

ARTICLES

DOSSIER TERRITORY, GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITIES

**ONE IZIDORA AND TWO ROSAS: NOTES FOR A PERSPECTIVE ON A SPACE PROTAGONIZED BY BLACK WOMEN**

*Natália Alves da Silva\**

\*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Abstract

*The aim of this article is to discuss the leading role played by Black women in disputes over place, which have occurred at three different historical moments, in the region of Izidora, where the Vitória, Esperança and Rosa Leão occupations are currently located, in the north zone of Belo Horizonte, state capital of Minas Gerais. The article seeks to demonstrate a convergence between the struggles of the communities to remain in the physical-territorial dimension and their struggles to name it. Black feminist perspectives are taken as epistemology, in order to build a conceptual framework that, by problematizing unidimensional analyzes of the production of space, provides visibility to the multiple dynamics that intersect in space and time, informed by gender, race and class.*

Keywords

*Protagonism of Black Women; Izidora; Disputes over Place; Black Feminism; Narratives.*

## UMA IZIDORA E DUAS ROSAS: NOTAS PARA UMA PERSPECTIVA DO ESPAÇO PROTAGONIZADA POR MULHERES NEGRAS

Natália Alves da Silva\*

\*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil

### Resumo

*O presente artigo tem como objetivo discutir o protagonismo das mulheres negras nas disputas de lugar ocorridas, em três tempos históricos distintos, na região da Izidora, onde atualmente se localizam as ocupações Vitória, Esperança e Rosa Leão, situada no vetor norte da cidade de Belo Horizonte, capital de Minas Gerais. O que se busca mostrar é a convergência entre as lutas em torno da permanência das comunidades na dimensão físico-territorial e das lutas por nomeação do lugar. As perspectivas feministas negras são tomadas, enquanto epistemologia, para construir um quadro conceitual que, ao problematizar análises unidimensionais da produção do espaço, dá visibilidade às múltiplas dinâmicas que se entrecruzam no espaço e no tempo, informadas por gênero, raça e classe.*

### Palavras-chave

*Protagonismo das Mulheres Negras; Izidora; Disputas de Lugar; Feminismo Negro; Narrativas.*

# UMA IZIDORA E DUAS ROSAS: NOTAS PARA UMA PERSPECTIVA DO ESPAÇO PROTAGONIZADA POR MULHERES NEGRAS

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## Introduction

The name caught my attention. Of the three urban occupations that make up the region of Izidora (Vitória, Esperança and Rosa Leão), the latter seemed to be the one that most explicitly referred to a concrete existence. The names Vitória (Victory) and Esperança (Hope) certainly represented the collective desire to conquer housing. Rosa Leão (Rose Lion), on the other hand, escaped any definitive conclusion. It could, for example, have resulted from combining two elements chosen to represent collectivity, in which female participation had seemed, in addition to being active, somewhat fierce. The flower, maybe, could have represented a supposed delicacy, and the lion, a kind of presumed strength. Added to this, and thereby promoting this hypothesis, was the fact that, in the early days of the land conflict, which broke out in 2013, during an act of solidarity, local artists painted a lion holding a rose on the community coordination center. However, I was intrigued by the use of the word “Leão” in order to name an occupation that largely owed its existence to community action mainly developed by women. Or could it have been someone’s surname? The question regarding the name remained unanswered over the following three years, until the beginning of my academic work within the community.

It was only in 2016, while developing my research work, that a concern arose to establish a Black feminist perspective based on the paradigm of intersectionality for the spatial disputes protagonized by Black women in Izidora (SILVA, 2018), and that I was able to learn more about the life and trajectory of Rosa de Jesus Leão. The act of naming the occupation by the occupants became special to me,

and changed the direction of my investigation, since it prompted me to propose new angles of reading the disputes over place that became caught up in a five-year period of eviction threats, connecting them to the long temporality of regional conflicts surrounding the construction and permanence of their territories, all led by women, and historically erased from official records and academic research. For this, I gathered together information on Izidora da Costa, who lived in the nineteenth century and after whom the disputed region was named, and on Rosa de Jesus Leão (1954-2002). Conversations with Charlene Egídio (1981-), resident and coordinator of the Rosa Leão Occupation, deepened the debate on the historicity of the occupations.

The aim of this article is to present a proposal for reading the conflict based on an intersectional perspective, a contribution from Black feminist perspectives. In the first section, I trace out a cartography of the conflict in Izidora, relating it to territories in the region where Black women have been the protagonists. I seek to highlight the inseparability between the struggles to remain in the territory along with the struggle to name it. In the following section, I discuss the extent to which the readings brought by urban studies on space have tended to render the protagonism of Black women and their spatial practices invisible. I also present the methodological pathway that has allowed me to weave the narrative thread that connects three Black women at different moments in time, and which enabled the reconstruction of the cartography of conflicts and expand the scope of the struggles for territory represented by the acts of naming. Lastly, based on fragments of narratives by Izidora, Rosa and Charlene, I discuss the protagonism of Black women and their formulations on spatial practices in the formation of territory.

### 1. Territorial disputes and disputed territory

The occupations in Izidora, in Belo Horizonte, are made up of Rosa Leão, Esperança and Vitória (Figure 1), in which around ten thousand families live, and who, since 2013, have faced the threat of legal eviction. The last large area of green reserve in Belo Horizonte, the “Isidoro Woodlands”, as the region is identified in official records, is located in the Granja Werneck neighborhood, in the northern zone of the municipality, where the metropolitan border expands (Figure 2), mobilized by high investments in works, such as the Green Line, which provides access to Confins International Airport, and the Administrative City of the State of Minas Gerais (COSTA; MAGALHÃES, 2011). As proof of the transhistorical dimension of this dispute for territory in the capital of Minas Gerais, in 2016, the conflict was selected as one of the seven most emblematic cases in the world to be presented at the International Tribunal on Evictions, in Quito, Ecuador, during the III UN-Habitat (FRANZONI; ALVES; FARIA, 2018).

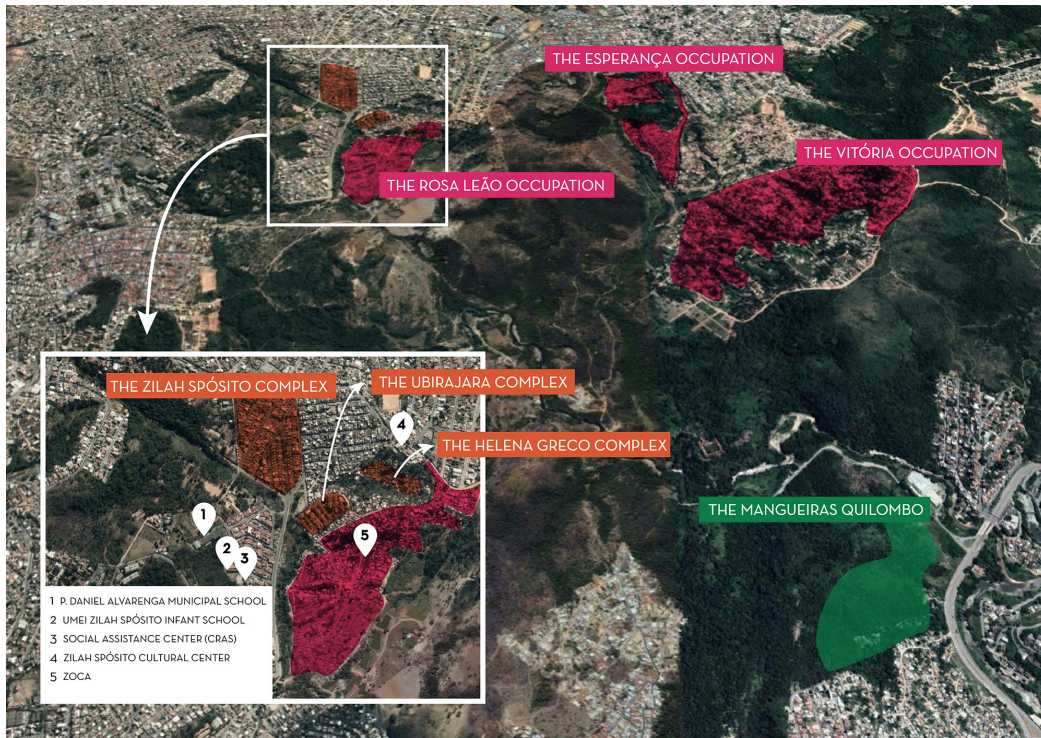


Figure 1. The Region of Izidora  
Source: Produced by the author (SILVA, 2018).

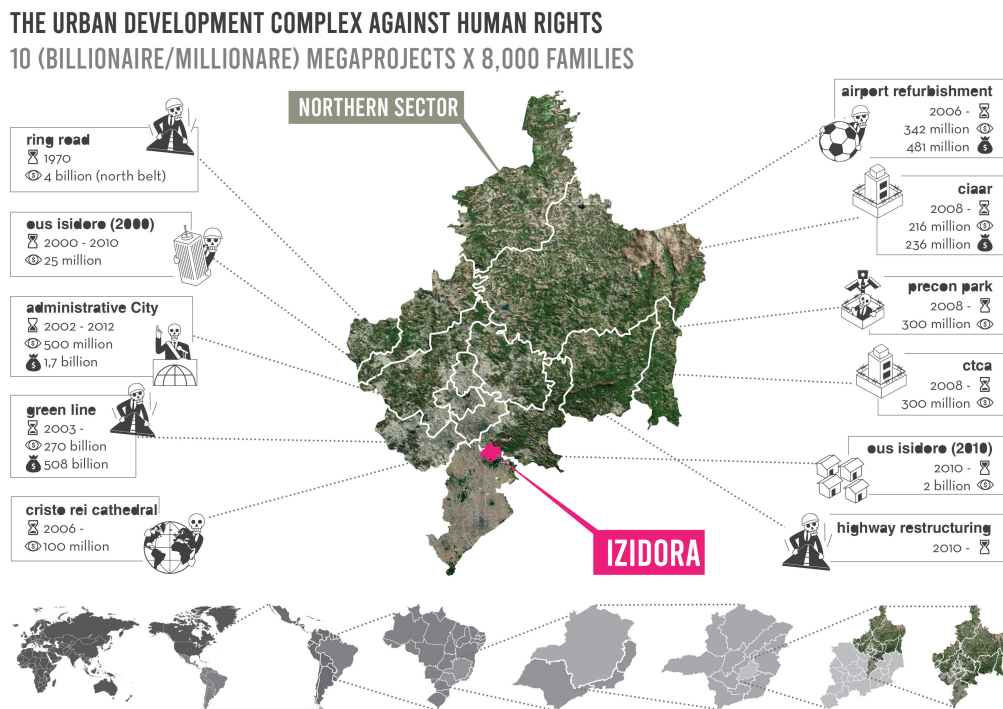


Figure 2. Megaprojects planned for the Izidora region  
Source: Map produced by Julia Franzoni, Natália Alves da Silva and Daniela Faria to present the Izidora case at the International Tribunal on Evictions (2016), in partnership with the Margarida Alves Collective, with information from Freitas (2016).

In the Izidora region, there are stories of thousands of people who, in their daily political struggle, have reconfigured the urban space, and are a reminder of the Mangueiras Quilombo<sup>1</sup> and the social housing complexes located in its surroundings, such as Ubirajara and Zilah Spósito. I briefly examine the cartography of the conflict in order to highlight the disputes of place that have taken place from the nineteenth century – when Izadora da Costa probably first settled in the region, which was to be named after her, and when the Mangueiras Quilombo was formed – until today, when the three “Izidora occupations” became established. For now, I propose a cartography that demonstrates the formation and continuity over time of these Black territories and the struggles waged against the various levels of violence in the State capital, which have formed continuous attempts to whiten the area and the subsequent erasure of the agency of Black people – particularly, of Black women – from the history of the region.

Founded by the couple Vicencia Vieira de Lima and Cassiano José de Azevedo, the Mangueiras Quilombo is located on the border between Belo Horizonte and the municipality of Santa Luzia, and which, until the end of the nineteenth century, belonged to Vila de Sabará. This area was called “Ribeirão da Izidora” [Izidora Creek]. According to the community’s narrative, Izidora was a slave who, on receiving her freedom, settled in the region. The fact that her name was given to both the creek and the forest in the region where she lived is a very strong indication of the historical importance of this Black woman, that both the State and state capital have unsuccessfully attempted to erase – or to transform into “Isidoro”.

The history of Mangueiras is told by its residents through evoking the name of one other Black woman, Maria Bárbara de Azevedo (1863-1936), considered the matriarch of the quilombo for having managed to secure the possession of part of the original territory of the community after successive divisions had been carried out by court order (NUQ-UFMG, 2008).

The community was located around the borders of large farms, for which its members worked as aggregates and service providers, while maintaining the African and Afro-Brazilian practice of collectively using the territory. Cassiano and Vicencia managed to register the lands that they occupied, which was fundamental for constructing their identity, which, in turn, has strengthened the contemporary struggle for the territory of Mangueiras Quilombo.

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1. Quilombo is the denomination given to Black communities that have a common historical trajectory of enslavement and collective resistance to the historical oppression they have suffered, with a community way of life and a specific sense of territorial belonging.

If the location of the couple and their children along the sides of the future road that would link Santa Luzia to Belo Horizonte favored the group's economic integration into the region, it also caused greater real estate speculation and pressure on their land, especially from the 1920s onwards. At this time, the aforementioned road was built, and a doctor from Rio de Janeiro, Hugo Werneck (who in the future would be an outstandingly influential communications entrepreneur, banker and politician), initiated, with funds obtained from the Banco do Brasil, the construction of Granja Werneck, a sanatorium focused primarily on treating employees from the institution (NUQ-UFMG, 2008).

From the perspective of the quilombo population, one of the most serious consequences of constructing the sanatorium in the vicinity was what would come to be defined as "environmental racism". Due to the lack of a sewage system, patient waste was thrown into the creek in Izidora, which made it impossible for those living in the quilombo to use water for both their daily consumption and for growing food and conducting their sacred rites. The force of the Werneck's growing political, economic and cultural influence may be observed in the official maps of the following decades, when the Mangueiras Quilombo became a "no place", an "empty space". The name of the Ribeirão da Izidora was changed to "Ribeirão do Izidoro"<sup>2</sup> and the neighborhood became known as Granja Werneck, in a blatant erasure of Black geographies in the region.

The division of the quilombo territory, which led to the individualization of vast tracts of land, which had always been used collectively, was undertaken with the active participation of a member from the Werneck family. Roberto Eiras Furquim Werneck, then manager of the Granja, was the plaintiff of the lawsuit that allowed him to acquire half the area of Ribeirão da Izidora, in 1932 (Figure 3). It should be noted that, according to the Anthropological Report (NUQ-UFMG, 2008), the documents evidencing the transaction were never presented by the alleged buyer.

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2. In Portuguese, as a general rule, nouns that terminate in 'a' are feminine, and words that terminate in 'o' are masculine. Thus, "Izidoro" becomes the masculine form of the name "Izidora".

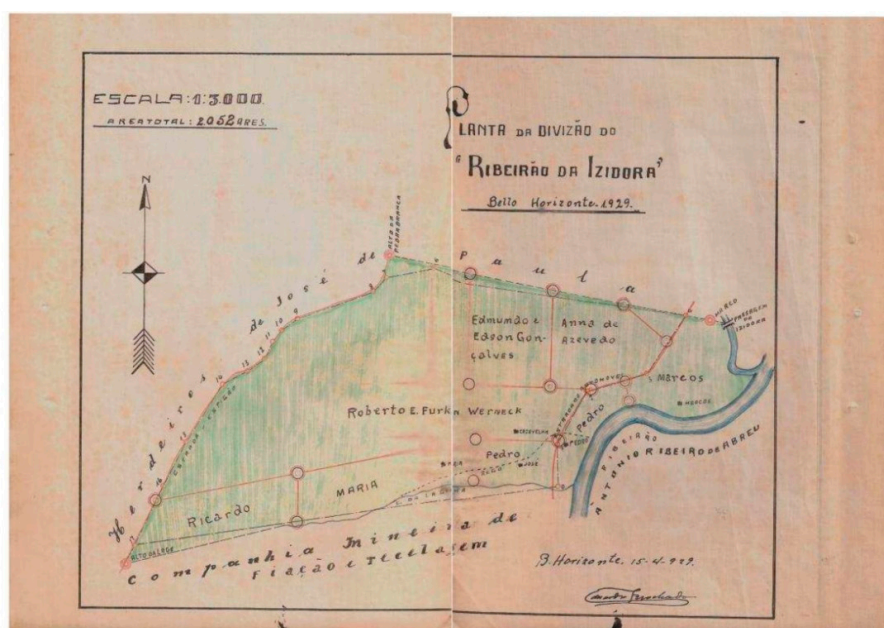


Figure 3. The Sub-Division Plan for Ribeirão da Izidora (1929)  
 Fonte: The Anthropological Report for the Mangueiras Quilombo (NUQ-UFMG, 2008).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, new development plans for the northern zone were drawn up, justified by the public authorities because of the need to contain disorderly occupation fronts and of the threat to environmentally protected areas, in addition to taking advantage of the growing interest of the real estate market in the region. To attract private investors, Municipal Law No. 8137 (BELO HORIZONTE, 2000) was enacted, amending the 1996 Master Plan, and establishing the Isidoro Urban Operation (OUI), the total area of which was around 10 km<sup>2</sup> (FREITAS, 2016, p. 177). The project did not have the expected adhesion of the private sector, nor was it prioritized on the political agenda of the following city hall administrations.

Ten years later, the Urban Operation was restructured, with proposals for a new urban model, aimed equally at the middle and upper classes (FRANZONI; FARIA; RENA, 2016). The 2010 plan, which also did not have the expected adhesion of private capital, was removed from the agenda of political priority of the municipal Executive. A third proposal appeared in 2014 – the Granja Werneck Project (EGW), designed to be one of the country’s largest complexes for the Minha Casa Minha Vida Program [My Home, My Life] (PMCMV), which aimed to build more than 13 thousand housing units in an area equivalent to almost all three urban occupations.

Anchored in neoliberal rationale, which attempts to impose the form of commodity onto everything, the project aimed to replace the use given to the land for common goods and activities developed there with the exchange value stipulated



by the Urban Operation. The disrespect shown toward to the living conditions of the residents of Izidora and Manguieras Quilombo constituted a veritable commoditization of rights (housing, city, work, among others), fundamental for the materialization of the project to whiten the region.

Currently, of the four lawsuits referring to the areas of Izidora, two are still in force: the lawsuit filed by Fazenda Tamboril and the other filed by Ângela Werneck, who is claiming part of the Esperança occupation area. On the other hand, the accumulated struggles over a six-year period have resulted in the occupations becoming recognized by the municipal and state Executive, which has qualified them as Areas of Special Social Interest (AEIS-2), embodied in a decree of April 12, 2018 (FRANZONI, ALVES, FARIA, 2020, p. 2). In 2019, with the approval of the new Belo Horizonte Master Plan, the same areas were incorporated into the law<sup>3</sup>.

The various versions of the Urban Operation re-edited a series of characteristics already identified in other large urban projects, most notably an approximation between the urban agenda and the interests of real estate agents. Freitas (2016) mentioned that the novelty brought by the Isidoro Urban Operation is the role of urban planning, not only in the conceptual draining away of the project, but also in its subversion, with the centrality of external agendas.

I bring this section of the article to a close by briefly mentioning two conquests by the Black territories of the Izidora region that attest to the importance of the population's struggles for the right to a full life: the issuance, in 2005, of a self-recognition certificate of the Manguieras Community as being a remnant of the quilombos, and, in 2018, the Deliberative Council of the Cultural Heritage of Belo Horizonte attributed the status of cultural heritage to the quilombo. Understood from within a relational perspective, these two technical, administrative acts, although distant in time, complement one another as a political gesture, and indicate the possibility of being able to overcome the tendency towards dissociating culture and space, which so gratifies the State/state capital, as if the "cultural manifestations" could exist without the materiality of the territory and the social relations embodied within it.

In the following section, I show how physical-territorial violence is consistent with the non-existent production in the urban readings mobilized against the same subalternized groups. I also discuss the epistemic gains of approaches that have considered the dimensions of gender and race in the reading of spatial disputes.

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3. The decrees were commented upon by the Resiste Izidora network at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/resiste-izidora/para-compreender-melhor-os-dois-decretos-do-prefeito-de-belo-horizonte-alexandre/1383434508469189/>. Viewed on: January 20, 2020.

## 2. The intersectional perspective in reading space

The action of the public authorities in the Izidora region, as previously explained, was intended to promote the total erasure of Black territories by resorting to physical violence, through coercion or the use of epistemic violence, which manifests itself, for example, in the actions to suppress the names given to the territory by its population. The State/state capital sought to replace the use given to land, to the common goods and activities developed there, with the exchange value and the whitening of the territory (SANTOS, 2019).

What is under discussion is the need to understand the mechanisms involved in eviction as being co-constituted by gender and race relations. In addition to recognizing the differential effect on bodies, the resistances in the territory combine various spatial practices and spatial formats (SANTOS, 2018), in which categories based exclusively on the political economy of conflict are insufficient in order to capture them. In urban studies, there is a predominance of readings that render the dimensions of gender and race invisible. Susan Smith (1996, p. 255) indicated that the structures mobilized to understand the urban are parts of generalizations, for the entire population, of the experience of men, - white men I would add.

An initial discussion demonstrates how the lack of urban studies on the protagonism of Black women has integrated the processes of epistemic violence against the Black population and other subalternized groups. The focus then turns to how this erasure has been fought against in some of the literature on the subject and, finally, to the methodological challenges and my own contributions to the reading of the case studied in this article.

Numerous articles have indicated the massive presence of racialized people, especially Black women, in the disputed territories. Marinho, Rolnik and Lins (2018) observed that Black subjects are the most affected by removal actions in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo. Almeida and Franco (2018) cited the differential impact of homelessness on the daily lives of women. Soraggi and Aragão (2016) perceived the role played by women in organizing collective activities in an urban occupation of Belo Horizonte. However, in addition to specific findings, very few studies have placed gender and race at the center of the debate. For Vila Autódromo, the forefront of strong resistance to the removalist policy of the City Hall and State Government of Rio de Janeiro, due to the 2014 mega-events surrounding the World Cup, there is a vast bibliography that has emphasized the new gentrifying policy of public authorities (CALDAS, 2017), the urban policy instruments mobilized in resistance (SÁNCHEZ et al., 2016) and the construction of the concept of conflict

planning for the case (OLIVEIRA, TANAKA, COLI, 2019). Understanding how the conflict was traversed by the dimensions of gender (MONTEIRO, MEDEIROS, NASCIUTTI, 2017) and race is an important challenge, which has the tendency to enrich urban studies.

Certain feminist literature, with regard to urban planning, has discussed evictions from the perspective of “accumulation by dispossession” (HARVEY, 2016), as a powerful analytical key to highlight experiences of life-threatening land enclosure with unequal impacts on Black men and women (SOBRINHO, 2007; HARKOT, 2019; LACERDA et al., 2020). In Franzoni, Alves and Faria (2018, p. 3), we argue that “accumulation by dispossession is not an abstract phenomenon”<sup>4</sup> and that its concreteness puts territories and all forms of life within them at risk, in addition to producing and reinforcing racism, socio-spatial inequality and cisheteropatriarchy.

By proposing “Black feminist poetics”, Denise Ferreira da Silva (2019) portrayed capital as a legal-economic architecture with different methods of expropriation or appropriation of territories and work, either through legal agreement (exploitation) or by physical coercion, which leads to the appropriation of the total created value. For this philosopher, the concept of accumulation by expropriation may lend itself to the figuration of the post-slavery trajectory of Black men and women in America, marked by economic exclusion and legal alienation - enslavement, segregation, mass incarceration -, which results in a disproportionate percentage of black population becoming economically dispossessed (CHAKRAVATTY; FERREIRA DA SILVA, 2013).

At various moments in Izidora, the State was organized for the use of outright violence against the occupations. The coordination committees of the three occupations, in conjunction with members from the support network, produced a dossier on the arbitrary acts committed by the Military Police, presented at public meetings and hearings and forwarded to the Superior Court of Justice, which granted an injunction to suspend any action that may culminate in the eviction of residents (FRANZONI, 2018).

Lao-Montes (2019) contests the hegemonic manner of reading in the field of urbanism. In a context in which the city is equivalent to the “modern”, the “Afro” or “Black” represents the margins, the dangerous, the primitive, unhealthy, undesirable and exoticized classes and places. Lélia Gonzalez (1982) challenged the naturalization of what she defines as the “racial division of space”. In an appeal that echoes that of Sueli Carneiro, of “Blackening feminism”, Lao-Montes draws attention to the need to Blacken consideration regarding cities (LAO-MONTES, 2019, p. 1).

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4. This, and all non-English citations hereafter, have been translated by the author.

Many challenges are involved in constructing methodologies that are capable of capturing the geographic struggles protagonized by Black women. In the case of Izidora, I recorded stories in my field notebooks told to me by the women who participated most actively in the movement. I worked in the support network right from the early days of the threat of eviction, while coordinating training activities (workshops and conversation circles). I also endeavored to understand who Rosa Leão was, through informal dialogues with the oldest residents of the Ubirajara Complex, which neighbors the Occupation. These conversations, which led me to formulate a method, enabled me to obtain some indications regarding Izidora, a Black woman who lived in the region, which today bears her name. Thus, a plot was woven, that brought the lives of three black women closer together who, at three different historical moments, presented different forms of relationship between the Black population and the disputes for place and the struggle for territory.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) indicated the narrative method as one of the fundamental features of Black feminist epistemology. This method, which emerges from the displacement of the epistemic locus in the production of theory, and questions the hegemonic criteria of knowledge production and validation, since it is based on lived experience as a criterion for the meaning of the world, became the basis from which I sought to capture the rich, complex landscape of Black social life in the Occupation.

My condition as a researcher, who has descended from a family made up of poor, migrant, Black people, did not leave me the option of an allegedly impartial ear. According to Hartman (2020, p. 18), “This writing is personal because this history has engendered me, because the knowledge of the other marks me”. Everything looked familiar. Thus, we build solid dialogic bridges regarding the subjects of the Occupation, individual and collective histories and the logic of production and circulation of academic knowledge. I found myself within the “special place” that Collins (2016) defines as that occupied by Black intellectuals and other marginalized groups in academic contexts, such as the “outsider within”. This definition points to the fact that, as opposed to the marginality to which we are subjected, which generates mismatches between the hegemonic paradigms of the production of academic knowledge and our experiences, the status of outsider within signals a position of stimulating creativity and criticism, based on the combination of academic training and lived experience.

The construction of this transhistorical plot has required certain choices. For Izidora, since I was only able to find some archival information, which were added to oral reports by older residents in the region, I resorted to the exercise of “critical

fabulation”, a conceptual and technical procedure formulated by the US writer Saidiya Hartman (2020), which enables us “to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened” (HARTMAN, 2020, p. 29).

From the many hours of recorded conversations on the trajectory of Rosa de Jesus Leão, I chose to reproduce parts of the dialogue with Marlene de Mattos, who was her close friend, partner in daily life, in political clashes and in the full experience of the right to party and have pleasure. Marlene’s testimony enables us to reflect upon the dimensions of daily life and the formation of affection in the processes of struggle, in an expansion of the political scope – unthinkable, within a conventional perspective.

Charlene Egídio tells us about the Rosa Leão Occupation anchored in the ethical and political legacy left by the struggles of Black women in the region and in the community-building processes. Politically formed in the struggles against the authoritarianism of the State/state capital, Charlene forms a careful analysis of the context in which this very important chapter of the struggle for territory in Belo Horizonte has been organized.

These fragmentary narratives complement one another and help to compose the multifaceted picture of the struggles for territory in Brazil. If the fragment is all that remains of a text (written or spoken), we may also take it as one of the founding parts of the collective testimony - which includes forgetfulness and incompleteness - on certain information that should never be lost. I turn to Leda Maria Martins (1997), who calls acts of speech and performance *orature*, which comprises the singular inscription of the oral register that, like letters, spells out the subject in a given narrative and enunciative territory.

The disputes over territory in the narrative that follows involve both “a territorial identity attributed by social groups” and “the appropriation and ordering of space”, in which the exchange value predominates (HAESBAERT, 2020, p. 94). Aware that authors who favor the “place” category, such as Katherine McKittrick, are called into this conversation, I use these two categories to express the narratives on Izidora. Black territories, here, are conceived as “physical and symbolic space, configured from functionality and/or cultural practice in which the black presence, although it may not be exclusive, is a central issue” (VIEIRA, 2017, p. 43).

During the investigative process, it was in the rounds of conversation that the practical application and expansion of the narrative method took place. I highlight the cartography workshop (Figures 4 and 5), in which we retrieved individual and collective narratives regarding the Occupation, with the aim of generating a tool, which allowed the coordination team to discuss the histories of spatial

disputes fought in Rosa Leão with more recent residents, supporters and public authorities. These exchanges were also fueled by civil construction workshops for women (Figure 6), which became a space-time for mutual learning and powerful discussions (SILVA, 2018; CRUZ; SILVA, 2019).



Figure 4. Cartography workshop in the Rosa Leão Occupation  
Source: Author's personal collection (2017).



Figure 5. Detail from the cartography workshops in the Rosa Leão Occupation presented by Sara dos Santos  
Source: Author's personal collection (2017).



Figure 6. Construction workshop for women in the Rosa Leão Occupation

Source: Author's personal collection (2017).

An intersectional approach to spatial practices in the city approaches what McKittrick (2006) defined as Black geographies. In this conceptual model, Black histories are linked together by the ways in which they respond to geographic domination. Thus, Black geographies bring out alternative patterns that work alongside and beyond traditional geographies and places (McKITTRICK, 2006, p. 17).

According to Mara Viveros (2016), wagering on intersectionality enables us to apprehend social relations as simultaneous constructions in different orders, of class, gender, race, sexuality, and in different historical configurations or “situated achievements, [...] contexts in which the interactions of race, class and gender revise these categories and give them their meanings” (VIVEROS, 2016, p. 12).

In the following sections, research narratives from the disputes of place experienced by Izidora da Costa, Rosa de Jesus Leão and Charlene Egídio are presented, and which enable me to propose new readings with regard to the conflict at Izidora, and, in particular, to the practices of space in the Rosa Leão Occupation. This demonstrates how present and past geographies, although distinct and particular, have become entangled within these three cases.

### 3. One Izidora and two Rosas

#### 3. 1. Izidora

In the archival investigations to which I turned, in an attempt to understand who Izidora had been, I was faced with yet another example of how Black lives have been rendered invisible, and reduced to a very basic list of fragmented information. Hartman (2019) observed that researchers committed to the narratives of Black people are forced to “grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor” (HARTMAN, 2019, p. xiv).

I understood that, if all of my research on Izidora had only managed to come up with a few vague fragments on who this woman might have been, whose name appears in the memories of those who live in the region and on the oldest maps of Belo Horizonte, then I would have to find a way of dealing with this dearth of information (produced socially and politically). The scarce, the meager and the minimum have, after all, always been a part of my life – as the daughter and granddaughter of Black women who, with the little they knew, in terms of formal education, taught me so much about the production of knowledge.

Until at least 1937, the brook that gave the area its name appeared on maps of Belo Horizonte as the Ribeirão da Izidora<sup>5</sup>. In later maps, the spelling was changed to Isidoro, and the region received the name Mata do Isidoro [Isidoro Woodlands]. The masculinization of the name was viewed by us, who formed the support network, and by the coordinators of the occupations, as an issue related to structural and structuring sexism, for which, erasing the presence of women from the map and from history is one of its greatest trump cards. Upon contacting the Mangueiras Quilombo, we learned that, according to the community's narrative, Izidora had been an enslaved woman who, after being given her freedom, settled in the region and constituted her descendants there<sup>6</sup>. I constantly asked myself whether there had been any kind of exchange between the people of Izidora and the quilombolas. Also, whether Vicencia and Cassiano, and, by extension, the Mangueiras Quilombo, could be part of Izidora da Costa's descendants.

In the search, I came across two official records in which there were references to the name Izidora. The first was in the *Land Registry of Curral Del Rei*, a village before the construction of the city of Belo Horizonte<sup>7</sup>. In it, there is a certain figure called Izidora da Costa who was the owner of half a bushel of land in Ribeirão do Onça (Venda Nova), which bordered the property of the heirs of João Antonio da Silva and Jozé Vieira and with the Ribeirão Acima. This information was declared and registered on March 28, 1856<sup>8</sup>. It is important to note that the area indicated as being owned by Izidora is part of the same region today called Mata do Isidoro.

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5. The Ribeirão da Izidora, the main tributary of the Onça Basin, was named after her. (BORSAGLI, A. *Rios invisíveis da metrópole mineira* [Invisible rivers of the Minas Gerais metropolis]. Belo Horizonte: Ed. do Autor, 2016).

6. The first person to gather this information was researcher Margarete Leta, a member of the Association of Architects Without Borders and a professor at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica of Minas Gerais (PUC-MG) and at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG).

7. Belo Horizonte was founded on December 12, 1897, as a planned city that sought to follow Haussmann's modernist molds.

8. Cf. APM – FUNDO REPARTIÇÃO DE TERRAS PÚBLICAS. Transcrição do Livro TP-1-067 Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem do Curral Del Rei (1855-1857). Registro nº 84. p. 32-33.



The other information refers to the *freed slave* Maria Izidora, 38 years old, listed as being among the enslaved people belonging to Colonel Luis da Siqueira, residing in the region called Palmital, in the then parish of Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem in Curral Del Rey. The data are from the List of Inhabitants, dated 1828<sup>9</sup>.

Given this information, which gradually made up the image of a Black woman who owned land in a context of dispossession of the formerly enslaved Black population, a new set of questions was imposed: What if it was the same person? Could Maria Izidora have used her freed status to obtain the necessary resources to acquire her lands? How could she have registered them, in accordance with the controversial 1850 Land Law<sup>10</sup>, in order to guarantee the rights of her descendants? How and when would she have started to sign herself as da Costa? On the possible origin of her toponymic surname, I speculated: Where could her ancestors have been born and lived? Which coast could her name be referring to? The Gold Coast of Coromantees, Fantis, Ashantis or Minas, present-day Ghana? Or distant Mozambique, from where, between 1811 and 1830, 20% of the total number of enslaved people who landed in Rio de Janeiro had been kidnapped? (MAGALHÃES, 2010) From whom, if not the members of a social group, such as Izidora herself, linked to the idea of ancestry – which implies a notion of circular temporality –, would the idea have come of giving the name of this woman to a creek?

### 3.2 Rosa

Adjacent to the Rosa Leão Occupation, the Ubirajara Complex is composed of one hundred houses (HOURI, 2008). Before moving definitively to the Complex, the residents occupied an area on the border between the Itatiaia and Santa Terezinha neighborhoods, in the Pampulha region. Installed along the banks of the homonymous creek on April 25, 1994 (ROSA, 2010), the Sarandi Occupation originally had around sixty families (URBEL, 2000).

Rosa de Jesus Leão lived in Sarandi and there joined the Struggle for Housing Movement (MLPM) as one of the group's representatives at the negotiation tables. An agreement was reached with the then mayor of Belo Horizonte, Patrus Ananias (PT), at the end of 1994. The Sarandi families who met the criteria established

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9. This list was published in TASSINI, R. *Verdades históricas e pré-históricas de Belo Horizonte antes do Curral Del Rei* [Historical and prehistoric truths of Belo Horizonte before Curral Del Rei]. Belo Horizonte: [s. n.], 1947. (Library collection of the Public Archives of Minas Gerais).

10. "In fact, it [the Land Law] was born as a legal instrument that ensured a class monopoly over land in all regions of the country, even in those not yet economically occupied" (MARTINS, 1979, p. 155). MARTINS, J. S. *O cativo da terra* [The captivity of the land]. São Paulo: Livraria Editora Ciências Humanas, 1979.

by the municipality's housing policy, and who managed to resist the months of waiting<sup>11</sup>, were removed to an area of property of the Companhia Urbanizadora de Belo Horizonte (Urbel), in the Jaqueline neighborhood, with the commitment to build their houses. From that moment on, four years of canvas roofing and struggle followed, until the work was completed – undertaken by a contractor hired by Urbel – and the inauguration of the Complex, in 1998<sup>12</sup>.

*Marlene de Mattos welcomes the group to her home at the Ubirajara Complex. She is enthusiastic about the proposal to retell Rosa's story and, as she speaks, searches for photos in a bag. Contemplating the photos activates her memories and causes temporalities to become present, and to cross over one another, in the unrepeatability of the dialogue, relativizes the differences between the time of affection and that of struggle, and compensates for the scarcity of documents available to the researcher.*

*I really like talking about her, and it all comes flooding back, the difficulty we experienced in the canvas tents, the suffering we went through together. [...] We were great friends, me and Zoca and Rosa, that's what we were like, we drank together, danced forró [a typical Northeastern Brazilian dance] together. What Rosa liked was cachaça [local rum]. We'd go over to her house, she'd go to the butcher's, she'd get some things in [,] we'd have a fry-up and drink. She liked having a full house. There were always people at hers. You could turn up at hers at any time and there was always someone there. Asking her to donate a basket of food, something she always did, she was always involved with something in the community. There was no one who didn't know Rosa. Everyone knew Rosa. She was a really popular person, she was such a helpful person. Charlene is very similar to her. She was very supportive. I could talk to her, as she was highly sensitive and had a big heart. We were very alike. We had fights though, you know? I remember that before she died we were kind of fighting. So we went for about a month without talking. Then, on my birthday, she was missing me. I remember to this day. So, she called my landline, I lived over there in Block 9. Then she asked Estela to recite a beautiful message to me on the phone, and at that same moment I went straight over to give her a hug. "I'm so fond of you. I just can't be away from you, at all." She told me "I'm going through a difficult time with my partner, Juninho", she used to say that he was Ítalo's father. Then she said "let's meet up for a drink, we'll go drinking together". So we arranged for Friday. I'd leave off work and we were to meet there in that bar over there, a*

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11. The main criterion was to be from Belo Horizonte. This excluded participating families from Contagem.

12. For more information on Belo Horizonte's housing policy during the period, cf. BEDÊ, M. C. *Trajatória da formulação e implantação da política habitacional de Belo Horizonte na gestão da Frente BH Popular* [The trajectory of the formulation and implementation of the housing policy in Belo Horizonte in the management of BH Popular Front]. 1993/1996. 2005. Dissertation (Master's) – Instituto de Geociências, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2005.

*little bar on the crossroads between Rio de Janeiro Street and Santos Dumont. I used to work at a motel there in Tupinambás, called Stillus. I said, we'll meet there, around 4 pm, 4:30 pm. I'll wait for you there. We'll have a beer and talk. We arranged to meet and soon after that the tragedy happened. [Rosa was shot in the face in 2002, leaving five children who were taken in by Marlene and Zoca, until they moved to the Complex.]*

Marlene's report demonstrates the position taken by the two friends, which expresses how reductive the dichotomous notions of public and private are. Their friendship, which was not restricted only to the private sphere, to which patriarchy historically relegates women, dares to "occupy" the city center, in a political gesture that recovers and expands the multiple meanings of the presence of Black women in the past and present in the urban space (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Rosa de Jesus Leão portrait

Source: Author's personal collection (2017).

Marlene and Rosa's movements between the activities of militancy, care and self-definition enables us to consider how the construction of Black femininity "disrupts normalized gender categories (male-aggressive, female-passive, male-public, female-private), which are predicated on whiteness." (McKITTRICK, 2006, p. 47). Not an innocent place of private passivity and respectability nor a totally public and/or rational self, but a collection of ideological scripts that highlight a complicated bodily geography, defined by Santos (2018) as "geo-graphies", i.e, the ways in which "race relations spell out space", establishing "temporary territorialities associated with racial belonging" (SANTOS, 2018, p. 77).

*[Rosa] couldn't read or write. But she could talk really well... but you should have seen her in meetings, how well she talked, how well she talked to people. How she put herself across. Nobody knew she was illiterate, because of how smart she was. She was a warrior. [Rosa was] very important to us because she's still part of our history, right? I think it's cool, Charlene's just the same, she was into all these movements, she was into everything, women's business, prejudice against women, she was there, so that women could have more space.*

Marlene's testimony is very important because, in addition to presenting us with a Rosa who did not seem to separate the (collective) struggle for the right to life from the right to enjoy good living, it reveals the owner of such a rare political intelligence that "nobody knew she was illiterate". This report leads us to consider the silent (silenced?) work that countless Black intellectuals, despite their condition of being "illiterate", develop on a daily basis, from the time they jump out of bed until the moment, almost on another day, when fatigue leads them to a few hours of sleep. How can we not see that such women, while making their own lives viable, and of those who depend on them, they also, within their daily actions, always create new ways of thinking and recreating the world?

### 3.3 And Rosa

Charlene Egídio tells us about how the Resiste Izidora network was formed.

*Look, after the occupations happened, the other two occupations, the same movements that were here, started to go over there. How did the [movement] Resist Izidora start? From the moment that the judge at the Municipal Court took all the cases of [...] she took the case of Rosa Leão, Esperança and Vitória and threw them all together into a single case. She shouldn't have done that, but she did it to kick everyone out. But as she'd already made this little cake, so we too made a cake in the resistance, to place... To make it understood, to make the history of the land known, to let them know that this entire region is Izidora, but with different owners. That's when this process started to be understood, and then it became one large single occupation, with three separate territories. [...] so just as the judge was strategic in joining the whole process so as to evict everyone at once, in the interest of capital and owners, our strategy was to bring everyone together to be able to resist it. Bringing together the three communities, the three leaderships as well, since it became the same movement in the three occupations, right?*

The Resiste Izidora struggle network, articulation and political platform created in 2014 (initially named Resiste Isidoro), was built around the resistance agenda of urban occupations, entangling communities, popular social movements

and various supporters in an experience of resistance that translated the strength of urban struggles into the dispute for the city.

Santos (2006) highlights how the construction of the actor in the struggle can have her/his spatiality defined by her/his antagonist. This redefinition may constitute an actor on a scale compatible with that of the antagonist, seeking dialogues that strengthen her/his struggle. The spatiality of the interlocutor – in this case, a combination of the three eviction orders for Justice – and the dimension of the Isidoro Urban Operation, which encompassed the three occupations, conditioned the organizational reconfiguration of the struggles, contributing to the constitution of territories as occupations of Izidora with “spatial coverage compatible with the project” (SANTOS, 2006, p. 187) and an identity corresponding to the territory’s Black ancestry.

*It was the various acts of resistance throughout the processes, not just resisting eviction. First it was resisting a group of individualists that wished to take over their little piece and have it just for them, who became accommodated and then that was that, don't let the rest come and occupy it. The other issue was to resist territorial real estate speculation, to resist it and also to resist within a space that, at the beginning, was lawless, and [it was difficult] for you to make people aware of the environmental, structural and urban issues of the place. This was another resistance, so that people understood that they weren't going to arrive here by plane, that they needed a street. The people understood that they needed green, because in several processes, in addition to life itself, of people have a better life, there's the question of crime. Then there was this second resistance, which I thought was really fucking great. Here comes resistance to living in a place with no water, electricity, sanitation, no right to school, [exposed to] ticks, animals, snakes, spiders. This is yet another kind of resistance. And there were very few people, because the vast majority came, walked round and then left. The few who stayed at the beginning took up resistance. There were buggers all here, I can tell you exactly how many people lived here on this block. Then, with a lot of struggle, saying: "If you don't live in it, you'll lose it..." and the coordination playing this role, and those who lived here were in a more legitimate position to do this, and so progress was made. So it was another resistance.*

In our conversation, Charlene Egidio revealed herself as an attentive analyst of the geopolitical context in which the movement had been formed and established. Her elaborate critical considerations were woven while she cooked lunch, which brings us to the issue of the production of knowledge, from the viewpoint of Black women, as a task as unavoidable and urgent as caring for the home and

the well-being of the family group – for which they are often solely responsible. Producing knowledge signifies, in the midst of a hostile daily life, producing space and time to think and give new meaning to the world.

Unlike a Carolina Maria de Jesus, with her notebooks collected from the trash, or an Audre Lorde (2019), who, by stating that “poetry is not a luxury”, defines the poetic word as the establishment of the “foundations for a future of change”, Charlene writes aloud her critical thinking, her “orature” that helps us to disautomatize the use of the word resistance. We learn from it that there are “several resistances”, and also that this word has a double meaning: just as a certain social group resists the forces that violate it, there will always be those who resist any and all projects for transforming society.

Charlene’s theorizing reminds us that the identity of a community is not something given but is always established through negotiation and susceptible to conflict. Thus, “places are not coherent, they are mixed, they are hybrids, they are meeting points, and the community of a place will be a matter of contention, of social negotiation between different groups” (MASSEY, 2013). Produced in landscapes of domination, black geographies engage in clashes over the definitions of property and the multiple meanings of struggle.

#### Final considerations

The occupations of Izidora demonstrate the convergence between the struggles for communities to remain in the physical-territorial dimension and their fight to name it. Protagonists in the disputes for place, Izidora, Rosa and Charlene dialogue with one another in a trans-historical perspective, and thus help to expand the repertoire on the production of space in a city, Belo Horizonte, founded in the nineteenth century by the idea of exclusion and of erasing any and all traces of the Black presence in Minas Gerais and Brazil. My objective has been to recompose this history, since it is evident in the practice of the women with whom I have opened a dialogue, that there is a political and symbolic gesture that places the quilombo in the centrality of the city’s production.

I have also sought to discuss the importance of Black feminist thought for the figuration of disputes of place. The problem of exclusion, reiterated by the use of theoretical frameworks that programmatically ignore the intersection between power relations, has been circulating for a long time in different historical and geopolitical contexts (VIGOYA, 2016, p. 5). By defining itself as an epistemological tool, whose main function, in this article, has been to reveal the multiple dynamics that intersect in space and time, intersectionality allows us to escape the consideration of one-dimensional spatial practices, guided only by the State/state capital.

There is still much to be done in the field of urban studies regarding the protagonism of Black women. Since the line of argument and the analyzes developed in this work are part of a research agenda that is still ongoing, the considerations made herein are not conclusive, and represent an invitation to debate and, who knows, to engage.

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**Natália Alves da Silva**

Currently undertaking her doctorate studies on the Postgraduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning at the Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional (Ippur) at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

**Email:** natalialvesrj@gmail.com

**ORCID:** 0000-0001-9524-4996

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