

# GEISA

34 years old

Concreto Rosa

 *concretorosa*



**GEISA IS A BLACK LESBIAN FROM AN UNDERPRIVILEGED** background. After experiencing many financial difficulties throughout her life, in 2015 she founded *Concreto Rosa* (Pink Concrete) a construction and remodelling company that aims to provide female labour in a market dominated by men.

## CONFRONTING SEXISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Since starting her business, Geisa has been subjected to machismo from clients and hardware store employees. When she buys materials, the, mostly male, hardware store employees are impressed by her knowledge of plumbing supplies and doubtful about her ability to carry out the work. It was only recently, after years of confronting sexist comments and trying to demand respect from her suppliers that her work started being recognised and praised. She explains:

***“I often get this look, like, ‘you, black woman, doing things that are usually done by an alpha male’. I get looks of disdain and curiosity from clients, and many of them question whether I can actually fix things. [...] For them, it is often uncomfortable for a woman to be painting their apartment, going into their house, walking through their space”.***

*Concreto Rosa* is challenging the institutional sexism of the construction industry and building an increasingly female clientele, regardless of sexual orientation. Geisa says that many lesbian couples and single heterosexual women hire her because they do not feel safe with men working in their homes. Demand for her services has increased significantly due to her participation in online directories of female-operated services such as *“Indique uma mina”*

(*Hire a chick*) and *“Indique uma preta”* (*Hire a black woman*). She is also part of a group of women who work in construction in Brazil and discuss strategies to deal with sexist attitudes from clients and the husbands of women clients.

In Geisa’s view, most of the discrimination that she suffers is racial, since many clients do not know she is a lesbian. She says that some clients, mainly older people, have refused to employ her after she disclosed her sexual orientation. Now she prefers to be more discreet and not expose her personal life at work. However, being a lesbian is an advantage within her company, as most of the people she hires are part of the LGBT community. She recently hired two lesbians who previously had difficulty finding work because they dress in a “masculine” way.

## “DEDICATED TO AN OBJECTIVE”

In 2016, Geisa enrolled in Micro Rainbow Brazil’s second entrepreneurship course. She believes the course had a positive impact on the management of her business and on her personal finances. Developing a business plan has helped her to better manage *Concreto Rosa*, further understand her market niche, and above all, price her services more accurately. Before taking the course, Geisa was not able to make a profit because she did not know how to work out an appropriate price for her services, and often ended



up charging too little. Now she can plan better and consequently serve more customers. She says:

***“The course was a first step, you know. I started the course full of ideas and determination, but I did not know where to start. I did not know what I had in stock, the exact amount that I should charge, and that I have to include transportation, food, all of these things [in the service price]”.***

After the course, Geisa increased her income and could rent an apartment for herself and her son. She purchased more furniture and appliances and spent more on her son’s health and education. The improvement in her personal finances also affected her relationship with her family, especially with her sister, an evangelical Christian who helps raise her child. Geisa feels she can now be more assertive within her family, and her sister has cut back on jibes and “religious preaching” directed at her sexual orientation. Geisa explains:

***“She sees that I’m working, I’m dedicated to an objective, I’m earning money, I’m investing more in my son, taking him on trips, paying for drum lessons. This helps. I start to get more acceptance from them, from the family, they know that I am really a lesbian and that I will not change. This is me, this is my nature... [they] end up accepting and don’t say anything”.***

The increase in income also had an impact on her personal safety. Geisa feels less exposed to street violence because she can now afford to take a taxi when necessary, thus returning home safely: “I realised a short while ago, that now if I am on the street at night, I can leave a place where I don’t feel safe and not have to wait for public transport. I came to realise that one of the advantages of being better off financially is being able to afford these expenses... my girlfriend and I do not take risks any more”.

## **EXPANDING CONCRETO ROSA**

According to Geisa, the Micro Rainbow International course not only enabled her to better manage Concreto Rosa, but also gave her several ideas of how to improve her company. First, she wants to invest more heavily in marketing strategies, such as changing the logo and making T-shirts and other promotional items. Then, she plans to expand her range of services to include air-conditioning installation and interior design. Finally, she intends to concentrate more on management, since she currently carries out day-to-day operations in addition to managing the company. At the moment, she is following one of the most important lessons of the course: saving money to pay her debts and accessing credit in order to achieve her goals.

As she expands her business, Geisa hopes to increase her team and to hire other LGBT people. The Micro Rainbow Brazil Project gave her contact with other LGBT entrepreneurs and taught her to value their services more highly. In fact, she has been



hired by some of her former classmates to do work in their houses. She concludes her analysis of her participation by saying:

***“Taking a course with other LGBT people has helped me to walk in other people’s shoes, to have more empathy, you know, without losing my identity, knowing that other people have the same problems... This exchange was very enriching, it really was!”***

Geisa's success story illustrates how a low-income, black lesbian was able to use entrepreneurship to improve her living conditions while breaking into a male-dominated sector. With Concreto Rosa, she challenges racism, sexism and homophobia and proves that her innovative work and productive potential can counter both LGBT and gender discrimination, which are still widespread in Brazilian workplaces. ■



Geisa showcasing her business in her graduation ceremony

