



Petrona Rosende: A transnational feminist intellectual and the defense of women's education in the Argentine periodical *La Aljaba* (1830-1831)¹

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Petrona Rosende: una intelectual feminista transnacional y la defensa de la educación de las mujeres en el periódico argentino *La Aljaba* (1830-1831)

Ana Cristina Pereira Lage

Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri (Brasil)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2716-6847>

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/8720539429917901>

anacristinapereiralage@gmail.com

Carolina Giovannetti

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brasil)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1640-4803>

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/1119138640496687>

carolinagiovannetti@hotmail.com

Abstract

We intend to analyze the trajectory of the Uruguayan journalist and teacher Petrona Rosende who, in the years 1830 and 1831, founded, wrote and directed the Argentine newspaper *La Aljaba*. Drawing on gender and feminist studies, transnational history, history of education and intellectual history, we argue that Petrona Rosende advocated women's education as a form of social emancipation. The analysis of the source points to education as a first demand, which later enabled the fight for civil and political rights by nineteenth-century women. The periodical also dialogues with the project of affirming the independent and civilized nation.

Keywords: Petrona Rosende; *La Aljaba*; History of Women's Education.

¹ English version by Ana Maria Dionísio. E-mail: dionisio.anamaria@hotmail.com.

Resumo

Pretendemos analisar a trajetória da jornalista e professora uruguaia Petrona Rosende, que, em 1830 e 1831, fundou, redigiu e dirigiu o jornal argentino *La Aljaba*. A partir do diálogo com os estudos de gênero e feministas, história transnacional, história da educação e história intelectual, argumentamos que Petrona Rosende defendia a educação de mulheres como forma de emancipação social. A análise da fonte aponta para a educação como uma primeira demanda, o que possibilitou posteriormente a luta por direitos civis e políticos por parte das mulheres oitocentistas. O periódico dialoga ainda com o projeto de afirmação de uma nação independente e civilizada.

Palavras-chave: Petrona Rosende; *La Aljaba*; História da Educação de Mulheres.

Resumen

Nos proponemos analizar la trayectoria de la periodista y profesora uruguaya Petrona Rosende quien, en los años 1830 y 1831, fundó, escribió y dirigió el periódico argentino *La Aljaba*. A partir del diálogo con los estudios feministas y de género, la historia transnacional, la historia de la educación y la historia intelectual, sostenemos que Petrona Rosende defendió la educación de las mujeres como una forma de emancipación social. El análisis de la fuente apunta a la educación como una primera demanda, que luego posibilitó la lucha por los derechos civiles y políticos de las mujeres del siglo XIX. El periódico también dialoga con el proyecto de afirmar una nación independiente y civilizada.

Palabras clave: Petrona Rosende; *La Aljaba*; Historia de la Educación de la Mujer.

Introduction

Women's education was a widely advocated issue in the periodical press in South America in the 19th century. We believe this was the first demand that united women in intellectual networks and the subsequent desires for political equality and civil rights. Throughout the 19th century, women from various locations advocated for girls' education in the pages of newspapers. Among the pioneers of this advocacy, Petrona Rosende (1787-1863) stands out, who had a prolific intellectual production in Argentina and Uruguay, circulating between these two spaces. We see these women as intellectuals who broke the mold and contributed to the “[...] thinking of their time and to the formation of intellectual networks, mainly through their work in newspapers and magazines” (Ribeiro; Gontijo, 2021, p. 224). In this text, we focus on the actions of a woman in Argentina, whom we consider to be a character in an intellectual action on the fringes of the patriarchal culture of the 1830s.

We intend to analyze the defense of female education in the 19th century, focusing on the newspaper *La Aljaba*, published in Argentina in 1830 and 1831. “Both the image and the name of the publication (the quiver is a receptacle that stores arrows) can be linked to the figure of Artemis, the Greek goddess of hunting, childbirth, virginity and maidens, known for alleviating female illnesses” (Vicens, 2022, p. 9). The choice of this periodical as a source and this historical period as the object of study takes into account that “[...] it was in the 19th century that Latin American nations took on their struggles for independence from the Spanish and Portuguese metropolises, thus constituting, at least in the political sphere, independent countries” (Lima, 2019, p. 30). It is also a form of intellectual expression for women in a society and at a historical moment that was markedly exclusionary for women.

In this sense, this text aims to analyze the defense of women's education proposed in *La Aljaba*, a periodical aimed at women. It was written and directed by Uruguayan Petrona Rosende, considered the first female journalist in South America, while she was exiled in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Vicens, 2022; Auza, 2004). Petrona Rosende was a poet, teacher, writer, editor and journalist, in addition to dedicating her life to women's education. The editions of the newspaper *La Aljaba* are available for online consultation on the website of the project “*Ahira. Arquivo Histórico de Revistas Argentinas*”².

For a long time, women were on the margins of broad and unrestricted access to literacy and literate culture. As historian Michelle Perrot (2017, p. 159) states, “[the] right to knowledge, not only to education, but to instruction, is certainly the oldest, most widely shared of the demands” of women organized in movements, individually or through networks of intellectuals. The author also adds that access to knowledge is the basis for “[...] emancipation, promotion, work, creation, pleasure. This demand is accompanied by an immense effort of appropriation: reading, writing, access to instruction” (Perrot, 2017, p. 159).

It is important to differentiate between the terms instruction and education. According to Mônica Jinzenji (2010, p. 25), the word instruction and its derivatives appear with some frequency in newspapers and printed documents from the 19th century, but its use may not be the same as that found in the definitions in dictionaries of the time. The entries education and instruction appear related to each other, with the differentiation only being in the purpose of one or the other action. When consulting Campagne's 1886 dictionary, the author informs that “the purpose of education is to develop moral faculties, while instruction aims to enrich intellectual faculties” (Campagne, apud. Jinzenji, 2010, p. 25). In view of the above, we can point out that the periodical discussed here uses both terms, making it important to understand the distinction between them.

² Available at: <https://ahira.com.ar/revistas/la-aljaba/>. Accessed on: May 8, 2024.

In this article, we also aim to contribute to breaking the silences about female intellectual production, since “for a long time women were not considered subjects of history and, therefore, were excluded from historians’ narratives” (Wolff; Possas, 2005, p. 545). When examining women’s silences in history, Michelle Perrot (2017) proposes that women’s history should be debated daily in the most diverse spheres of social life, as a form of political positioning through which the silences of history are no longer accepted. In this way, “[...] the development of women’s history quietly accompanies the ‘movement’ towards emancipation and liberation. It is the translation and the effect of an even broader awareness: that of the sexual dimension of society and history” (Perrot, 2017, p. 15).

In line with Adriane Lima (2019, p. 31), we intend to give visibility to “the discourses of women themselves who, in the 19th century, with their conceptions of education, contributed to thinking about emancipation and freedom”. Breaking the silence about the work of female journalists and writers also allows for the inclusion and organization of their intellectual experience in studies of gender relations, understanding that women were often “[...] excluded from the narrative of History and, for a long time, were absent as *subjects*, since they are absent from those who were, for a long time, considered official sources” (Ribeiro; Gontijo, 2021, p.226).

Throughout the 19th century, the first organized demonstrations of women fighting for their rights emerged. Among the main demands, in the first decades of the period, was the fight for the right to school education and, later, in the last decades, for the right to vote. From the fight for schooling, they were part of one of the segments that stood out most in ensuring the universalization of social, civil and political rights (Pinsky; Pedro, 2003, p. 267). They fought through the periodical press for their right to schooling, understood as a social right, which we can consider as the beginning of a feminist agenda.

Zahidé Lupinacci Muzart (2000, 2003) states that, as a practice, feminism preexists the use of the word with which it is designated, identifying women in the 19th century who, due to their agendas and demands, many of them linked to the defense of women's education, can be considered *feminists*. These women were poets, journalists, and teachers, and initially, writing and reading made these women aware of “[...] the exceptional status they occupied in the universe of illiterate women, of the subordinate condition to which their sex was subjected, and led to the emergence of reflective and engaged writings, such was the denunciation and the demanding tone that many of them still contain” (Duarte, 2017, p. 14).

The historian Gerda Lerner (2019, p. 274), when analyzing privileged women who had access to education and instruction in the 19th and 20th centuries, states: “From the ranks of these women emerged the intellectuals, the thinkers, the writers, the artists. It was these women who, throughout history, became capable of giving us a feminine perspective, an alternative to androcentric thinking”. Writing became a space of resistance and confrontation of the women’s condition who, in most situations, lived in a subordination position.

This condition of subordination placed women, and especially black and Latin women, as inferior in colonial and post-colonial societies in the Americas, with public writing in newspapers and the defense of education being a possibility in which the “subaltern” could speak. If “the subaltern subject has no history and cannot speak, the female subaltern subject is even more deeply in obscurity” (Spivak, 2010, p. 85). Therefore, the importance of female writing in newspapers in the nineteenth century appears as a demarcation of resistance to oppression.

Writing, from the point of view of women, asserting themselves as intellectuals, was an act of daring, especially for Latin American women. Thus, the “[...] issue of female – and feminist – intellectuality is something that crosses much of the territory and history of Latin America” (Ribeiro; Gontijo, 2021, p. 225). We intend to think about the intellectual production of a nineteenth-century woman from the perspective of gender coloniality (Lugones, 2008), understanding that Petrona Rosende wrote in a sociopolitical context that was quite adverse for the majority of Latin, racialized women belonging to different economic classes.

The use of the category gender, in the historiographical field, proposes theoretical understandings about the questions that arise from political practices, since “[...] gender becomes, in fact, a way of indicating ‘social constructions’ – the creation entirely social of ideas about the roles proper to men and women” (Scott, 1995, p. 7). The contributions that gender studies have made to contemporary historiography are relevant, as they make it possible to remove women from the invisibility of the past and pose a set of important problematizations and methodological reflections. The universalities of the historiographical discourse are then questioned, enabling the growth of the appreciation of relational aspects in the analysis.

Periodical press and feminist intellectuals

The periodical press constitutes an important space for questioning the condition of women in the 19th century, for developing analyses about the promotion of female education and the first feminist discussions in South America (Souto, 2019, 2022; Duarte, 2017; Lima, 2019). It is worth noting that the scarcity of evidence related to women’s historical pasts is one of the major challenges faced by historians who set out to study these histories. Sources such as newspapers, magazines and women’s literary production can fill this gap, since they contain information about the literary tradition, the work of the first female journalists and women’s awareness, as well as about the possibilities, advances and setbacks of educational policy, as well as the formation of the new reading public (Duarte, 2017).

The nineteenth-century press can also be considered as constituting a written culture, in which education for women was defended. Research in the field of the history of education has pointed out theoretical and methodological assumptions for the analysis of periodicals within a history of written culture in defense of women’s education (Jinzenji, 2010; Galvão; Melo, 2019). Other research has already highlighted the intrinsic relation among women’s newspapers, the proposal for education and the fight for women’s rights (Duarte, 2017; Buitoni, 2009; Souto, 2019, 2022). These studies demonstrated that women used newspapers to defend women’s right to education, public instruction and, later, the right to vote. Regarding the relation between periodicals and education, Mônica Jinzenj (2010, p. 24-25) points out that:

although the defense of education is emphasized, and this is often related to the schooling of the population, it would be limiting to consider that both printed matter and educational institutions were restricted to this function – or this objective; moral qualities and the “cultivation of virtues”, especially when referring to the female population, appear as key elements of the discourses that defend education, thus referring to an educational action.

Women writers in the periodical press in the 19th century shared a common project of women’s emancipation, which initially proposed access to education. The call for education that systematically encompassed women was one of the premises of the feminist press and “driven by the same strength and idealism, this press ended up creating – in concrete terms – a legitimate network of mutual support and intellectual exchange, and by configuring itself as an indispensable instrument for raising women’s awareness” (Duarte, 2003, p. 158). This can be seen in newspapers from South America, from the first half of the 19th century, such as *La Aljaba*, published in Argentina, and *O Jornal das Senhoras*³, published in Brazil.

³ *O Jornal das Senhoras*, which circulated in Brazil between 1852 and 1854, is considered the first feminist newspaper in Brazil and was founded by Juana Paula Manso de Noronha, a writer, translator, journalist, teacher and one of the pioneers of feminism. Juana Manso produced in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

As for the analysis of printed material, it is necessary to consider it in its historicity, perceiving the local circumstances, its production contexts and linking “[...] the analysis of any publication or periodical to the field of social struggles within which it is constituted and operates” (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007, p. 257). It is important to ask “[...] *who speaks* and with what credentials, in defense of what projects and with what alliances” (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007, p. 263, emphasis in the original). Consequently, the analysis of the newspaper *La Aljaba* needs to be linked to the historical and social contexts of its production, such as moments of political tension, disputes over social projects and decolonization in relation to European countries, in addition to understanding that these printed publications are integral parts of a given time and social space. The periodical press, therefore, not only incorporates projects from various social forces, but also constitutes a space for the articulation and development of these ideas, resonating values and proposing social projects, such as the newspaper analyzed here.

Considering a printed periodical as a historical source requires an “operation of choice and selection made by the historian and which presupposes its theoretical and methodological treatment” (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007, p. 258). As an operation of choice and selection, also permeated by subjectivities, the analyses of copies of the newspaper *La Aljaba* are proposed, aiming to analyze the role of women in the history of the periodical press and in the history of women's education, making women's experiences and society projects resonate of editors and writers in question. In this sense, it is important to consider that:

This possible combination of education and the press allows us to think of the newspaper as a platform, not only to express one's own ideas (that is, as a mechanism for authorial legitimization) and claim certain rights, but also as a way of making oneself known in the community and attracting students, which implied a much more certain monetary income than a periodical (Vicens, 2022, p. 5).

Regarding the editorial project and the ideas developed within the periodical press, when constructing an editorial project for a newspaper it is important to “ask how the periodical constructs its historical perspective, proposes a diagnosis of social reality in a given process and situation, how it positions itself in the field of social memory, that is, in what way and with what references it articulates past/present/future” (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007, p. 265).

It can also be considered that the periodical press was a form of propaganda for the civilizing ideals of the 19th century, with the aim of educating readers, propagating values and behaviors, such as reading and writing. The press allows us to understand much of the path taken by Latin American societies in the early 19th century, and can be conceived as a space in which lived reality is represented. It is constituted as the result of a series of social practices of a given era, and those who produce it engender images of society that will certainly be reproduced in other historical periods (Capelato, 1994, p. 24).

The press is also related to intellectual history and the formation of networks of intellectuals. Maria Elisa Noronha de Sá (2021) reports that, in the last two decades, this historiographical field has been consolidating itself as an important space for historical interrogation, connecting with intersecting histories and other cultural connections, with the circulation of literate people, publicists, scientists and intellectuals throughout the American territory during the 19th century. “This circulation implied not only spatial displacements, but also the formation of spaces of sociability in which ideas circulated, were appropriated and reinterpreted, in a very special and specific context of nation-building” (Sá, 2021, p. 13).

However, when we consider the category of female intellectuals, we cannot lose sight of their diverse trajectories, experiences, and experiences, in order to try to reveal the complexities and diversities of these women who work in the public and intellectual sphere and

in various spaces, such as newspapers, schools, and intellectual networks. In addition to these issues, it is important to consider the nations in formation in South America, which did not ensure equality between the sexes, since the “resources of the State and its ramifications, that is, the idea of national power, even with the end of colonial ties, was based on previous constructions of gender power, together with the intersections of race, class, territoriality, and sexuality” (Ribeiro; Gontijo, 2021, p. 231).

In Argentina, the press was also considered “the main support for production aimed at the general public and the main archive of political and cultural themes that marked the 19th century” (Freitas Neto, 2021, p. 133). In the 1830s, the country was a scene of effervescent protests, due to the political events that the assassination of Manuel Dorrego, in 1828, and the appointment of Juan Manuel de Rosas, in 1829, as governor of the province of Buenos Aires, triggered locally and nationally (Vicens, 2022). Rosas represented “the interests of the property-owning groups and held back the advancement of the liberal project of achieving national unification based on a centralized liberal state” (Souto, 2022, p. 30). The Argentine press acted as a sounding board for this situation

Not only because Rosas' rise to power implied the closure of opposition newspapers and the emergence of others that openly supported him (Beltrán, 1943), but also because the press was one of the fundamental devices through which both supporters of Rosas and its opponents consolidated collective identities, linked to their respective political factions during the following years (Vicens, 2022, p. 3).

In *La Aljaba*, Petrona Rosende used the periodical press to assert rights and demand actions. The analysis of the Argentine periodical helps us to trace a path that promotes the interpretation of a part of the history of education in Latin America, “considering the prism of gender, cultural and ethnic differences in the construction of the writing of history, and emphasizing the narratives and conceptions inferred from the writings of women who until then had been disregarded and even made invisible” (Lima, 2019, p. 25).

In this sense, we argue that Petrona Rosende was a transnational feminist intellectual, writing and editing texts in Argentina, in addition to publishing poems and fables, as in 1835, when she was the only woman to publish in the collection *El Parnaso Oriental o Guirnalda poética de la República Uruguaya*, as well as teaching in Argentina and Uruguay. “In the city of Buenos Aires, Petrona set up a primary school for the education of girls. The school operated at least between 1825 and 1829, as can be deduced from the advertisements in the Buenos Aires periodical press of those years” (Barcia, 2008, p. 134, our translation). Petrona Rosende's production was largely dedicated to the defense of teaching and education of women in Argentina, and she also became a pioneer of children's literature, upon returning to Uruguay, through the writing of fables and texts for children (Falcone, 2019).

In line with Bárbara Souto (2022), we believe that, by defending women's intellectual capacity, Petrona Rosende adopted a feminist stance and established herself as a transnational intellectual, working in South American countries. Through her work, she defended women's education as a premise for social emancipation and the fight for women's rights, initiating feminist actions and demands, and being part of the first feminist movements in Argentina (Falcone, 2019).

It is important to emphasize that this was a feminism with a limited scope of action and limited to the defense of women's education. These first generations of feminists still defended the importance of marriage, but they also valued women's education. Furthermore, a woman – not a man –, by voicing her ideas in the public space, demonstrates awareness of a struggle she has taken upon herself, including a political struggle to enter the public space through her writings and through her intellectual activity with the aim of strengthening the nation.

La Aljaba is not a feminism that promotes women's rebellion or a radical change in their development within the public space, but rather the first step that leads to a full awareness of their rights and duties and functions and, therefore, it is a program that must be carried out through education (Auza, 2004, p. 24).

For Dora Barrancos (2022, p. 19), “feminism is a current of thought and political action whose central objective is summarized in the achievement of equal rights for women and, consequently, “The purpose of this movement is to eliminate all and any subordinating male guardianship.” We believe that Petrona Rosende was a feminist because she was a woman who raised her voice to demand the right to education for women, and the most appropriate way to do this would be to provide girls with intellectual opportunities so that they could enter the public sphere. Furthermore, she was transnational because she was an intellectual who was part of the contexts of two nations and was sensitive to the problems that permeated female subordination in these spaces.

Petrona Rosende and the pioneering spirit of *La Aljaba*

Invisible to the official and patriarchal historical narrative, women also fought for their ideas and proposals, defending education for all, as can be seen in the intellectual production of Petrona Rosende. Born into a traditional Spanish family, she was born on October 18, 1787 in Montevideo and married José Agustín Sierra at the age of 25, an active participant in the struggle for independence in Uruguay (Sosa de Newton, 1986). It was up to this *criolla* class, of nationals of Spanish descent, to begin thinking about a post-independence national identity. After the Portuguese-Brazilian invasion of Uruguay in 1815, the two went to Buenos Aires.

We know nothing about her education and training, although what she received was undoubtedly solid, as it allowed her to become an educator, journalist and poet. On March 1st, 1812, she married José Agustín Sierra, who participated in the revolution and the Liberation Crusade of 1828. They had three children: Anastasio, who died during the liberation of Montevideo; Benjamín, who was a soldier and also died in the civil wars; and Máxima, her only daughter who died a month after getting married. There is no doubt that the loss of her children affected her morally (Barcia, 2008, p. 134).

The fact that we know little about her education, her family and her productions is related to the erasure of documentary collections, within an androcentric epistemology, which did not consider women as worthy of being subjects of history at the time. Because of this, there is very little biographical and documentary data about women, due to their deliberate erasure from history (Duarte, 2022).

Petrona Rosende founded *La Aljaba* during her period of exile in Argentina, in November 1830. On its home page, the newspaper stated that it was “*Dedicada al bello sexo Argentino*”. In its pages, it advocated women’s education, proposing an education that was also linked to the civic and patriotic aspects of Argentina. According to Maria Vicens (2022, p. 1), studying the newspaper *La Aljaba* allows us to analyze debates and themes “fundamental that challenged women at the time, as well as the arguments and strategies used by the first female publicists to intervene in the public sphere, legitimize their discourse and deal with the attacks they received when they dared to raise their voices in public”. For Rosende, a woman’s skills must be cultivated through education to provide work in public sphere activities.

The time has come to use time more usefully and to treat one’s own interests with greater dedication and care; men have gained a lot of ground in terms of the rights of the fair sex, and it is necessary to make them retreat in their march, presenting them with the imponderable barriers of moral virtues, which are the only weapons they fear and respect, and even more so when they are linked to education (*La Aljaba*, n.15, 1830, p.3).

As it was common in periodical publications of the time, *La Aljaba* was an ephemeral publication. The historian José Alves de Freitas Neto (2021, p. 134), when analyzing the construction of Argentina in the 19th century, explains that “the fragmented and ephemeral nature of periodicals allows for another reading of events: they are placed at their crossroads, in their heated controversies and in the repercussions that some texts achieved”. The newspaper in question was produced between November 16, 1830 and January 14, 1831, with a total of eighteen issues, including the “prospectus”⁴ presenting the newspaper, printed before its launch.

Its format is simple, measuring twenty-five centimeters high by nineteen centimeters wide (Vicens, 2022). The text is distributed across four pages and has two eight-centimeter columns on each page (Auza, 2004). The newspaper was published on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Delivery was by subscription to guarantee the resources needed for its printing, and it was sold for three Argentine *reais*.

The publication lists *Imprenta del Estado* as the printing house responsible for printing and editing the newspaper. The circulation reach of *La Aljaba* is not stated, since its distribution method depended solely on subscriptions, a condition that probably limited its circulation.

This is probably where the publication weakness lies, since it does not accept financial cooperation nor does it offer opportunities to obtain female collaborations that would take on the publication as their own and contribute to expanding its radius of dissemination. By giving the publication the character of personal expression, even though its proposal is shared with its peers, it allows many women not to consider it a representation of the female community (Auza, 2004, p. 26).

⁴ A device commonly used in 19th century printed matter, as a text introducing the newspaper. In the prospectus, the propagation of doctrines appears as one of the main objectives (Kieling, 2014).

In the eighteen issues published, *La Aljaba* addresses a series of themes that range from the exaltation of the nation, as can be seen in the column *Amor a la Patria*, present in twelve issues; as well as the theme of religion, which is also present in twelve issues, being explored in the ten issues of the column *Religión* and, in addition, in two issues, in a column entitled *Existencia de Dios demostrada por sus obras*. Even in these texts and in others that do not directly address the theme of education, the author always points out the importance of women's education, as presented in the first article of her newspaper, entitled *A mis lectoras*, where she states: "The woman who receives a moral education, and practices it properly, is, so to speak, a temple where all virtues live" (*La Aljaba*, n. 1, 1830, p. 1). Petrona Rosende also includes a series entitled *Variedades*, which contains poems, sonnets and letters from readers. We understand that the newspaper, as a whole, aims to educate its readers through its writings, which, in addition, always present the need to strengthen the discourse on the importance of female education.

Petrona Rosende maintained specific columns on the subject of education in her periodical, such as the one entitled *Educación*, which appeared in seven issues⁵. In these columns, she widely defended the education of women, for example in the following question: "How much must it be the misfortune of a father, or the impossibility of a mother, to deprive her daughters of the inestimable treasure of a cultured education?" (*La Aljaba*, no.5, 1830, p.1).

In addition, Petrona Rosende also expressed her defense of the education of daughters by their fathers in other columns of *La Aljaba*, such as *Educación de las hijas*, which appeared in three issues⁶; in the article *Educación de la juventude*, which appeared in issue 13 of the periodical; and in the column *A los que oponen a la instrucción de las mujeres*, which appeared in issue 4, and in issue 5 the title was changed to *A los que se oponen a la educación de las mujeres*, emphasizing education. In issue 16, Petrona changed the name of the column again, calling it *A los opositores a la instrucción de las mujeres*.

The theme of education is transversal in the newspaper *La Aljaba*, and can be considered a central theme, since it permeates its various columns. It is also important to mention that the theme of education is addressed in the first column and on the first page of the eight-issue edition of *La Aljaba*, denoting the relevance that the theme had in the newspaper.

In her lines for *La Aljaba*, the editor postulates the principle, for those years, of equal rights between men and women, reflecting on the importance of girls' education and ideals of nation and homeland. The educational proposal that can be inferred from these texts is linked to the importance of women's intellectual and professional training, that is, a comprehensive and equitable education, linked to the conviction that women would be capable of carrying out intellectual and professional activities, no longer limited to the domestic sphere.

Defending women's education in 1830 was a difficult task, as this was a historical moment marked by authoritarianism and social hierarchies of all kinds, which determined the unequal relations of gender, race and class in Buenos Aires society. For the editor of *La Aljaba*, women would have full conditions for intellectual development, which "associated with application, continuous study and love of solid glory, produces the same effects in women and men, because there is no superiority in one nor inferiority in the other, as those who oppose the education of the sex believe" (*La Aljaba*, n. 14, 1830, p. 4). Thus, Petrona Rosende established herself "in journalism and in the cultural process of feminism by having given birth to *La Aljaba*, the first women's periodical, and by being the first to postulate the explosive principle in those years of equality of social status between men and women" (Auza, 2004, p. 20).

⁵ Numbers 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14 e 16.

⁶ Numbers 3, 6 e 8.

Those who study the phenomenon of the evolution of feminism in our midst, a topic that has become a source of attraction for historians and sociologists, cannot fail to read this formidable antecedent, although far from the ideology expressed by some extreme contemporary strands of this movement. The equality of rights demanded by its director, especially access to a comprehensive education that far exceeds that attributed to it by tradition, is a very interesting chapter due to the vigor and discursive solvency with which she expresses her arguments, which places her in an advanced position for her time, while the need for this education to be based on a solid religiosity and moral principles that lead to the formation of “obedient daughters, respectable mothers and worthy wives” is fully present in her (Bohdziewicz, 2004, p. 11).

The director of the periodical asked: “How long will the female sex remain plunged into the darkness in which it has been confined by the oppressive system of those who have denied it the simplest knowledge? They can no longer be blamed for the intellectual degradation in which they find themselves, the majority of whom are women” (La Aljaba, n. 4, 1830, p. 1). The author vehemently defended the opportunity for women and that there would be no more justifications for keeping them in ignorance, in the darkness of the lack of knowledge and education imposed by men on women. It is therefore necessary to think about and analyze the “effect of gender on social and institutional relations” (Scott, 1995, p. 75). In this sense, the periodical analyzed here emerges in defense of a literate nation, of access to education for a considerable part of Argentine society and of the construction of an ideal nation in the 19th century.

A careful study of the 19th century is important because it “[...] contributes to the understanding of central themes, ranging from democratic political participation, the role of intellectuals, the situation of women, and the construction of national identities” (Prado, 2004, p. 19). In societies undergoing transformation in the 19th century, the press began to play an important role in the dissemination of ideas and the promotion of education. Thus, the history of political processes in Latin America and the “history of the press go hand in hand, explain each other, and feed off each other, forming an immense canvas” (Martins, 2008, p. 8).

La Aljaba is an important space for understanding the history of female publicists in South America and the circulation of ideas about women’s education, since it was written by a Uruguayan, Petrona Rosende, during her period of exile in Argentina, in a possible transnational network of intellectuals in transit.

A transnational feminist intellectual in defense of women's education

The newspaper *La Aljaba* addressed several issues, such as the promotion of women's educational education, their place in society and their position in relation to men, but it also had space for art, religion and literature. In her writings, Petrona Rosende defended women's right to education and spoke out harshly against men who opposed it:

The oppressors of women argue that if they have knowledge they become arrogant, very petulant, extremely haughty, proud and arrogant—all this they say to justify their Ottoman behavior; but that is not what they have to fear—because it has been proven that all these defects that they claim result from knowledge are, in fact, the legitimate children of ignorance: the educated woman possesses all the qualities opposite to these vices; and the more advanced she is in useful knowledge, the more humble she becomes (La Aljaba, n.5, 1830, p.2-3).

Petrona Rosende called her female readers “the beautiful portion of society,” but in her editorials she also addressed the men who could financially support and read the periodical. “It is necessary that they convince the ladies that they must come forward to protect a newspaper that for the first time was dedicated to them” (*La Aljaba*, n. 7, 1830, p. 4).

La Aljaba is the first journalistic expression of the Río de la Plata written entirely by a woman (Bohdziewicz, 2004), which makes its study important for understanding the processes of decolonization of the country in question, its formation as a National State, and also the defense of women’s education proposed in this periodical.

at the intersection of these worlds, the press for women was created, a universe where the tension between illustrating and entertaining, typical of 19th century journalism, became a critical aspect in view of the possibility that women were not only recipients but also producers of these discourses (Vicens, 2022, p. 6).

Women like Petrona Rosende sought alternatives to express themselves freely and break with the customs that confined them to the private sphere in order to participate and express themselves in the public sphere. This can be seen in the phrase that appears on the cover of all issues of the newspaper: “We will free ourselves from the injustices of other men only when we do not exist among them.”

Figure 1 - Issue number 1 of *La Aljaba*, November 16th, 1830.



Source: Ahira – *Archivo Histórico de Revistas Argentinas*. Available at: <https://ahira.com.ar/ejemplares/la-aljaba-no-1/>. Accessed on: September 4th, 2024.

The author sought to question readers about the intellectual formation of women, their position and social role, and also about gender inequalities. She defended an ideal woman for the time: “A good mother; a tender wife; and a virtuous citizen!” (*La Aljaba*, n. 8, 1830, p. 2). The ideal woman combined her civic role with her role in the home (Gluzman, 2015, p. 69), especially contributing to the formation of her children as future citizens.

Can a woman who received an isolated education, subject to the customs of a tiring routine, which did not go beyond reading, writing and some poorly executed household chores (and from which she will obtain no benefit, just as one does not obtain from everything that is taught superficially) with such dim lights consider herself capable of shaping a man's happiness? (*La Aljaba*, n. 11, 1830, p. 4).

In the excerpt above, published in the section *Oposición a la instrucción de las mugeres*, Petrona Rosende argues that a woman with little access to education would contribute little to the construction of a civilized nation and also questions how she could contribute to the happiness of a man. In this way, there is an interconnection between education, enlightenment and social participation of women. The editor of the periodical also defended the economic activities that women could have, “linking herself to a theme explored throughout the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century: the need to provide girls with an education capable of making them economically independent in cases of extreme need” (Gluzman, 2015, p. 70).

In the analysis of *La Aljaba*, one can also perceive the circulation of liberal and civilizing ideals in America. For Freitas Neto (2021, p. 45), the writings of liberals had a pedagogical and political function “that established as a goal to define what civilization would be to be achieved. Through this civilizing purpose, they established an affiliation with universal history, led by European discussions that related civilization and progress”.

In order to link the enlightenment of women to civilizing progress, in the section *Oposición a la instrucción de las mugeres*, Petrona Rosende argues that “Civilized man, throughout the educated world, knows merit where he finds it; he does not consider himself the only one capable of achieving progress in science or the arts; he does not doubt the talent of women” (*La Aljaba*, n. 14, 1830, p. 4). Thus, there is a perspective of linking the defense of women's education to the advancement of society and nations that were in the process of construction in the 19th century, as is the case of Argentina.

The researcher Maria Vicens (2022) states that it is possible that Petrona Rosende thought of her readers as role models and saw the possibility of raising potential daughters to be students, especially if their teaching activities were taken into account and the central place that education occupied (specifically, the education of daughters) in the newspaper. In her doctoral thesis, Georgina Gluzman (2015), when addressing discussions about women's education in 19th-century Argentina, states that *La Aljaba* expressed that, among all the evils arising from domination, men's opposition to women's basic education must be counted and that “discussions around women's education were the order of the day in 19th-century Buenos Aires. The issue of the education that should be offered to women already appears in *La Aljaba*, which reflected the colonial legacy with regard to women's education” (Gluzman, 2005, p. 69).

This can be expressed in the following passage from *La Aljaba*: “They forbade them even to know the letters of the alphabet” (*La Aljaba*, n. 3, 1830, p. 1). According to Petrona Rosende, in the opinion of men, the reasons for keeping women without education were that “the women who knew how to read and write were the ones who were lost” (*La Aljaba*, n. 8, 1830, p. 1).

For Lily Sosa de Newton (1996, p. 12, our translation), the so-called “Oriental Sappho” has for us, without diminishing her literary qualities, the honorable title of first female journalist. *La Aljaba* has the significance that gives it its status as a breakthrough in women’s media.” Petrona Rosende is compared to Sappho of Lesbos, “an ancient Greek poet whose life unfolded between 630 and 580 BC, with an exceptional destiny for a woman in the historical context in which she lived: she composed poems that became essential in the context of the Western literary tradition” (Anjos; Silva, 2021, p. 2). *La Aljaba* demarcates a field of female struggles and demands and, like Sappho, opens the way for other important writers and intellectuals, who will travel through the Americas, defending women’s education. Petrona Rosende analyzes education in the context of America:

Among the infinite serious damages that our oppressive tyrants have caused us, this must undoubtedly be considered the greatest and of greater significance throughout America, the great system they adopted with regard to the education of both sexes, in particular and in general. But where their opposition was most evident was in relation to their daughters: they forbade them even to know the letters of the alphabet; they said, with the eloquence of their strongest arguments, that women who knew how to read and write were the ones who were lost. Could a man express his stupidity in a better way? (*La Aljaba*, n. 3, 1830, p. 1).

In the excerpt above, Petrona Rosende considers men as oppressors, responsible for causing grave harm to the nation and to America, by prohibiting their daughters from education. Thus, she links the importance of women's education with the advancement of society. “For Petrona, education was the basis of the struggle. The editor of *La Aljaba* believes that women’s education is the fundamental basis on which the social edifice is built” (Falcone, 2019, p. 33).

The editor of the newspaper *La Aljaba* states that men, as a way of controlling women, prohibited them from studying and getting an education, even from learning to read and write, considering those who had access to minimal education as “lost”. The defense of education thus acquires a socially emancipatory character, a feminist proposal for the liberation of women. The education of women and its defense later generated the defense of political rights. For Petrona Rosende, education was the basis of any struggle and, due to its themes and demands, *La Aljaba* is considered a publication that defends women’s rights, starting feminist struggles.

Final considerations

“As enlightened as she was courageous...”, this is how historian Lourdes Peruchena (2012) describes Petrona Rosende’s personality: a woman who dared to write and break out of the private world common to women, in a historical period in which founding and writing a newspaper, as well as saying what she thought, were actions carried out only by men in South America. Rosende insisted on the importance of women having a school education and fought for civil rights, such as education, for women.

La Aljaba was an early movement to spread the ideas of equal rights and educational proposals in the Argentine periodical press, written by a woman who overcame the silence traditionally imposed on women and achieved a place in the public and political sphere, through her work as a journalist and editor, defending women’s education and, later, running schools

for girls. “Petrona advances in two public spaces, upon leaving the confinement of her home: her educational institute and the periodical she founded” (Barcia, 2008, p. 134). If we consider the period in which Petrona Rosende produced *La Aljaba*, the first half of the 19th century, a time when the male gaze and patriarchal dictates were ingrained in Latin American societies, we can perceive the originality and importance of the publication analyzed here.

Petrona Rosende’s intellectual production, not only through the periodical *La Aljaba*, but also through her literary and didactic production, was extremely relevant for subaltern subjects to have a voice in Latin American societies that were forming in the nineteenth century. To affirm her as a feminist intellectual is to propose a reordering of official history, which often excludes women from official canons. After all, “an ill-explained humility denies women a title that is also theirs: intellectual!” (Lima, 2019, p. 13).

In this sense, Petrona Rosende’s intellectual production is a watershed in the first half of the 19th century for the beginning of feminist movements in South America, as she widely proposed in her periodical the education of women, understood here as a first agenda of feminist struggle. Education is thus configured as a strategy for the struggle for social liberation and economic emancipation.

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