

THE VOICES OF THE WOMEN WHO SPEAK TO OUR MORRO: ART AS AN ACTIVATOR OF MEMORIES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a reflection on the potential of art as an activator of memories within the context of the Monte Serrat community in Florianópolis (Santa Catarina, Brazil), based on a pedagogical experience at Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne. The study begins with the sensitive listening to the voices of women from the community — mothers, grandmothers, educators, artists — who build and keep alive the collective memory of the territory. The investigation focuses on the interdisciplinary project *Mama África*, developed with third-year secondary school students, which sought to recover silenced histories and highlight the role of women in community organisation. Drawing on authors such as Paulo Freire (1992) and Célia Xakriabá (2020), the text explores the centrality of territory in educational practice, advocating for a school that is committed to listening, oral expression, and popular knowledge. In this context, art is understood as a language capable of mobilising affections, revealing subjectivities, and giving visibility to historically marginalised experiences. By valuing memory as a constitutive element of identity and collectivity, the work proposes that art contributes to strengthening belonging and autonomy among individuals. Through the practices developed, the study reaffirms the importance of an education that recognises both territory and people as a living body and a producer of knowledge, thereby building relationships between school and community. The experience described points to pedagogical pathways that intertwine memory, art, and territory, envisioning an emancipatory, affective, and transformative education.

KEYWORDS

memory, art education, territory, Monte Serrat, female voices

AS VOZES DAS MULHERES QUE FALAM AO NOSSO MORRO: A ARTE COMO ATIVADORA DE MEMÓRIAS

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta uma reflexão sobre as potências da arte como ativadora de memórias no contexto da comunidade do Monte Serrat, em Florianópolis (Santa Catarina, Brasil), a partir da experiência pedagógica vivida na Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne. O estudo parte da escuta sensível das vozes de mulheres da comunidade — mães, avós, educadoras, artistas — que constroem e mantêm viva a memória coletiva do território. A investigação tem como foco o projeto interdisciplinar *Mama África*, desenvolvido com estudantes do terceiro ano do ensino médio, que buscou resgatar histórias silenciadas e valorizar o papel das mulheres

na organização comunitária. A partir de referenciais como Paulo Freire (1992) e Célia Xakriabá (2020), o texto discute a centralidade do território na prática educativa, defendendo uma escola comprometida com a escuta, com a oralidade e com os saberes populares. A arte, nesse contexto, é compreendida como linguagem capaz de mobilizar afetos, revelar subjetividades e dar visibilidade a experiências historicamente marginalizadas. Ao valorizar a memória como elemento constitutivo da identidade e da coletividade, o trabalho propõe que a arte contribua para o fortalecimento do pertencimento e da autonomia dos sujeitos. Por meio das práticas desenvolvidas, reafirma-se a importância de uma educação que reconheça o território e as pessoas como corpo vivo e produtor de saberes, construindo relações entre escola e comunidade. A experiência descrita aponta para caminhos pedagógicos que entrelaçam memória, arte e território, e que têm como horizonte uma educação emancipadora, afetiva e transformadora.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

memória, arte-educação, território, Monte Serrat, vozes femininas

1. INTRODUCTION

There are places where time is not measured solely by clocks but by shared memories, everyday gestures, and the affections that traverse generations. Monte Serrat, a community located in the central region of Florianópolis (Santa Catarina, Brazil), is one of those places where memory is inscribed in space in a living and continuous way. Its streets are not merely routes of passage, but paths marked by collective experiences, silenced narratives, and practices that resist erasure. In this setting, time takes on other forms: it pulses in the present, inhabits bodies, and manifests itself in oral expression, shared knowledge, and the networks of care that sustain community life.

Within this context, memory is understood as a social, dynamic, and situated process, shaped by disputes over meaning and practices of cultural resistance. It emerges as a lived and shared experience, not restricted to the past but constantly renewed in everyday relationships, primarily through the voices of women who keep the community's memories alive. Mothers, grandmothers, educators, artists, and community leaders play a central role in preserving and transmitting local knowledge. They are the ones who weave intergenerational bonds and sustain processes of belonging and identity.

Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne, situated at the heart of this community, serves as a space where academic knowledge engages in dialogue with popular and local knowledge. The school, attended mainly by children and adolescents from the *morro* (the hillside communities historically inhabited by Afro-Brazilian populations) itself, becomes a meeting place between different epistemologies. Students arrive with rich cultural backgrounds marked by histories of struggle, creativity, and resistance. Recognising these forms of knowledge and incorporating them into pedagogical practices is an ethical and political gesture that strengthens an education committed to social transformation and challenges school models that disregard local realities.

In the field of visual arts, this dialogue becomes even more intense. Art, understood as a sensitive and critical language, offers possibilities for expression, listening, and the construction of meaning. Through artistic practices, silenced memories, erased subjectivities, and ways of existing that challenge hegemonic patterns become visible. Thus, art in the school context can be understood as a means of affirming identities, recovering senses of belonging, and re-enchanting the bonds between individuals, territories, and memories.

It is within this context that the Visual Arts teacher Luiza Melo has been carrying out projects with the institution's students since 2023. Among these experiences, the interdisciplinary project *Mama África* stands out in this text. Initiated in the first trimester of 2025 and now in its final stage of development, the project was carried out jointly with students of Portuguese, History, Geography, and Sociology in a third-year secondary school class. The project aimed to provoke reflections on ancestry, Afro-Brazilian culture, and identity through recognising the importance of female community leadership. By carefully listening to students' narratives and creating images through different artistic techniques, the project sought to open pathways for valuing the Afro-descendant roots present in the community, as well as for affirming other possibilities of existing and inhabiting the city.

This article, therefore, proposes a reflection on the relationships between art, memory, and territory, taking as its starting point a situated pedagogical experience. By sharing this practice, we seek to highlight how art can activate memories, generate symbolic shifts, and strengthen processes of belonging and recognition. It is a sensitive and committed exercise in listening to the voices of women and the community that speak to and through the *morro* — voices that insist on existing, resisting, and (re)telling their memories within the school setting.

In this sense, this study is characterised as qualitative research of an exploratory and descriptive nature, grounded in an action research approach. The methodology adopted aimed to understand the potential of art as a catalyst for memory activation in the school context, fostering the active participation of all stakeholders (teachers, students, and female community leaders) and promoting the collective construction of knowledge. The methodological procedures included a literature review, participant observation of the territory's sociocultural dynamics, and analysis of the artistic works produced by students within the scope of the *Mama África* project. In analysing the data from this pedagogical experience, the aim was to identify the meanings attributed by students to their memories and experiences, as well as the relationships between art, memory, and territory.

It is essential to note that, within the context of the *Mama África* project, the sensitive listening to female voices aimed to recover silenced narratives and to acknowledge the fundamental role of women in community organisation and knowledge sharing. Throughout the text, the actions of these women are emphasised as the driving

force behind the emancipatory and transformative education being pursued. They are the guardians of memory, the weavers of intergenerational bonds, and the protagonists of the cultural resistance practices that shape the identity of the *morro*.

2. THE MONTE SERRAT COMMUNITY AND THE SCHOOL

Monte Serrat, also known as the Morro da Caixa, is one of the oldest communities in Florianópolis (Figure 1). Its origins are directly linked to the processes of urban exclusion that took place in the early twentieth century, which pushed the newly emancipated Black population towards the city's hillsides. Santos (2009) helps us understand this process by describing three distinct phases of occupation:

the first was the slow settlement during the nineteenth century by fugitive and freed slaves, as well as poor soldiers, who sought refuge in the surroundings of the path that crossed the Morro. (...) The second phase began in the 1920s, resulting from urban and sanitary reforms that displaced the poor from the city. The third phase occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, with the migration of impoverished Black populations from Biguaçu and Antônio Carlos in search of employment in the construction industry. (p. 586)



Figure 1. Community — Street between the communities of Monte Serrat and Alto Caeira

Credits. Luiza Melo

Over time, Monte Serrat became consolidated as a place of struggle, collective organisation, and vibrant cultural production. It also became one of the main strongholds

of *samba* in Florianópolis, home to the city's second-oldest samba school, Embaixada Copa Lord, founded in 1955 (Figure 2). This history of resistance has been woven through community actions aimed at improving collective life, including the pursuit of quality education.



Figure 2. Samba School Embaixada Copa Lord—Façade of the Embaixada Copa Lord Samba School

Credits. Luiza Melo

It was through this movement towards education that the Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne was founded. In the 1990s, community leaders began to mobilise in response to rising violence and growing concern for the future of children and young people. In 1998, the Centro Cultural Escrava Anastácia da Nossa Senhora do Monte Serrat — a name that intertwines African and Catholic religiosities — was established through the efforts of Dona Darcy, Seu Teco, and Father Vilson Groh, all active figures within the community. In partnership with the cultural centre, a project was created that would eventually lead, in 2003, to the establishment of the Centro Social Marista do Monte Serrat.

The community already had a state school, the Escola Estadual Lúcia do Livramento Mayvorne, which was in poor condition and threatened with closure. In 2011, following negotiations with the Department of Education of the State of Santa Catarina, the school came under the management of the Marist educational network, becoming the Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne (Figure 3). Today, it serves more than 500 students, from the early years of primary education through to secondary level. The Marist educational network is a private institution that operates both private and social schools, the latter offering free education to children and adolescents living in peripheral areas — such as is the case of the Lúcia Mayvorne School.



Figure 3. School — Façade of the Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne

Credits. Colégios Maristas (<https://colegiosmaristas.com.br/#nossas-unidades>)

Within the social, political, and cultural movements that have shaped the community — including those that gave rise to the school — the leadership of women has always been a central aspect. They have been the driving force behind many of the community's achievements. The centrality of women in this role is analysed by Paulista (2013), who emphasises:

the banners of struggle of housing and grassroots social movements — such as neighbourhood associations — are deeply intertwined with women's lived experiences in urban spaces and their domestic routines. This identification of women with these causes is an essential subjective condition that influences their mobilisation and organisation within such movements, beyond the objective conditions (such as threats and deprivation). (p. 11)

In the context of Monte Serrat, women are the guardians of memories, traditions, and knowledge that sustain the community. They weave networks of care and solidarity that ensure the continuity of local life and culture. The *Mama África* project sought to give visibility to this protagonism, encouraging students to recognise and value the women's voices that speak to the *morro*.

The Monte Serrat community carries a rich and powerful history, forged through the struggles and resistance of its residents and marked by individuals who have played key roles in building this territory. The school itself is a living manifestation of that memory — one that pulses through the houses, alleyways, and faces of the community.

The very historic materiality of this territory already reveals the importance of evoking and preserving these memories — but why use the school as the space for that? Xakriabá (2020) offers insight into this question, when reflecting on the context of Indigenous school education, she argues that “it is necessary to consider territory as an important element that nourishes, teaches, and constitutes us as people in the world.

We cannot see ourselves as separate from the territory, for we are also an inseparable part of it, our body” (p. 326).

Xakriabá (2020) reminds us of the importance of integrating the elements of territory into educational practices, for we are part of it whenever we are in school. Schools, in their different contexts and territories, must engage in dialogue with the narratives of the places they inhabit. This means connecting learners with the spaces in which they live, while also enabling them to apply the knowledge they develop in school back to the community. After all, “to strengthen educational processes, it is necessary to nurture the practices woven within culture, which are present in oral expression, in rituals, in social organisation, in secrecy and the sacred, in what is hidden” (Xakriabá, 2020, p. 320). In this way, the school can become a space for the sharing of knowledge not only historically systematised but also popular and cultural knowledges — equally important yet often marginalised.

When we think of building a school that breaks away from traditional education and seeks to forge paths through the development of critical thinking, it is essential to place territory at the centre of pedagogical processes — whether starting from it or relating it to historically systematised knowledge.

Paulo Freire (1992) reminds us that “community life is the fertile soil in which education as the practice of freedom can flourish. The community is the place of listening, dialogue, sharing, and struggle” (p. 53). It is, therefore, within the community that we can build an education that breaks with dominant logic — and it is together with the community that we can create a new kind of school, one that makes sense and allows learners to feel meaning in what they learn.

The concept of education as a practice of freedom, as developed by Paulo Freire (1992), proposes a fundamental shift in how we understand the processes of teaching and learning. Rather than a vertical action that transmits ready-made content, this perspective values dialogue, attentive listening, and the collective construction of knowledge, recognising each subject as a bearer of unique experiences and wisdom. Education thus becomes a space of encounter — between memories, affections, and possible worlds — where critical awareness and the capacity to transform reality can be cultivated.

In this sense, the participation of residents — through oral narratives, cultural practices, and collective actions — strengthens the bond between school and territory, fostering a living education that transcends the boundaries of textbook content. Art, in this context, becomes both a political and pedagogical gesture, legitimising peripheral knowledges and opening cracks through which other possible worlds may emerge.

To recognise territory as a source of knowledge is also to enact historical repair. By valuing the community’s cultural practices, the school reaffirms its commitment to social justice and a pedagogy that embraces difference as a potential source of learning. Within this process, historical repair is understood as the restoration of dignity to individuals and collectives marginalised by the effects of colonialism, structural racism, and

social inequality. As Ventura (2021) observes, “the movement for historical reparation highlights the silent denial of African enslavement and colonial violence as foundational elements that sustain contemporary practices of racial exclusion and discrimination” (p. 15). In the context of Monte Serrat, this movement materialises through the recognition of memories and cultural practices cultivated by women, artistic collectives, and community leaders who re-signify and keep local traditions alive.

3. THE MAMA ÁFRICA PROJECT

The interdisciplinary project *Mama África* emerged from reflections on the relationship between the school and its territory in the construction of a school for freedom. The notion of territory became a central pillar in the approach proposed by this article. The project’s title references the song of the same name by Brazilian singer-songwriters Chico César and George Thomaz (Letras.mus.br, n.d.-b):

Mama Africa / My mother is a single mother / And she has to make the
baby’s bottle / Every day / As well as working as a packer / At Casas Bahia /
Mama Africa has so much to do / Besides taking care of the baby / Besides
showing affection / Her little boy has to understand / Mama Africa comes
and goes / But never drifts away from you. (v. 1)

The lyrics reveal the struggle and strength of Black women within the family structure — the single mother who both cares for her children and works outside the home, bearing the marks of her daily hardship in the wounds on her feet. The song thus highlights the centrality of Black women in sustaining family life and, consequently, their crucial role within the community. The choice of this composition as a reference for the project aligns with its purpose: to inspire reflection on ancestry, Afro-Brazilian culture, and identity, valuing the role of women in building and maintaining collective memory.

It is worth noting that interdisciplinarity was a fundamental element in the design and implementation of the project. By integrating the subjects of Art, Portuguese, History, Geography, and Sociology, *Mama África* provided a holistic and contextualised approach to the theme, allowing students to explore multiple dimensions of Afro-Brazilian ancestry and identity through the interaction of the curricular components involved. The school was conceived as a space that enables a multifaceted and critical understanding of reality as it manifests itself, complex, contradictory, plural, and interconnected. It is understood that

the school is a living space where interpersonal and human relationships are both found and sought. In this sense, it must contribute to the formation of the human by fostering connections between cultural pluralism, social differentiation, and ideological pluralism — and by relating what “separates” us to what unites us. In this respect, it needs to be interdisciplinary. (Salgado, 2017, p. 72)

Interdisciplinary practice took shape through the definition of the project theme in a pedagogical meeting involving all teachers of the participating subjects, starting from the central issue of the role of women in community organization — especially in Monte Serrat — acknowledging the significant number of women who hold leadership positions in the community. Once the general guidelines were established, the teaching staff discussed how each subject could contribute to the debate and planned collective activities. During the roundtable discussion with community leaders, classes were conducted collectively, with all subject teachers present.

In Geography, students explored processes of community organisation and the cartographic construction of place, developing a collective affective map of Monte Serrat. In Sociology, the teacher presented research and led discussions on the sexual division of labour and the care economy, focusing on women's centrality in social organisation. In History, the teacher outlined the historical trajectories of women who served as political leaders in various African countries, later connecting this material to the stories of women from the local community. Finally, in Portuguese, the teacher introduced short stories and poems from Brazilian and African literature that conveyed different women's perspectives on their territories, culminating in the production of micro-stories.

As for the role of Art, as previously mentioned, artistic processes and visual references were used to open pathways for valuing the Afro-descendant roots present in the community, as well as for affirming other possibilities of existence and of occupying the city.

Overall, the project's integrated approach not only enriched the learning process and strengthened pedagogical ties between teachers and students but also reinforced the connection between the school and the community, fostering an education that recognises and values popular and territorial knowledge.

4. MEMORIES, CONVERSATIONS, AND ART

In the field of cultural and social studies, the concept of memory goes beyond mere individual recollection or the factual chronology of history. Memory is a complex, dynamic, and socially constructed phenomenon, distinguished from history and recollection by its specific characteristics and functions. While recollection refers to personal and subjective memories, and history seeks a critical and objective reconstruction of the past based on documents and evidence, memory — especially collective memory — emerges as a living, continuously reworked process that manifests in social practices, rituals, oral narratives, and shared spaces.

Maurice Halbwachs (1950/2006), one of the pioneers of collective memory studies, argues that memory is not a purely individual phenomenon but rather is shaped and sustained by social frameworks. According to Halbwachs (1950/2006), personal memories are always referenced within a social context, and collective memory is what allows a group to maintain cohesion and identity.

The Brazilian psychologist Ecléa Bosi (1987/2004), in her work *Memória e Sociedade: Lembranças de Velhos* (Memory and Society: Reminiscences of the Old), deepens this understanding by exploring memory as a research field that reveals the experiences and narratives of marginalised groups, giving voice to histories often silenced by official accounts. Bosi (1987/2004) emphasises the importance of oral expression and testimony as primary sources for constructing social memory, highlighting how individual memories intertwine with collective ones to form the identity of a people. Her contribution is essential for understanding memory as a social phenomenon that transcends the individual, constituting a collective heritage maintained across generations.

In the context of this article, memory is understood as an active process of (re)constructing the past in the present, manifested in the voices and practices of the women of Monte Serrat. It is not a static recollection, but a living memory that permeates the community's daily life, activated and re-signified through art. This perspective allows for the valorisation of popular knowledge and previously invisible narratives, recognising memory as a powerful instrument of resistance and social transformation.

Memories are paths that return us to identity, ancestry, and the collectivity that shapes us. We are many, even as we form one collective. Remembering is also a claim for space in history, a recognition that our trajectory is as valid as any other recorded in official books.

Memory, often associated only with nostalgia, is, in fact, what defines us as subjects. We are not only our individual recollections, but the collective ones — the memories we inherit, which tell us who we were and who we can become. As Célia Xakriabá (2020) defines:

native memory refers to the memories we retain from our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents — the oldest memories that we carry ancestrally. Active memory also consists of those memories we reactivate from past matrices. Yet, they remain present and active today, being dynamic and marked by processes of re-signification that will define our relationship with the body-territory memories for the future generations yet to come. (p. 321)

When discussing memory, it is also essential to consider the spaces where it is propagated and maintained, such as through oral expression. It is in conversation that we activate and resist with memories. Knowledge and stories not regarded as central to the so-called “universal history” are marginalised and perceived as not relevant enough to be included in books or works of art, although contemporary art has begun to take initial steps toward this recognition. For this reason, it is necessary to reclaim spaces for conversation within the school.

When we gather and share memories, we can construct new knowledge and narratives for a place, as Bosi (1987/2004) points out:

only the group can resist and recombine traces of its past. Only the intelligence and labour of a group can recover precious things that have been lost

while they are still recoverable. When this collective resistance is absent, individuals scatter and are cast far away, their roots torn apart. (p. 452)

Collective involvement and resistance are necessary to reclaim the collective, community, and class memories that still pulse through the streets of Monte Serrat. These memories become tools, allowing each student to gain autonomy and awareness of their own process of becoming, as subjects in society, and enabling a rupture with the prevailing social organisation.

But, why the visual arts as activators of memory? Art, in its multiple forms, goes far beyond historical, social, or cultural documentation; it presents itself as a singular space for the construction and re-signification of knowledge. It offers its own language, capable of communicating what often escapes conventional forms of discourse, creating bridges between the tangible and the intangible, the rational and the emotional. Through images, colours, and forms, the visual arts mobilise beliefs, ideas, and subjectivities, allowing individual and collective experiences to be expressed in a unique way. Unlike logical argumentation, which seeks to persuade through reason, art invites the viewer to a sensitive encounter with their own feelings, awakening dormant memories and often expanding into the realm of affects — those deep emotional bonds that link an individual to their context, history, and community. In this way, the visual arts serve as catalysts for processes of remembrance and belonging, providing a space where silenced narratives gain voice and visibility, thereby contributing to the construction of more plural and affirmative identities.

Corroborating this perspective, Silva (2014) writes:

as a field of knowledge, art will utilise its properties to structure, organise, and give meaning to the surrounding reality. The symbolic value that permeates artistic production responds to the human need for understanding, organisation, and dialogue with the environment, responds to certain stimuli emanating from it, and establishes a continuous process of intervention and transformation of both. In its own way, it gives meaning to the world distinct from other fields of knowledge. (pp. 38–39)

Art, beyond its importance as a field of knowledge and its own language, which enables communication through diverse materialities and singularities, also presents itself as a space for preserving and activating memory. This is evident, for example, in the *sambas-enredo* (themed samba) of Monte Serrat's *samba* school, Embaixada Copa Lord, which consistently includes cultural, historical, and symbolic elements of the community:

In the faith of my *orixás* and Our Lady of Monte Serrat / *Axé* Dona Uda Gonzaga and the life lessons she came to teach / Marias among so many Marias with spirit and *samba* in their step / Who do you think you are without the strength of women? (Silveira, 2014, v. 4)

The refrain is taken from the 2014 *samba-enredo*, when Embaixada Copa Lord developed the theme “Quem Você Pensa que É, sem a Força da Mulher? Copa Lord Saúda D. Uda, as Mulheres do Morro e as Mulheres do Mundo!” (Who Do You Think You Are Without the Strength of Women? Copa Lord Salutes D. Uda, the Women of the *Morro*, and the Women of the World!), composed by Alexandre Feijão, Leleco, Nenem do Banjo, and Zinho Bom Astral, centred on women’s strength in society and highlighting Dona Uda Gonzaga, the great matriarch of the community of Monte Serrat, as a symbol of this power.

5. SHARING MEMORIES THROUGH VISUAL ARTS IN THE MAMA ÁFRICA PROJECT

Within the community of Monte Serrat, many women are frequently mentioned in school spaces or in conversations with students. However, a more complex understanding of their struggles and roles in community organisation is necessary, that is, a deeper study. Thus, the project sought to provide visibility and reflective depth to this issue, as it is understood that

it is essential to highlight the role of women as guardians of community knowledge and practices, as well as in transmitting daily practices through conversation circles, exchanges, care of productive yards, religious rituals, and/or daily rituals that describe working with/on the land as part of constructing a *quilombola* identity. (Leal & Boakari, 2023, p. 7)

In alignment with Leal and Boakari (2023), we understand the importance of the women of Monte Serrat not only as community organisers and fighters but also as guardians of the community’s knowledge, practices, and memories.

The educational path in the Arts component initially addressed what students believed to be the memories of these community women, and later, these beliefs were placed in dialogue with the voices of the women themselves. Following the conversation with community leaders, students studied works and artists that reflect on memory, such as Rosana Paulino, Rosângela Rennó, and Racionais MC’s. Finally, they engaged in an artistic process, activating memories through the creation of images.

We began the project by asking students to identify the women in the community they knew and to assess, in their perception, the personal and social significance of these women for Monte Serrat. After compiling the names, we discussed the possible influence of these women on the construction of the Monte Serrat community. From this debate, students wrote letters to these women, which could be addressed to a woman they actually knew or to a woman they believed existed in the community, thus the latter being a fictional figure. To provide artistic grounding for the letters, students were introduced to artists working with mail art, including Paulo Bruscky and Regina Silveira. Luiza Melo’s mail art piece “Desaparecido” (Missing, 2019) was also shared. This work consists of a photographic appropriation, a handwritten letter, and a postal stamp. The

letter is fictional, written by a child to their mother, during a period of political disappearance under the Brazilian military dictatorship.

We highlight here the letter of a student whose grandmother is a community leader. In this letter, she brings personal memories, a social dimension, and admiration for her grandmother's struggle: "I'm here remembering when I was little and you went to pick me up at daycare, hands full of bags, tired, but you always went anyway. At the time, I didn't fully understand, but today I see how difficult it was. You've been through so much, yet you never stopped fighting, not only for our family but for everyone around". Her letter also closely connects with the song "Mama África", which inspired the project's name, as it recounts the daily overburdening of women caring for children (or grandchildren, in the context of the letter), while also working and fighting for the community.

After the classroom conversations and artistic letter writing, together with the other teachers and project coordinators, and with the support of the school administration, we invited women who had played or continue to play an essential role in the organisation of Monte Serrat to visit the school. We then held a roundtable to share their memories, during which they spoke about their social, political, and cultural involvement in building the community.

Three women with significant roles in the community participated in this roundtable: Rosângela Freitas, Dona Teresa, and Sandra. Rosângela is the executive director of the Instituto Reverbera (<https://institutoreverbera.com.br>), this social institution supports youth in the community in entering the job market, with a particular focus on addressing social, racial, and gender issues. Dona Teresa is a resident who was heavily involved in the community, organising the construction of a church in the Alto Caieira area (part of the Morro da Cruz massif). She also fought for access to the treated water network, which at one point experienced scarcity, and developed projects for youth study and support, among many other initiatives. Sandra, also known in the community as Preta, is one of the founders of *Viva Monte Serrat* (<https://vivamonteserrat.com.br>), a community-based tourism (CBT) project. Sandra's project implements a visitor model managed by the community itself, promoting cultural exchange, valuing local history, and the sustainable use of the territory — unlike traditional tourism, it stems from community actions and planning, rather than external perspectives.

In addition to presenting their community efforts, these women shared their personal and collective memories. Each participant mentioned other women who had been important in shaping themselves and the community. In this context, washerwomen were frequently cited, as it was through their labour — descending the *morro* to collect laundry from the city elites and returning to wash it by the river — that their importance in the community was solidified. In the post-slavery period, when Black people had limited access to formal employment, the income from washerwomen's work sustained many families.

Another figure emphasised by the guests was Dona Uda, considered by all as the matriarch of Monte Serrat. Dona Uda (who could not attend the roundtable due to mobility issues) was the first Black woman to become a teacher in the community, serving for many

years as director of the Escola Estadual Lúcia do Livramento Mayvorne, where this project is currently conducted. She was also president of the Escola de Samba Embaixada Copa Lord, a full member of the State Education Council, and for years a catechist at the Church of Nossa Senhora do Monte Serrat. She has engaged in various social struggles over the years, dedicating herself to the community.

After the meeting and back in the classroom, we discussed these shared memories and reflected on the importance of these women, having heard their voices and learned their life stories more deeply through direct narrative. We then debated how these conversations could be explored through visual arts, asking: What images can we create from this encounter? What did this conversation awaken in us? Which processes of identification and recognition became possible? To expand artistic references and repertoire, we studied works that address memory: Rosana Paulino's "Parede da Memória" (Wall of Memory, 1994–2005) and "Bastidores" (Backstage, 1997), Rosângela Rennó's "Imemorial" (Immemorial, 1994) and "Vulgo" (Alias, 1998–1999), and the song "Diário de um Detento"¹ (Diary of a Prisoner, 1997) by Racionais MC's (written by Josemir Prado, a former detainee of the Carandiru Penitentiary Complex in São Paulo, which suffered a massacre on 2 October 1992, resulting in the death of 111 detainees, evoking the memory of this cruel moment in history).

From these conversations and provocations, we collectively considered which artistic languages each student would use in their creations. Initially, we aimed to use photo-transfer techniques, as Rosana Paulino employs in some works. However, after making our own adapted press, we realised the school printer ink was unsuitable. Thus, we decided to use the artistic materials available at the institution. For this reason, each student chose those with which they most identified or believed to have the strongest connection to what they wished to explore in their artistic proposal. This autonomy was significant, reflecting years of experimentation with different techniques and materials in the school space. At the time of writing, ongoing works include embroidery on raw fabric, oil paintings on canvas, pastel drawings on Canson paper, gouache paintings on canvas, and graphite drawings on paper.

Students' works represent different depictions of Monte Serrat women. One recurring theme is washerwomen, shown either in action or facing the viewer, with the *morros* and rivers in the background. Dona Uda Gonzaga appears in some works, once in a painting where she is depicted embroidering the Escola de Samba Embaixada Copa Lord flag (Figure 4), and once in an embroidery piece featuring her name and symbols representing her life. Rosângela Freitas is depicted in a painting (Figure 5), smiling and looking at the viewer. Some students also depicted women from their families, notably a painting showing a student's grandmother and her connection to *Umbanda*, a religion prevalent in the community (Figure 6). The painting shows the grandmother younger, wearing a *guia* (protective bead strand), with a *ponto cantado* (song from African-rooted religions) beneath her face: "if my father is Ogum, Ogum / Conqueror of demand / He comes from Aruanda / To save the child of *Umbanda*".

¹ "(...) It was the breach the system wanted / Tell the IML (Forensic Medical Institute), the great day has come / It all depends on one man's yes or no / Who prefers to stay neutral over the phone / Fleury went for lunch, fuck my mother / Murderous dogs, tear gas (...)" (Letras.mus.br, n.d.-a, vv. 11–12).



Figure 4. Oil painting (in progress) depicting D. Uda Gonzaga embroidering the Escola de Samba Copa Lord flag
Credits: Luiza Melo



Figure 5. Watercolour on Canson paper representing Rosângela Freitas
Credits: Luiza Melo

scheduled to take place at the end of the term. The exhibition will be held at the Escola de Samba Embaixada Copa Lord, a central stage for the women of Monte Serrat.

6. ECHOES OF MEMORY

Listening to the female voices that speak to the *morro* is more than a poetic gesture: it is a political, ethical, and pedagogical stance. At Monte Serrat, art is understood not only as expression, but also as a listening and an encounter. This intertwining of lives, memories, and images reveals other ways of knowing and teaching — ways that emerge from affection, the body, and lived experience.

It is through the hands, words, and gazes of the women of the community that the *morro* speaks. By listening to these voices, the school can reinvent itself as a space of living memory, shared creation, and transformation. Acknowledging the power of the narratives that emerge from the community, especially those of the women who build it daily, serves to reaffirm the importance of an education committed to the territory and its inhabitants. In this context, art becomes a language that makes visible what has long been silenced, while offering pathways to imagine possible futures, sown with dignity and a sense of belonging.

These women weave networks of care, keep traditions alive, and make resistance a daily practice. Their narratives span generations and challenge the silences imposed by hegemonic histories. By transforming their experiences into pedagogical material, they are recognised as legitimate sources of knowledge and expertise. These knowledges, often transmitted informally through conversations, prayers, gestures, and community festivities, invite a re-signification of school practices.

In this process, the school ceases to be a space confined to content reproduction and becomes a territory of listening, welcoming, and creation. By opening space for these voices, subjectivities are activated and community bonds strengthened. Art, in this context, becomes both a political and pedagogical gesture, legitimising peripheral and feminine knowledges and opening avenues for constructing other possible worlds.

Thus, it becomes clear that it is necessary to learn to take off the shoes worn when walking paths and accessing the theoretical knowledge produced in the centre. Let the feet touch the ground in the territory. Your shoes will become small and will not fit collective feet; they will squeeze our minds so tightly that they will limit access to knowledge in the territory of the body.
(Xakriabá, 2020, p. 330)

It is therefore necessary to relearn walking collectively, in an attitude of listening, allowing the ground of the *morro* to teach. May the steps taken together with the community continue to activate memories, sensibilities, and senses of belonging.

Recognising the territory as a source of knowledge is a form of historical reparation. By valuing the community's memories, voices, and cultural practices, the school reaffirms

its commitment to social justice and to a pedagogy that embraces differences as potential. In this way, Monte Serrat not only teaches about itself but offers the world other ways of existing, educating, and dreaming collectively.

7. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article aimed to reflect on the potential of art as a memory activator within the Monte Serrat community in Florianópolis, drawing on the pedagogical experience at Marista Escola Social Lúcia Mayvorne. Throughout the text, it has shown how the sensitive listening to the community's female voices, the recognition of the territory as a space of knowledge, and the interdisciplinary approach of the *Mama África* project contributed to the development of a more engaged and transformative education.

Discussions on the importance of oral expression and the central role of women in preserving local memories revealed the complexity and richness of Monte Serrat's cultural universe. In this context, art emerged not merely as a tool of expression but as a powerful catalyst of memory, capable of mobilising emotions, re-signifying experiences, and strengthening bonds of belonging and identity.

The practices developed with students, which culminated in the creation of artworks inspired by the narratives of the community's women, demonstrate the potential of Art Education to foster the recognition of peripheral knowledges and affirm alternative epistemologies. By giving visibility to these voices and their memories, the school reaffirms its commitment to a pedagogy that embraces difference and promotes social justice.

Thus, the Monte Serrat experience, mediated through art, points to pedagogical paths that intertwine art and territory, envisioning an emancipatory, affective, and transformative education. It is an invitation to remove one's shoes and allow the ground of the *morro* to teach, collectively constructing a future in which all voices can resonate.

Through these artistic practices, students began to narrate their own memories, revisit their ancestries, and recognise themselves as active participants in producing meanings about the place where they live. Through listening and creating alongside these students, it became possible to identify feminine and peripheral epistemologies that resist, pulse, and flourish, even in the face of historical erasures.

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