

## Nilma Lino Gomes delivers aula magna at UFRGS



### Broaching “The Role of the University in Overcoming Racism,” Gomes argued that overcoming racism involves facing racism

UFRGS officially began the academic semester with the Inaugural Class delivered by a professor of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Nilma Lino Gomes. Gomes is former minister in the Bureau for the Promotion of Racial Equality—SEPPIR—(2015) and in the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, Youth and Human Rights (2015-2016). She was the first black woman to become president of a federal university in Brazil, when she got in charge of the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony—UNILAB—in 2013.

Professor Gomes opened her speech on “The Role of the University in Overcoming Racism” mentioning the commitment science had to racism in other times, recognizing that there is a historical debt of science to humanity and to the black people around the world. “Science, the illustrated medium, was used to prove the supposed racial inferiority of black men and black women, transforming racist ideologies into racial theories, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the effects of which – in science and Brazilian society – we live under until today, ” she argued.

The march of capitalism is intertwined with racism, pointed out the teacher. According to her, the slave trade from Africa to the Americas, which made possible the capital accumulation through exploitation of unpaid labor, seemed to be justified by the popular imagination of that time, which perceived an African continent with nothing but anthropoids, species that were away from the human race. This led to the formation of what Gomes calls “perverse articulation” of inequality, which occurs according not only to socioeconomic aspects, but also to race, gender, and sexual diversity.

The role of the university in our society, she said, is to confront racism, whether through discussion and theoretical production, or through the way its inner structure is organized, in the curricula that have to be revised and updated in light of the dynamics of our time. “The public university faces racism when it does not say yes to narrow thinking and obscurantism. It has the duty – along with education, research, community outreach, and international outlook policies – to renew itself in the light of not only cutting-edge technologies but also cutting-edge social policies and achievements. Recognition of a broad core of knowledge produced by a diverse group of people that are part of the public university by right and not by concession: black people, indigenous, women, quilombolas, people with disabilities, rural populations, LGBT people... People who are constitutionally in the university due to a history of political struggle, rights, resistance, pressure, negotiation, and who have in the black movement a protagonist in the discussion with the State,” said Lina Gomes.

Overcoming racism is facing it, Nilma argues. “When the university does not deny the reality of racism, on the contrary, when it is explicitly opposed to it – by means of academic anti-racist policies, curricula revision, creation of education coordinating bodies for affirmative actions, implementation of racial quotas in graduate programs –, it creates spaces of academic formation and enables a successful stay for the subjects of affirmative actions, so redefining the core structure of the university. When the university does this, it becomes part of the political and epistemological arena to overcome racism. And to overcome it, you have to face it.”



Nilma Lino Gomes is professor of the Federal University of Minas Gerais

The aula magna, which also opened the celebrations of UFRGS 85th anniversary, was held at the Salão de Atos and was attended by UFRGS' president Rui Vicente Oppermann, UFRGS' vice-president Jane Tutikian, affirmative action coordinator Denise Jardim and union representatives, Maria Luiz Ramos (Assurgs), Paulo Mors (Adufrgs), and Fabiola Loguercio, from the University Student Union (DCE).

President Oppermann's opening words highlighted the history of the UFRGS in defense of democracy, whose landmark was the proposal and subsequent consolidation of the affirmative action policies, in force since 2008. President Oppermann stated that this is the right time to overcome differences and to embrace diversity in favor of inclusion.

The aula magna was broadcasted by UFRGS TV. The video is available at UFRGS TV YouTube channel.

*Translated into English by Luísa Branchi Araújo, under the supervision and translation revision of Elizamari R. Becker (P.h.D) – IL/UFRGS*

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