Fiuza's trajectory was her philanthropic practice, confirmed by her participation, as secretary, in the *Grêmio das Damas Benfeitoras de São Vicente de Paula*, founded in the parish of Antônio Dias, in Ouro Preto, on March 4, 1915 (O Paiz, 1915). According to Lage (2012), the *Congregação*

¹⁶ According to Boschi (1986), brotherhoods were created within the European context of the Late Middle Ages. According to the author, it is not possible to determine exactly when they arrived in Minas Gerais; however, it is believed they were already present from the earliest years Minas Gerais territory's settlement.

das Filhas de Caridade de São Vicente de Paula was created in France in the 17th century by Vicente de Paulo and Luísa de Marillac. Its objective was specifically directed towards charitable practices, through the care of the sick, children and destitute elderly, assistance in maternity wards and prisons and, with the advent of the expansion of popular schooling in the 19th century, also in educational institutions.

According to Lage (2012), in addition to the *Filhas de Caridade*, there were also the *Damas de Caridade de São Vicente de Paula*, married women, mostly from wealthier classes, who practiced charity through donations and fundraising within their social circles, but not directly working in hospitals, asylums, and orphanages. The group Maria Fiuza participated in falls into this category. Pasche and Arruda (2018) emphasize that, especially from the second half of the 19th century, the disciplining and civilizing ideals of society were directly related to charitable practices to combat poverty. Therefore, it can be argued that Maria Fiuza's actions in this segment were in line with the disciplinary thinking widely disseminated between late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, which aimed at transforming Brazilian society, into a modern and civilized one.

An analysis of the aspects of Maria José Fiuza da Rocha's life, beyond her educational career, reveals her intense social engagement, both personally and socially. Moving through various spaces, associations, societies, and congregations (of political, philanthropic, and religious nature), often holding prominent and leadership roles in the administrative spheres of these segments, this normal school student and professor remained socially active in Ouro Preto throughout her life. To achieve this, she overcame gender barriers, as she was embedded in a conservative and patriarchal context where men still predominantly occupied positions of power. In other words, her pioneering spirit can be seen both in her work in education and in other aspects of her life.

5 Final Considerations

Established amidst the first teacher-training initiatives for primary education in Brazil, the ENOP was, during its initial phases, intended primarily for male students. In the 1870s, it was reopened and admitted students of both sexes.

In a short time, women surpassed men in enrollment numbers, with the 1870s and 1880s being decisive for the effective feminization of the institution's student body.

Although it formally continued to admit boys in the 1890s and 1900s, these were increasingly rare and remained so until the school's closure in 1904. From its reopening in 1910, the institution, then annexed to the Ouro Preto Gymnasium, exclusively admitted female students, already within the context of the consolidation of the feminization of teacher training and the teaching profession in the country.

Maria José Fiuza da Rocha lived, studied, and worked professionally precisely during this period of transition, both for the ENOP and for the teaching profession in general. In this sense, she had to face all the challenges and resistance movements common in contexts of change. This graduate of the Normal School in Minas Gerais was part of the first class of female students to graduate from a Normal School in Minas Gerais and one of the first group of women working in teacher training in Minas Gerais, including those of the opposite sex. Her trajectory and that of ENOP intertwine and intersect amidst the turbulent end of the 19th century. Maria Fiuza also engaged in various movements and associations typically reserved for men, without abandoning her traditional roles historically understood as feminine, such as a wife, homemaker, and mother. She was, therefore, a pioneer across different spheres.

However, this pioneering spirit was accompanied by doubts and mistrust, as the presence of women outside the domestic sphere was still viewed with strangeness and resistance by conservative sectors of society. Nevertheless, her trajectory, along with that of so many other women, mostly forgotten or neglected by historiography over time, certainly opened paths, albeit indirectly, for many others, encouraging them to seek their spaces and rights within Brazilian society, from an educational, professional, and personal point of view. The recovery of trajectories such as that of Maria José Fiuza da Rocha, highlighting her effective and autonomous participation in social spaces and the educational environment of her time, helps to give visibility to women who, although historically neglected by historiography, actively participated in the processes of building society, the profession, and teacher training in Minas Gerais and Brazil.

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