



WOMEN'S AFRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN JUIZ DE FORA, MG: REFLECTIONS ON GASTRONOMY, EVENTS, AND TOURISM

*AFROEMPREENDEDORISMO FEMININO EM JUIZ DE FORA -MG: REFLEXÕES
SOBRE GASTRONOMIA, EVENTOS E TURISMO*

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| Keywords | Abstract |
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| Afro-entrepreneurship. Black women. Food and beverage. Events. Afrotourism. | This article aims to analyse the gastronomic Afro-entrepreneurship in Juiz de Fora – MG, from the perspective of black women, and to reflect on the possibilities of their inclusion in the city's official events. Methodologically, this research is characterised by a qualitative and exploratory perspective. The research has allowed visibility to a sensitive and important issue for black people, especially women, who have historically been discriminated against, made invisible, and devalued in the official gastronomic events of the municipality. Eight gastronomic enterprises run by black women were identified in the city, enabling an analysis of how they identify with Afro-entrepreneurship. The interaction between the Afro-entrepreneurship of the women studied, who work in the food and beverage sector, and these events can become an element of socio-economic and socio-cultural integration with tourism in the city of Juiz de Fora. However, structural racism still imposes numerous obstacles and challenges to the appreciation of the history and culture of the black population. Therefore, it is essential to encourage the production and consumption of products and services originating from black people and cultures, such as gastronomy, events, and Afrotourism. |

ISSN
2594-8407





| Palavras-Chave | Resumo |
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| <p><i>Afroempreendimentos.</i> <i>Mulheres negras.</i> <i>Alimentação e bebidas.</i> <i>Eventos.</i> <i>Afroturismo.</i></p> | <p><i>Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar os afroempreendimentos gastronômicos de Juiz de Fora – MG, sob a ótica das mulheres negras, e refletir sobre as possibilidades de suas inserções nos eventos oficiais da cidade. Metodologicamente, esta pesquisa se caracteriza pela perspectiva qualitativa e exploratória. A pesquisa permitiu dar visibilidade a um tema sensível e importante para o povo negro, em especial às mulheres, que historicamente foram discriminadas, invisibilizadas e desvalorizadas nos eventos gastronômicos oficiais do município. Foram identificados oito empreendimentos gastronômicos de mulheres negras na cidade, o que possibilitou analisar como se identificam com o afroempreendedorismo. A interação entre o afroempreendedorismo das mulheres pesquisadas que atuam na área de alimentos e bebidas e esses eventos pode se tornar um elemento de integração socioeconômica e histórico-sócio-cultural com o turismo na cidade de Juiz de Fora. O racismo estrutural, porém, ainda impõe inúmeros obstáculos e desafios para a valorização da história e da cultura da população negra. Por isso, é fundamental incentivar a produção e o consumo de produtos e serviços oriundos de pessoas e culturas negras, como a gastronomia, os eventos e o afroturismo.</i></p> |

How To Cite (APA):

Queiroga; R. C.; Maurício, V. C. da S.; & Moraes, E. A. (2024). Afroempreendedorismo feminino em Juiz de Fora - MG: reflexões sobre gastronomia, eventos e turismo. *Ateliê do Turismo*. Edição Especial - Afroturismo. 7 (2). 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.55028/at.v8i1.19807>



INTRODUCTION

Afro-entrepreneurship constitutes an entrepreneurship of Black people responsible for managing their own businesses in various sectors of the labor market. In addition, it seeks to provide work that involves other family members so that the income obtained from the commercialization of their products and/or services circulates among their peers, generating a productive chain and conscious consumption for the sake of empowerment, autonomy, cultural appreciation, and the reduction of socioeconomic inequalities. Consequently, they occupy better positions on the social pyramid (Santos, 2019). According to Silva (2021), these characteristics are also combined with the racial self-declaration as Black (a characteristic that, according to IBGE, includes both Black and Brown individuals), offering products and/or services that value their ethnic and cultural roots, fostering identity with consumers who develop feelings of belonging and a connection to their own history. Thus, Afro-entrepreneurs have positioned themselves as agents of their own promotion and social transformation.

According to the study "Afro-entrepreneurship in Brazil," developed by RD Station, Incentivos, and the Black Money Movement, Afro-entrepreneurship moves around R\$1.73 trillion per year in the country. However, 48.6% of businesses still do not have revenue, facing severe difficulties in ensuring subsistence (Teixeira, 2021).

In this context, Afro-entrepreneurship is also part of the Brazilian tourism labor market. Since 2018, Afro-entrepreneurs in tourism have been organizing in ways that value Black cultures and identities in the country, contributing to the construction of Afro-tourism. This approach has been discussed as a potential alternative to showcase how the Black historical and cultural process can drive the desire for travel (Clube de Criação, 2022). Thus, Afro-tourism has been established as a possibility to position Black individuals as protagonists, both as travelers and as hosts in tourist destinations, as well as business managers in hospitality and gastronomy, for example (Calixto, 2023). However, it is not about linking Black individuals to a specific segment or tourist product. Afro-tourism is related to a counter-hegemonic way of thinking and acting in tourism, which allows for Afro-entrepreneurship and being a client in different areas, such as travel agencies, leisure, recreation, hospitality, food and beverages, among others. In other words, race/ethnicity is also a fundamental social marker for analyzing tourism and its relationship with the existence of individuals in contemporary society (Melo, 2024).



Given this context, the present article focuses on Afro-entrepreneurship. Considering the breadth of the topic, this research specifically examines Black women working in the food and beverage sectors, as they have historically been the most affected by exclusion, inequality, and exploitation in the workplace (IBGE, 2019). Thus, it highlights how female Afro-entrepreneurship in the food and beverage sectors can become part of event-related agendas, thereby contributing to fostering tourism, and specifically Afro-tourism, in the city of Juiz de Fora (Minas Gerais).

In this direction, the central objective of this research is to analyze gastronomic Afro-entrepreneurship in Juiz de Fora from the perspective of Black women and to reflect on the possibilities of their inclusion in official food and beverage events held in the city. The specific objectives are: a) to identify the gastronomic enterprises of Black women in Juiz de Fora; b) to analyze whether these enterprises identify as Afro-entrepreneurship; c) to list the city's official gastronomic events; and d) to characterize the possibilities for organizing women for their inclusion in these gastronomic events.

Thus, this article contributes to expanding the scientific production on entrepreneurship, tourism, and ethnic-racial relations, specifically concerning the Afro-Brazilian population, through the appreciation of cultures beyond Eurocentric ones. Additionally, it brings visibility to the actions of Black women who, despite being part of a historically excluded population, strive to generate income and employment, seeking to reduce social inequalities and combat racism.

To this end, this article is organized into four main sections. The first section presents some theoretical frameworks that guide the understanding of the concept of Afro-entrepreneurship with a focus on the food and beverage sector. The second section discusses the qualitative research methodology chosen to explore the topic in the city of Juiz de Fora. In the third section, the results are systematized and analyzed from the perspective of the Black women studied, highlighting the meanings and pathways for improving their quality of life and their businesses. Finally, in the concluding remarks, the article discusses the limits and possibilities for the inclusion of Afro-entrepreneurs in the official gastronomic events of Juiz de Fora and their relationship with Afro-tourism.



AFRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN BRAZIL: RACE, GENDER, AND WORK IN GASTRONOMY

The practice of Afro-entrepreneurship has been known in Brazil since the 19th century during the era of slavery, when "enslaved for hire" individuals were authorized by their masters to sell certain products and services in urban areas. Among the various activities, notable ones included those performed by food vendors, laundresses, cooks, porters, barbers, bricklayers, and artisans. These activities served as alternatives to increase the possibilities of autonomy, survival, and resource acquisition, including purchasing manumission letters, contributing, even minimally, to breaking with colonialism and resisting slavery (Matos, 2021).

In the post-abolition period, due to difficulties in entering the formal labor market, Black people were forced to continue in informal labor activities as a means of survival. This was because they faced significant challenges in securing employment, as paid positions were occupied by European, Arab, and Asian immigrants who began arriving in Brazil between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries (Guimarães, 2006).

According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2019), the Black population has always faced the greatest difficulty in entering the labor market, holding the lowest social indices in education, culture, housing, health, employment, and security. These indices can be explained by the fact that racism underlies all social structures, a phenomenon known as Structural Racism (Almeida, 2021). As a result, even in the 21st century, Black people still suffer from discrimination, prejudice, and racial harassment in the labor market. This contributes to the exclusion of a large part of the Black population from the formal labor market, forcing them to turn to the informal market to survive, motivating or compelling them to start their own businesses.

The perspective of Afro-entrepreneurship is based on the Black Money Movement (MBM), created in the early 21st century in the United States. One of its main characteristics is that it constitutes a political-ideological movement aimed at combating racism through the production of goods and services that reflect Black identity to its consumers. It also aims to stimulate and strengthen the autonomy of the Black community for its socio-economic empowerment, thus enabling the circulation of monetary resources among Black people through a productive chain system of creating and selling products and services, generating employment and income among their peers (Dias, 2018).



According to Santos (2019), Afro-entrepreneurship is “an entrepreneurial movement carried out by Black people that articulates [ideological and political] positions, breaking with colonial practices and enabling greater circulation of financial resources among Black people, allowing them to occupy better positions in the social pyramid.” From this perspective, Afro-entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important tool for work and an alternative to addressing racial, social, economic, and cultural inequalities, in addition to contributing to the strengthening and appreciation of Black identity, enabling these individuals to be agents of transformation for their emancipation (Oliveira, 2021a). In this context, the pioneering role of Black women in entrepreneurial activities stands out, paving the way for female Afro-entrepreneurship in Brazil (Baia & Costa, 2022).

With similar objectives, Afro-entrepreneurs in the Brazilian tourism sector envisioned Afro-tourism in 2018. With a strong political character, it has been promoting Afro-Brazilian Black narratives and cultures and combating racism in the sector (Oliveira, 2021b). This is because structural racism is also a component of the tourism production chain (Melo, 2024). According to Rodrigues (2021), Afro-tourism can be understood as “practices of rescuing, valuing, preserving, and reconnecting with identity and history through cultural assets, both tangible and intangible, which have Black individuals as protagonists.” On the other hand, Afro-tourism does not separate itself from the economic practices typical of the sector. Thus, Afro-tourism enters the market while offering products that redirect the tourist's perspective against racism.

In summary, Afro-tourism revises historical narratives about the Black diasporic population in Brazil and worldwide (Maurício, 2022), giving visibility to various Black productions and initiatives in the sector while questioning white supremacy – which is the focus of hegemonic tourism interests. Therefore, efforts to consolidate Afro-tourism are mainly made by Afro-entrepreneurs who must pay attention to the Afro-centered narrative promoted by their company or business (Oliveira, 2021b; Maurício, 2022).

Afro-tourism, which has been identified as a powerful force, is growing even in cities outside the Rio de Janeiro - São Paulo metropolitan axis (Humberto, 2023). For example, Diáspora.black, a Black-owned hospitality venture operating through an online platform, connects travelers and hosts in over 100 Brazilian cities and abroad. In this model, the owners and workers of the accommodations are Black and primarily serve Black clients. This type of Afro-entrepreneurship incorporates other products, adding an interesting range of diverse tourism experiences both online and in-person. On the platform, one can access, for instance, a gastronomic guide to Afro-Brazilian cuisine in Rio de Janeiro, created in 2021 and named Zungu (Diáspora.black, 2023). The purpose



of this guide is to highlight the Black cuisine of the city, engaging other Afro-entrepreneurs, visitors, and tourists, and fostering Black pride through culinary arts.

In this same perspective of growing initiatives, in Juiz de Fora (MG), the DaMata Cultural Collective has been organizing walks since 2022 that revisit some historical events and focus on the history and presence of the local Black population. Being the only Afro-tourism initiative in the municipality to date, it can be said that Afro-tourism in Juiz de Fora, despite its great importance, is still in its early stages.

Regarding gastronomy, the number of calls for support and promotion of Afro-entrepreneurship events in food services, which blend African and Brazilian heritage, is increasing. This is also reflected on a global level. It is no coincidence that the United Nations (UN) General Assembly established the “International Decade for People of African Descent” (2015-2024) with the theme “People of African Descent: recognition, justice, and development.” This commemorative decade aims to encourage the promotion of respect, protection, and fulfillment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of this population. Thus, the establishment of this thematic decade can also positively influence the creation of various initiatives associated with the tourism sector.

At the national level, the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae) approved the Municipal Program São Paulo Afro-entrepreneur, the Baobá Fund in Recife, among other initiatives. In Minas Gerais, the State Department of Culture and Tourism (SECULT) launched the Afromineiridades call in 2023, aimed at projects that seek to safeguard, circulate, value, or strengthen the image, history, tradition, and expressions of African and Black origin (SECULT, 2023). More recently, the Cozinha Mineira project - 2023 season was considered intangible cultural heritage of Minas Gerais by the State Department of Culture and Tourism and the Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais (IEPHA-MG). According to Revista Museu (SECULT, 2023), this project aims to recognize and value the knowledge and practices developed by indigenous and traditional peoples, including Afro-Brazilians.



At the local level, according to data from the IBGE (2010), the municipality of Juiz de Fora, located in the Zona da Mata of Minas Gerais, has approximately 600,000 inhabitants, with 55% of the population being of Black descent (Black and Brown). During the current administration of the Juiz de Fora City Hall (2020-2024), the Department of Tourism (SETUR) was established. The Municipal Tourism Plan (PMT) establishes "programs and actions that can contribute to the resolution of individual and collective problems, to the strategic advancement of local tourism, and to the benefit of the Juiz de Fora population" (Prefeitura de Juiz de Fora, 2020, p. 4). The priority tourism segment is Cultural and Gastronomic, followed by Business, Events, and Shopping. In the PMT, the municipality features cultural manifestations of German, Italian, African, and Syrian-Lebanese origins, providing the population and visitors with intercultural interaction through gastronomy, art, dance, and religiosity (PJF, 2020).

Juiz de Fora hosts several gastronomic events throughout the year. According to data from the Union of Hotels, Restaurants, Bars, and Similar Establishments of Juiz de Fora (SHRBSJF), there are approximately 500 food establishments and 800 bars in the municipality. The city offers a highly diverse cuisine, from regional to international dishes, in addition to pizzerias, snack bars, and specialized cuisine such as Arab, German, Portuguese, and Italian (PJF, 2018), which are commonly part of the official event schedule in Juiz de Fora. Afro-Brazilian cuisine only started being included in these formal spaces in 2023, through two sociopolitical, gastronomic, and cultural events organized by the local Black population: "Feijão de Ogun" and "Julho das Pretas."

Considering the events promoted by both the Brazilian Association of Bars and Restaurants (ABRASEL) and the Juiz de Fora Convention & Visitors Bureau (JFC&VB), the latter being an association aimed at contributing to the development of event tourism in the city, none were identified as being organized with a focus on Afro-Brazilian cuisine. Throughout the year, various gastronomic events are promoted and included in the municipality's official calendar, potentially attracting residents, visitors, and tourists, thereby generating socio-economic benefits. Notable events include JF Sabor, Comida di Buteco, Biergarten, Festa das Nações, Deguste, Seu Mercado, A Feira, Gastrocultura, Festival de Torresmo e Costela, and Festa Alemã, among others.



It is important to note that “Feijão de Ogun” was included in the official events calendar through the sanction of Municipal Law No. 14,625/2023, but it has been held since 2002, organized by the Unified Black Movement of Juiz de Fora. This annual event takes place on the second weekend of July and addresses themes beyond Afro-Brazilian cuisine, mainly related to African-rooted religion. “Julho das Pretas,” now in its second edition in Juiz de Fora, occurs in connection with the International Day of Black Latin American and Caribbean Women, celebrated on July 25. It was also included in the city's official events calendar through Law No. 14,661/2023, mainly addressing political-ideological struggles, gender issues, and the guarantee and expansion of rights for Black women. The recent approval of these two events contributes to making the food and beverage sector's women's Afro-entrepreneurship a fundamental element for socio-economic and historical-socio-cultural integration between Black gastronomy and tourism in Juiz de Fora.

Afro-entrepreneurship can further contribute to the recognition and appreciation of socio-cultural identity and the strengthening of the history, culture, values, knowledge, and traditions of the various ethnicities that make up the city. Additionally, it provides tourists and visitors with an immersion into the culinary diversity that is part of Brazilian society, without privileging one over the others. In this context, Afro-Brazilian cuisine can be used as a means of communication with others through its history, culture, and traditions, enhancing the potential for promoting Afro-tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is characterized by a qualitative and exploratory perspective. The topic was investigated based on a bibliographic survey, including books, articles, blogs, websites, theses, and other sources identified on Google Scholar, related to the categories of Afro-entrepreneurship and its variations. Additionally, documentary research was conducted on information about the Black population and tourism in the municipality of Juiz de Fora, as well as consultations with websites and social networks specializing in this subject.

In the process of constructing the research methodology, an exploratory phase was carried out in November 2022, with participation in conferences held during the 12th Tourism Week of the Tourism Course at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF, 2022), which allowed for the introduction of the debate on the reality of the working world in tourism for Black workers in Brazil. A visit was also made to the “1st Feira Preta de Juiz de Fora,” promoted by the Alfredo Ferreira Lage Foundation (FUNALFA),



as well as other related events that provided direct contact with various Black women from Juiz de Fora who create and sell crafts and typical dishes of Afro-Brazilian culture.

A consultation was also conducted with the Brazilian Association of Bars and Restaurants (ABRASEL-Zona da Mata), as well as other entities promoting gastronomic events, regarding the sector's activity calendar for the year 2023, aimed at dissemination, publicity, and the possibility of closer engagement of official events with Afro-entrepreneurs. Additionally, discussions were held with a representative from the Unified Black Movement (MNU) local chapter, the organization behind "Feijão de Ogun," an event that contributes to the culture, history, cuisine, and religiosity of the Black community. Subsequently, contact was made with a Tourism undergraduate student at UFJF and owner of a restaurant, where a technical visit was conducted as part of the Gastronomy course in the second semester of 2022 to explore her establishment and obtain recommendations for other Afro-gastronomic enterprises in the city.

Building on this foundation, field research was conducted on Afro-entrepreneurship in Juiz de Fora (MG) between April and May 2023. The research encompassed 8 Black women operating in the food and beverage sector in Juiz de Fora, selected using the snowball technique (Baldin; Munhoz, 2011), whereby one Afro-entrepreneur recommended another for study. This involved informal conversations with owners, direct observation of dishes offered in establishments/events, the environment, and the clientele served. To facilitate the field research, a semi-structured script was developed along with the Informed Consent Form (ICF), detailing the research objectives, risks, commitment to confidentiality, and provision of research results to all participants.

Thus, Table 1 presents the systematization of the profile of contacts made for the collection of empirical data.



Table 1

Profile of Afro-entrepreneur representatives

| Nº | Category | Age | Education | Initiative Name |
|----|----------------------|-----|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Event Feijão de Ogum | 64 | High School | Unified Black Movement |
| 2 | Restaurant | 48 | Incomplete higher education | Restaurant Harmoniza |
| 3 | Event | 57 | High School | Buffet Cida Franco |
| 4 | Bar/Cultural Space | 70 | Complete higher education | Quintal Cultural Dadartes |
| 5 | Restaurant/trailer | 44 | Complete higher Education | Cultural and Gastronomic Space Bete Baiana |
| 6 | Event | 54 | High School | Artdellas |
| 7 | Trailer | 70 | Incomplete high school | Dioni's Acarajé |
| 8 | Restaurant | 64 | Incomplete elementary school | Home-cooked Food by Pelu |
| 9 | Restaurant | 45 | Incomplete higher education | Marta's Restaurant |

Source: Queiroga (2023).

The analysis of the results was inspired by Vasconcelos (2002), who suggests that this type of research should highlight the aspirations, fears, difficulties, challenges, expectations, beliefs, and values that are part of the socio-economic reality of Afro-gastronomic entrepreneurship.

The research results were articulated and analyzed based on two main categories: a) black women's enterprises and gastronomic afro-entrepreneurship; b) black culture, gastronomy, and events. In addition, the possibilities for restaurant owners to participate in Juiz de Fora's official gastronomic events were considered, linking them with some conceptual inferences about afro-entrepreneurship.

a) Black women's enterprises and gastronomic afro-entrepreneurship

It was possible to perceive that there is a close relationship between women's enterprises and gastronomic afro-entrepreneurship in Juiz de Fora. All the investigated enterprises exhibit characteristics that align with the understanding of afro-entrepreneurship. This occurs not only because the restaurant owners are black and



operate in the food and beverage sector but primarily because they identify with the principles of afro-entrepreneurship. These principles include: work as a source of income that ensures or helps sustain oneself and/or one's family; autonomy; empowerment; the possibility of social mobility; and the circulation of money among their peers, which can occur within their own family network.

Most of the women investigated employ black individuals in their enterprises, establishing bonds of solidarity, identity, and commitment to the collective cause. To emphasize this relationship, another aspect related to afro-entrepreneurship is the choice of these women to create their own businesses as an alternative to formal employment, providing a source of income. Regarding the "choice" of the food sector, most reported having developed this skill since childhood or adolescence in their families' kitchens or jobs. For them, cooking is an activity they are familiar with, identify with, and enjoy doing.

Minas Gerais cuisine has a strong connection to Afro-Brazilian food, incorporating ingredients such as pumpkin, dried meat, cornmeal, okra, yam, etc. Some ingredients are not native to Africa, like peanuts, cassava, and rice, which were introduced into the African diet between the 7th and 16th centuries. The preparation of these dishes in the investigated establishments uses, whenever possible, ingredients that are still very characteristic of Afro-Brazilian cuisine, reinforcing the connection with African ancestral cuisine and the traditions of their descendants in Brazil. Thus, these dishes help keep this memory alive, valuing cultural richness and emphasizing the characteristics of afro-entrepreneurship.

The restaurants and establishments surveyed use many of these foods in their daily meal preparations. From beans, they make various dishes besides the famous feijoada, which is served mainly on weekends and during the winter: feijão tropeiro, bean fritters, acarajé, and tutu de feijão. They also use rice to make desserts like rice pudding and peanuts as an ingredient in pé de moleque. Corn is used to make polenta, popcorn, farofas, and cornmeal pasties filled with dried meat. Other ingredients commonly used in soups include pumpkin, cassava, sweet corn, canjiquinha, and yam, all enhanced with various herbs and spices, which are typically derived from African ancestry.

Most of the women surveyed are directly involved in their own establishments that provide meals or snacks. These include restaurants, trailers, or private spaces. Two of them, while also involved in dish preparation, focus their work on the events sector, including planning, organizing, coordinating, executing, and hiring teams for weddings, graduations, birthdays, baptisms, etc. Only one is a co-owner of an event space where



weekly activities related to Afro-Brazilian culture, such as samba and pagode, take place. In this space, appetizers related to ancestral traditions are also served.

Among the biggest challenges faced daily are those directly associated with organization, planning, and pricing of products or services, whether working in fixed locations or at events. Another significant issue identified was the difficulty in operating social media, which are strategic tools for promoting and increasing sales of their services and products. The proprietors believe that, being over 40 years old, they have limited skills with information and communication technologies, making them dependent on others to help them promote their activities. The need to use social media increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the closure of establishments to the public required virtual contact with customers to place orders, provide quotes, and promote services. As a result, many had to learn on the job how to manage delivery apps, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Ifood, in addition to handling deliveries. Some owners rely on family members' knowledge to assist with online sales, which are conducted via social media and also in person, for example, from their trailer at the market, performing tasks like handling the cash register, taking orders, and making deliveries. This is the case of one Afro-entrepreneur who sees this as a way to engage her grandchildren in paid activities, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

The family gets very involved. They are my support. I have to rely on them because I live here for them. It's not that I enforce this, but they know it's for them, otherwise, I wouldn't still be here in Juiz de Fora, I would be in Bahia with my family there, at my food stall... Because I don't depend on them, I don't ask, I don't bother them for manual labor. So, at least for the promotion part that I don't understand well. I'm honest in saying, 'I don't know much about these computer things. They were born with this already ingrained in their heads' (Proprietor 7).

The research revealed that the reality of these Black women reaffirms that Afro-entrepreneurship involves the active involvement and participation of other family members to boost the business, with each contributing their own knowledge. Consequently, this makes the business a potential source of income circulation among family members, enabling social mobility.



b) Black Culture, Gastronomy, and Events

In several of the Afro-entrepreneurial ventures visited, the intersection of Black culture, gastronomy, and events was observed. One venture stands out for not being limited to gastronomy but also incorporating culture, cuisine, and education. This space, known as "Quintal Cultural," hosts traditional samba, gastronomic and celebratory events organized by Black people, as well as activities promoting reading in the library and martial arts. This Afro-entrepreneurship initiative emerges as a multicultural space for leisure, entertainment, and social interaction, "by Black people for Black people," where individuals can interact, have fun, and expand their sociocultural relationships. All members of the venture are Black, and the activities are primarily aimed at Black consumers, although customers from other ethnicities also participate. The testimony of one of the interviewees emphasizes this target audience:

I have this cultural space, a space for culture, where we have barbecues, we samba, we sing... the events happen on Fridays... I say it and I will keep saying it. It's a Black house. Everyone can come. White people are welcome, but it's a Black house (Proprietor 4).

The relationship between food and traditional knowledge passed down through generations was also analyzed, revealing its ability to evoke affectionate memories of ancestors, childhoods, and life stories. This reaffirmed that gastronomic afro-entrepreneurship contributes to the preservation of memory and ancestry, as well as to the appreciation of the culture and identity of Black people. It stimulates perseverance because it helps keep the traditions and knowledge of their ancestors alive. One interviewee, from a quilombola community and working at a local restaurant, used ora-pro-nobis, an 'Unconventional Food Plant' (UFP), to create a dish for a gastronomic event in Juiz de Fora. Although her dish won an award, she did not receive the prize; it went to the restaurant owner, who used the prize money to purchase new kitchen utensils and equipment. As she emphasized, ora-pro-nobis is a part of her childhood and her history, as reflected in the following testimony:

The foods that the bosses ate were very different from what we ate in the countryside. I had never eaten beef. We ate pork and chicken, which were the animals we raised, along with the vegetables we planted in our yards, especially ora-pro-nobis, which was the "meat" we knew and ate. It was very accessible, nutritious, and high in protein. Besides ora-pro-nobis, pumpkin puree and banana farofa are memories of the ancestors in the Quilombo (Proprietor 3).



Another Afro-entrepreneur (Owner 5), who sells Bahian food in her own space and also from her trailer, made a point to emphasize the importance of promoting this cuisine because it is rich with stories of struggle, achievements, traditions, religiosity, and the resistance of African ancestors. She emphasizes that acarajé is ancestral food and was a staple for the enslaved people.

On the other hand, when observing these women's participation in official gastronomic events in the city, a distance becomes evident. All of them have heard of these events, but few have attended any. For most of them, these events are not part of their social milieu, and only two owners expressed interest in joining to participate in some contest or gastronomic festival. Two other owners participated in such events while working at a restaurant as head cook and kitchen assistant, with the awarded dish being created and executed by them.

However, it was considered unfeasible for small Afro-entrepreneurs to participate in the large-scale official gastronomic events in Juiz de Fora due to the high registration fees and the strict regulations of the selection process. Another impediment to participating in these events was the restricted operating hours of one of the restaurants, which only serves lunch from Monday to Saturday. This restriction is due to the restaurant being located inside a gallery in the city center, where the gates are closed in the early evening.

Noteworthy is the recognition of Owner 9's perception regarding the importance of accessing guidance and consultancy from professionals in related fields, as well as participating in courses offered by Sebrae. She added that another contribution to the adaptation of her space to meet formal requirements for operation was the annual visit from the Health Surveillance of the Juiz de Fora City Hall. This case highlights the efforts made to keep the restaurant running for 11 years, contributing to the education of various family members. Having graduated in Dentistry and Psychology, they have not only achieved social mobility but also engage in voluntary, solidarity, humanitarian, and fraternal actions for people who do not have easy access to these services. This owner's testimony emphasizes the importance of her business in investing in education as a tool for changing the family's situation:



"The family gets very involved. They are the ones who support me. I rely on them because I live here for them. It's not that I insist on this, but they know it's for them, otherwise I wouldn't be here in JF, I would be in Bahia with my family there, at my stand... Because I don't depend, I don't ask, I don't bother them for manual labor. So, at least for promotion, which I don't understand much about. I'm honest in saying 'I don't know much about these information technology matters.' They were born with it already planted in their heads" (Owner 7).

When one graduates, the whole family graduates. So, we're seeing the opportunity they're having through our work because that has always been our intention: to ensure they have a better quality of life, but also to enable them to see further, to achieve other things. So, we're seeing that happen. This is very rewarding because, if it weren't for the restaurant, if it weren't for the workshop, if it weren't for us advocating for education, maybe we wouldn't be able to (Proprietor 9).

It is worth noting that, despite some of the Black women being registered as Individual Microentrepreneurs (MEI), they are not affiliated with unions or other institutions that could represent them as a group. Some of the respondents participate in collectives where issues of gender, race, class, and territory are discussed. However, it is necessary to go further, to organize collectively, and to demand that institutions can form partnerships to improve these women's access to specific courses that meet their professional needs.

In the research, several local training institutions in Juiz de Fora were mentioned, such as the Cultural Foundation Alfredo Ferreira Lage (FUNALFA), Sebrae, the National Service for Commercial Apprenticeship (SENAC), Uni Academia, the Institute of Gastronomy of the Americas (IGA), and other culinary schools that can offer courses and establish partnerships to contribute to and enhance the training process in the gastronomic area. From the reports, it was observed that the surveyed women prioritize constant pursuit in offering quality services and diverse and innovative dishes, which requires professional training courses.

An initiative that provides representation to the Black population of the city and could increase visibility for the investigated Afro-entrepreneurs is the "Feijão de Ogun" (Ogun's Bean). Ogun is the deity that opens paths and gives the event its name. In 2023, the 20th edition of the event, approved by the Municipal Chamber, was included in the official calendar of the municipality, being one of the few official events related to



Afro-Brazilian culture in Juiz de Fora. The theme chosen in 2023 - "Land: Memory, Ancestry, and Resistance" - is related to the Program of Activities for the Implementation of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent - 2015-2024. The event was collectively built with plenary sessions with the community and partners to define the themes of the debate. Various activities were developed with cultural presentations, music, theater, dance, and films. In this event, one of the aspects of Afro-entrepreneurship in Juiz de Fora materialized with the programming of the 3rd Fair of Ethnodevelopment and Solidarity Economy, where local small Afro-entrepreneurs presented a diversity of products for sale to visitors, prioritizing goods with an emphasis on Afro-Brazilian culture: handicrafts, clothing, books, acarajé, sweets, etc.

Among the program activities, the DaMata Cultural Collective developed the "Juiz de Fora Black Walk," an afrotourism tour through the city's central streets, lasting approximately three hours. The tour aims to highlight local Black culture, as well as initiatives with new afrotourism experiences and promotion of businesses led by Black individuals. During this tour, places, personalities, and ancestral Black knowledge and their historical significance to the local Black community are emphasized (Nascimento; Cruz, 2023). In 2023, the Walk was funded by the Quilombagens Edital from PJF/FUNALFA. Catering primarily to student audiences, the itinerary focuses on Afrocentric reflections on the city's history, considering traditional tourist spots such as Halfeld Park, Halfeld Street, Marechal Deodoro Street, and Station Square. Other alternate points include Floriano Peixoto Street, Negro Teófilo Square, Roza Cabinda Square, and São Bernardo Lookout. All stops on the Walk are located in the city's downtown area. These new experiences, which provoke reflections on identity and belonging with participants' Black ancestry (Nascimento; Cruz, 2023), have contributed to the anti-racist struggle and self-esteem of Juiz de Fora's Afro-Brazilian population.

The "Feijão de Ogun" program concludes with a complete feijoada meal, Ogum's favorite dish, prepared with the participation of one of the surveyed women. The feijoada is distributed to event participants and institutions serving people in extreme vulnerability.

To ensure the success of this event, various institutional and cooperative partnerships were established, alongside financial contributions from individuals, local businesses, and institutions aligned with the cause. Another fundraising initiative involved selling shirts featuring the event's logo.



Considering the small number of surveyed women who participated in the 20th edition of "Feijão de Ogun," it appears that the organization of social movements is disconnected from anonymous afro-entrepreneurs. The majority do not participate in any associative groups. Perhaps this could be an alternative for organizing this segment to increase the participation of these afro-entrepreneurs, serving not only as a communication organ but also for integration, training, and establishing partnerships with other institutions. There is a recognized need to establish bonds that involve more effective participation of these women to make the event truly democratic. It is also important to use various communication channels to encourage greater involvement of the Black population in events like this.

The analyses also revealed the proximity between the work carried out by Juiz de Fora's afro-entrepreneurs and afrotourism. Their products reflect the afrocentricity that guides their activities. Furthermore, their work promotes manifestations of Black culture and, in a circular manner, reflects on their families and communities. On the other hand, political anti-racist activism, crucial for afro-entrepreneurship and afrotourism, needs to be further strengthened among these women. Some reported experiencing racist expressions and behaviors from their clients and suppliers, such as requests to "speak to the owner," not recognizing them as possible business owners. Overall, the effects of racism affect all Black individuals, yet the way this violence is received varies due to their diminished self-esteem stemming from pervasive structural racism, manifesting as a constant process of exclusion.

Regarding the official gastronomic events of the city listed on social media, it was found that they are outdated. According to the website of the City Council of Juiz de Fora, which approves the inclusion of events in the official calendar, other events have been included but have not been updated on the Juiz de Fora Tourism Portal (2022), such as "Feijão de Ogun," "Julho das Pretas," and "Dia do Torresmo." Furthermore, the lack of coordination among the sectors involved in the municipality's events leads to misinformation or conflicting information, thereby weakening these practices.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Overall, all surveyed Black women entrepreneurs identify with the premises of Afro-entrepreneurship. Analyzing the gastronomic Afro-entrepreneurships of these women and reflecting on the possibilities for their integration into gastronomic tourism events, it was observed that challenges for this audience still persist. Due to their multiple work shifts or difficulty accessing training courses, factors common among Black women, they struggle to participate in events. These women face difficulties in accessing information



technologies, making it unlikely for them to receive information about gastronomic events in the municipality. And when they do receive information, they often do not consider participating due to high costs, access difficulties, other priorities, or lack of business registration. Thus, it may be beneficial to signal to event organizers and promoters the reasons why these women are absent, paving the way for anti-racist initiatives to recognize their contributions and include them.

Except for "Feijão de Ogun" and more recently "Julho das Pretas," there is no record of another official event in the city's calendar that aims to involve the Black population as Afro-entrepreneurs. These few existing events have limitations regarding the number of participating Afro-entrepreneurs investigated. Regarding dishes that are part of the history of Afro-descendants, there is little information and dissemination. The research revealed the need for these women to create spaces for dialogue, exchange, and greater dissemination of their work committed to history, which could be enhanced through networks such as Diaspora.black and the Coletivo Damata Cultural's afrotourism. In this case, the local collective that develops afrotourism could include visits and/or lunches at the researched Afro-entrepreneurships in their itinerary for visitors to consume their services and/or products.

Thus, both afrotourism practices and gastronomic enterprises can benefit tourism in the municipality. In general, Afro-entrepreneurs can also support each other, strengthen bonds, and potentially reach more clients and an audience interested in consuming products and services committed to Black history. It is also necessary for social movements to collaborate with other event-promoting institutions related to tourism. In this case, joint action between the Unified Black Movement and tourism education institutions could be valuable in finding mechanisms to boost the self-esteem of food and beverage Afro-entrepreneurs, thus effectively combating racism. It is essential to promote debates on the topic to provide new experiences that facilitate greater interaction between the Juiz de Fora population and Afro-Brazilian culture in general. Perhaps through these avenues, it may even be possible to better understand Juiz de Fora's Afro-Brazilian culture.

Given the daily challenges faced by these women, it is evident they still have a long way to go towards their emancipation. In light of this, the inclusion of these women in tourism events related to food and beverages remains a distant reality. Therefore, Afro-entrepreneurship is seen as a means, an alternative, but not the end.

In attempting to suggest ways to bridge the gap between these Afro-entrepreneurships and Juiz de Fora's gastronomic event-promoting institutions, it is important to revisit



the discussion on the importance of strengthening social movements as categories of societal organization. Currently, there are several groups of Afro-entrepreneurs on social media. Efforts should be made to establish closer ties with these groups to strengthen them. As long as these workers operate individually and anonymously, without seeking affiliation with an association that represents them, they will remain disconnected from participation processes, likely to remain invisible and isolated, without even interacting with other Afro-entrepreneurs.

Therefore, this research aimed to shed light on a sensitive and important issue for the Black community, especially women who historically have been discriminated against, rendered invisible, undervalued, and excluded from the municipality's official gastronomic events for many years. Indeed, structural racism imposes numerous obstacles and challenges for the appreciation of the history and culture of the Black population. Concrete actions must be implemented to combat it, encouraging the production and consumption of products and services from Black people and cultures, such as their gastronomy.

Furthermore, it is crucial for Juiz de Fora's Municipal Tourism Plan to be implemented in a way that fulfills the proposal to value the history and culture of all ethnicities without distinction, promoting the expansion of events related to Afro-Brazilian cultures and affirming the importance of afrotourism for the city. This becomes even more critical when considering the Black Routes Project of the Federal Government, whose main purpose is to promote and celebrate Afro-Brazilian culture through the creation of tourist itineraries (Ministry of Tourism, 2024).

In this regard, it is important for public and private institutions to promote studies, encourage research, debates, and extension courses involving people associated with Afro-Brazilian culture. Thus, the research has identified some paths to advance these actions: assisting Afro-entrepreneurship in organizing collectively; seeking partnerships with institutions to promote quality courses in related areas; promoting meetings of knowledge and traditions related to Afro-Brazilian history and culture to leverage their potential in events promoted by institutions; providing concrete and effective actions within the scope of municipal and state public management to expand the participation opportunities of Afro-entrepreneur women in events that integrate gastronomy and afrotourism; and finally, promoting the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian cuisine festivals with event-promoting institutions in the city to attract increasingly diverse residents and visitors.



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