

Sueli Carneiro (author)

Written by: Juliana Stefany Silva Bartholomeu

Translated by: David Rodgers

Date of publication: 18th of September, 2024

Aparecida Sueli Carneiro, Afro-Brazilian intellectual and black feminist, was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1950. She enrolled for a philosophy degree at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1971. It was at the university, from her arrival in 1971 to 1980, during the military dictatorship, that she became actively involved in the black and feminist movements. Carneiro is the author of a vast academic production on race and gender relations in Brazilian society with impacts in diverse areas of knowledge, including anthropology. These include more than 150 articles, essays, chapters and books, which seek to combine activism and theoretical reflection, such as *Mulher negra* [Black woman] (1995), *Racismo, sexismo e desigualdade no Brasil* [Racism, sexism, and inequality in Brazil] (2011), and *Escritos de uma vida* [Writings of a lifetime] (2018).

Sueli Carneiro's political activism began at the Black Culture and Art Center (Cecan), one of the main organizations of the black movement in the city of São Paulo, founded in 1971 by the producer and actor Thereza Santos, and the sociologist Eduardo de Oliveira. During the first phase of Cecan (1971-1974), art was the main political tool in the fight against racism, in particular through the production of theatre plays like *E agora falamos nós* [And now we speak] (1972) and musical compositions. The group continued the earlier work of the Teatro Experimental do Negro [Black people's Experimental Theatre] (TEN) founded by African-Brazilian artist and scholar Abdias do Nascimento (1914-2011) in Rio de Janeiro in 1944, and its proposal that black people should author their own versions of the history of Brazil and slavery. Sueli Carneiro's arrival at Cecan coincided with its second phase, following the exile of Thereza Santos in 1976, a period in which the center went through a moment of reorganization, refocusing its attention towards education, and

Bartholomeu, Juliana Stefany Silva. 2024. "Sueli Carneiro". Translated by David Rodgers. In Enciclopédia de Antropologia. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Antropologia. <http://ea.fflch.usp.br/en/author/sueli-carneiro> ISSN: 2676-038X.

more directly towards black youth. In 1981, the center closed its activities but its history strengthened the bases of other political movements and black organizations in São Paulo. In 1983, Carneiro demanded the participation of a black representative on the São Paulo State Council for Womanhood, an organization then composed of 32 women, all white. In 1988 she founded Geledés – Black Woman Institute, São Paulo's first black feminist organization. The institute addresses issues specific to black women, seeking to strengthen their autonomy and their critical social participation, as well as combating inequalities of gender and race. In the 1990s, Carneiro created a physical and mental health program at Geledés aimed at black women, and also the Rappers project, aimed at black youth, victims of police violence.

As one of her book titles tells us, Sueli Carneiro proposes to 'blacken feminism' through an intersectional approach that simultaneously considers questions of race, social class, religion, age, etc. She argues that one of the forms of struggle against gender oppression involves contesting the socially constructed stereotypes of the role of women: their supposed feminine weakness, their confinement to the domestic space, their procreative role, and so on. The construction of a 'feminine identity,' the title of a work from 1989, is, she says, part of a feminist project committed to deconstructing conventional models of what it is to be a woman and restoring potentialities denied to women by patriarchal ideology throughout history. This project, still in course, also depends on the acquisition of a series of rights capable of assuring women full citizenship: the right to health, equal pay, the right to education, the right to control their own reproduction, as well as combating domestic violence and rape. Additionally, echoing the arguments of other black activists and intellectuals, Carneiro asks: is female identity, historically constituted, the same for all women? The question aims to investigate the reality experienced by black women, who do not recognize themselves in the stereotypes associated with femininity. Rather than being fragile beings confined to the domestic space, black women formed part of an enslaved contingent that worked in the fields, as well as in the streets as vendors, greengrocers, prostitutes, housemaids, etc. An analytic approach that privileges the intersection of gender and race thus seems more suited to

highlighting this distinct historical experience, which challenges contemporary conceptions of a supposedly universal female identity. The notion of ‘black feminism’ is developed in works like ‘Organização Nacional das Mulheres Negras: Desafios e Perspectivas’ [The National Organization of Black Women: challenges and perspectives] (1988) and ‘Construindo Cumplicidades’ [Building Complicity] (2001), as well as ‘Enegrecer o Feminismo: a situação da mulher negra na América Latina a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero’ (2003), translated into English as ‘Blackening Feminism’ (2014) and into French, ‘Noircir le féminisme’ (2005).

Her critique of the universalization of the category of ‘woman’ through the racial question in the 1980s transformed Sueli Carneiro into one of the pioneers in the dissemination of black feminism in Brazil, along with [Lélia Gonzalez \(1935-1994\)](#). Her intellectual production is inspired by concepts from the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), especially those of the ‘apparatus’ or ‘device’, and ‘biopower,’ which she explores to show how public policies, institutions, and scientific discourses corroborate and reiterate the subalternity of black women in Brazil. In her doctoral dissertation presented to the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo (2005), published in 2023 as *Dispositivos de racialidade* [Apparatuses of raciality], she developed the idea of an ‘apparatus of raciality’ that operates through the naturalization of social roles. The author also makes use of the concept of ‘epistemicide,’ formulated by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos (1940-), to discuss attempts to erase the knowledge of colonized peoples, with an emphasis on black women as one of the most oppressed sectors of these peoples. In the field of gender studies, her production engages with black Brazilian intellectuals and feminists like [Beatriz Nascimento \(1942-1995\)](#), Luiza Bairros (1953-2016), and [Lélia Gonzalez](#). In 2018, Djamila Ribeiro (1980-), Brazilian political philosopher and activist, created the editorial label *Sueli Carneiro*, inaugurated by a collection of four books in her honor, recognizing the importance of her ideas and activity.

Editor's note: Some of her work have been translated into English, including the essays ‘Defining Black Feminism’ (1995), ‘Black Women's Identity in Brazil’ (1999),

‘Blackening Feminism’ (2014), and ‘Women in Movement’ (2016); and into French, ‘Noircir le féminisme’ (2005), and ‘Femmes en mouvement au Brésil: noircir le féminisme’ (2010).

HOW TO CITE

Bartholomeu, Juliana Stefany Silva. 2024. “Sueli Carneiro”. Translated by David Rodgers. In *Enciclopédia de Antropologia*. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Antropologia. <http://ea.fflch.usp.br/en/author/sueli-carneiro>

KEYWORDS

black diaspora; black feminism; black intellectuals; Brazilian social sciences; decolonial studies; gender; race; intersectionality

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BORGES, Silva Rosane, *Sueli Carneiro*, São Paulo, Selo Negro, 2009 [Retratos do Brasil Negro]

CARNEIRO, Sueli, *Mulher negra*, São Paulo, *Cadernos Geledés*, Instituto da Mulher Negra, Cadernos IV, 1993

CARNEIRO, Sueli, “Gênero, raça e ascensão”, São Paulo, *Estudos feministas*, v. 3, 1995, p. 301-596

CARNEIRO, Sueli. “Defining black feminism”. In: PALA, Achola O. (ed.), *Connecting Across Cultures and Continents: Black Women Speak Out on Identity, Race and Development*, New York, United Nations Development Fund for Women, pp. 11-12, 1995

CARNEIRO, Sueli. Black Women’s Identity in Brazil. In: REICHMANN, Rebeca, *Race in contemporary Brazil: from indifference to inequality*. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1999, p. 321-336

CARNEIRO, Sueli, "Enegrecer o feminismo: a situação da mulher negra na América Latina a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero" In: ASHOKA EMPREENDIMENTOS

Bartholomeu, Juliana Stefany Silva. 2024. “Sueli Carneiro”. Translated by David Rodgers. In *Enciclopédia de Antropologia*. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Antropologia. <http://ea.fflch.usp.br/en/author/sueli-carneiro> ISSN: 2676-038X.

SOCIAIS; TAKANO CIDADANIA (org.), *Racismos contemporâneos*, Rio de Janeiro, Takano Editora, 2003

CARNEIRO, Sueli, “A mulher negra na sociedade brasileira - o papel do movimento feminista na luta anti-racista” In: Kabengele Munanga (org.), *História do negro no Brasil*, Brasília, Fundação Cultural Palmares –MinC/ CNPq, 2004

CARNEIRO, Sueli, *A construção do outro como não-ser como fundamento do ser*, tese de doutorado, Faculdade de Educação, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2005

CARNEIRO, Sueli, “Noircir le féminisme” (Jules Falquet, Trad.), *Nouvelles questions féministes*, n. 2, vol. 24, 2005, pp. 27-32. Available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-nouvelles-questions-feministes-2005-2-page...>

CARNEIRO, Sueli, “Femmes en mouvement au Brésil: noircir le féminisme”. In: Christine Verschuur (ed.), *Genre, postcolonialisme et diversité de mouvements de femmes*, Genève, Graduate Institute Publications, L'Harmattan, p. 257-262, 2010. Available at: <https://books.openedition.org/iheid/5895?lang=en>

CARNEIRO, Sueli, *Racismo, sexismo e desigualdade no Brasil*, São Paulo, Selo Negro, 2011

CARNEIRO, Sueli, “Blackening feminism”, *Geledés*, 2014. Available at: https://www.geledes.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Sueli_Carneiro_Bl...

CARNEIRO, Sueli, “Women in movement”, *Meridians*, vol. 14, no. 1, African Descendant Feminisms in Latin America. Part I: Brazil, 2016, pp. 30-49 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/meridians.14.1.03>

CARNEIRO, Sueli, *Escritos de uma vida*, São Paulo, Editora Letramento, 2018

CARNEIRO, Sueli, *Dispositivo de racialidade. A construção do outro como não-ser como fundamento do ser*, São Paulo, Ed. Zahar, 2023

FOUCAULT, Michel, “Il faut défendre la société”, *Cours au Collège de France*, 1976, Édition établie sous la direction de F. Ewald et A. Fontana, par Mauro Bertani et A. Fontana, Paris, EHESS/ Gallimard/ Seuil, 1997

GONZALEZ, Lélia, “Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira” In: SILVA, Luiz Antônio, *Movimentos sociais, urbanos, minorias étnicas e outros estudos*, Brasília, ANPOCS, Capítulo 3, 1983 [Ciências Sociais Hoje 2]

Bartholomeu, Juliana Stefany Silva. 2024. “Sueli Carneiro”. Translated by David Rodgers. In Enciclopédia de Antropologia. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Antropologia. <http://ea.fflch.usp.br/en/author/sueli-carneiro> ISSN: 2676-038X.

SANTOS, Boaventura de Souza, “Para além do pensamento abissal: das linhas globais a uma ecologia de saberes” In: SANTOS, Boaventura de Souza & MENESES, Maria Paula (orgs.), *Epistemologias do sul*, São Paulo, Cortez, 2010

SILVA, Joana Maria Ferreira, *Centro de cultura e arte negra – Cekan*, São Paulo, Selo Negro, 2012 [Retratos do Brasil Negro]