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Bruna Sinigaglia;Carla Rosane da Silva Tavares Alves;Vânia Maria Abreu de Oliveira

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The redefinition of female identity and the conquest of spaces in Brazilian society

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This qualitative social and bibliographic research aimed to discuss the redefinition of female identity throughout history, covering women's submissive identity in a patriarchal society until achieving multiple identities in contemporary society, in which women accumulate roles and domestic tasks with the competitive professional life. The study started from the social position of women in Brazilian colonial society until current days, and for this reason, we discuss the main factors and events that have contributed to the social restructuring and the emancipation of women in contemporaneity. In this context, women achieved several conquests, such as the right to education, to vote, to salaried work and, especially, the right to equality between men and women. Although notable advances, women still face difficulties in asserting their new social roles, since the changes are still not consolidated in our society.

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1 INTRODUCTION

We live in a complex society marked by evolution, where women's struggle for the recognition of many rights and equality is still constant. History has shown, in the course of time, women's fight against inequalities suffered resulting from gender issues, often arising from their arduous resistance in the midst of a patriarchal society of essentially sexist origin. Given the complexity of such inequalities in the social, cultural and economic spheres, we also observe that the envisioned equality, currently, is not yet full.

The History of Humanity and gender issues go together, in some times with more intensity and in others, with less, however, they have always based a series of discussions about which roles men and women, as distinct beings, are responsible for exercising in society. For a long time, the role that each one should run was defined by a social judgment, i.e., women should only devote themselves to the household, while men were responsible for working to provide for their family.

Women, in turn, carry in their history the subordination and inferiority, because they were considered as hierarchically inferior to men. The sexist vision of society excluded women from social life and their role consisted only in procreation, home organization, children's education and subordination to their husbands.

Over time, women gradually changed their identities, previously unique, since they dedicated solely to the domestic life, and began to assume different identities, in today's society, being housekeepers, wives, mothers, daughters and professionals, all at the same time. This redefinition of identities results from women's emancipation, fruit of social movements, such as feminism, and of many other movements in which many women have sacrificed their lives in the name of an egalitarian future between genders.

In the course of this work, we sought to analyze some of the aspects that allowed for the social transformation and the conquest of social spaces by women. We began the analysis with patriarchal cultures of colonial societies, in which the woman was totally submissive to the male power (father, husband), in addition to observing in relation to the Church, for an evolution of the imperial society, where the system of patriarchy began to fragment, and women won the right to education.

The female empowerment is achieved throughout history because of some social events, which include, in addition to the right to study and the fall of the patriarchy, the insertion of women in the labor market, a consequence of the industrial revolution, as well as, more recently, globalization and multiculturalism. Throughout the development of the Brazilian society, the woman won political, social and labor rights, on the same scale as men, entering, in a significant way, the labor market, as well as in the context of the most diverse social spaces, however, the woman still faces a series of barriers that hinder the achievement of substantive equality.

In order to perceive the redefinition of women's identity in contemporary society, the main objective of the present study, we need to go through historical, social and cultural events that contributed and drove these transformations. In this way, by means of literature and documentary review, we discuss and analyze the evolution of women and the redefinition of their performance in contemporary society, having as main theoretical bases: Castells (1999), Freyre (1996), Saffioti (2005), Oliveira (2012), Hall (2002), Tavares (2007), among others.

2 METHOD

This text presents a qualitative, bibliographical and documentary social research, with discussion and analysis about the feminine evolution and the redefinition of its performance in the contemporary society, having as main theoretical contributions: Castells (1999), Freyre (1996), Saffioti (2005), Oliveira (2012), Hall (2002), Tavares (2007), among others.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Women's path in the history of Brazilian society

Women's path, not only in Brazil, but in all parts of the world, carries with it a history marked by subordination to men and women's disregard by the family and society. Historically, the female gender was considered a synonym of fragility, obedience to the father and husband and with little capacity to perform activities that were not linked to the home.

In the national scene, since the Brazilian colony until the transition to the republic, women have suffered numerous difficulties and discrimination regarding the male sex, with the achievements and rights acquired and consolidated by them in the current Democratic State of Law, resulting from years of struggle and suffering. A great part of the Brazilian history was built only with the presence of the male figure, while women were on the margins of historical records, leaving them only the domestic scenes, which extends up to the end of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century, when the first historical transformations began to slowly occur.

During the colonial period, Brazil was marked by the agricultural economy driven by slavery system, which began shortly after the discovery in 1500, more precisely from the period of sugar cane mills and only ended with the signing of the *Lei Áurea* by Princess Isabel on 13 May 1888. The slave was considered a good, a property of a lord, had no autonomy, nor rights. The legislation of the period considered the slave a thing, *res nullius*¹, a commodity that could be negotiated and transferred by means of legal transactions, such as: donation, sale, loan, rent, mortgage, in addition to the condition of slavery being hereditary, thus, children of slaves were already born tied to slavery.

In this way, one may also realize that "Parental ties often made captives vulnerable, as they feared being away from their group, on the other hand, they became emotionally strengthened, in particular as a consolation, in the midst of the bonds of the slave system" (TAVARES, 2007, p. 27).

During this period, women did not have any value in society, because the white and free belonging to the bourgeoisie or connected to the Portuguese Crown remained stuck inside their homes without instruction and submissive to their weddings, while black women were enslaved, working in farming along with male slaves and also serving to household chores in the main house (where the owner lived with his family), also exercising the role of attendants of milk. The slaves were subject to all the offices of slavery, even to punishment, of which the most common were: the whip, the trunk, the handcuffs, the mask of iron and some instruments of iron stuck to the feet, hands or neck, not even sparing pregnant slaves.

The patriarchal society of the colonial era accentuated the distinctions between sexes and implemented them in almost all sectors, in both public as private sectors. The pattern, created by the Patriarchate, provided men a free life, enjoying the social life and the power of command over wife and children, since women were seen only as "[...] men's objects of sexual satisfaction, a breeder for heirs, labor force and breeder again", being responsible only for taking care of the house, the husband, children and giving orders to the slaves (SAFFIOTI, 2005, p. 42).

While black women were oppressed by slavery system, white women were subordinate to the

¹ Latin term corresponding to a thing with no owner, an object that does not belong to anyone.

patriarch, usually married early, leaving the power of their fathers for the power of their husbands. Women's fate, since their birth, was the wedding, because they had no purpose other than domestic care, so the only way to avoid unwanted marriages was the convent, which sometimes was also the fate of those who could not marry and procreate.

The patriarchy was a political and social system responsible for giving rise to the hierarchy and domination of men over children and women, making them less both within the family as in the social sphere. The patriarchy was much more than an ideology; it was a structure introduced in society as a whole, reaching culture, religion, politics and social spheres, and even economy. Castells (1999) mentions that the present society carries the historic elements of the patriarchy, being the analysis of this system essential for the understanding of the social relations of domination:

[...] patriarchalism is one of the structures upon which all contemporary societies rest. It is characterized by the institutionally imposed authority of men over women and children in the family. For this authority to be exercised, patriarchalism must permeate the entire organization of the society of production and consumption to politics, legislation, and culture. (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 169).

Women in the patriarchal society were submissive to both man as society in general, hostages of their homes, they could not go out, work, they were free only to go to the church, since accompanied. The female sex, fragile and with little capacity, was in all instances conditioned to the wills of strong, noble and ruler sex of men (FREYRE, 1977).

During the colonial period, and during a long history, education was a key element of little value, especially in relation to women, who had no access to it, could not read or write, because, for the society, the instruction was unnecessary for performing domestic tasks. The few literate girls, daughters of lords of sugar cane mills, field marshals and noblemen, were sent to convents in Portugal, where they learned the female roles, restricted to a house to govern, a husband to make happy and children to educate, limiting themselves to read, write, count and sew (OLIVEIRA, 2012, 02).

The Jesuits had the role of instruction, however, their goals were to catechize settlers and indigenes with the intention of teaching them to read and write, and sending them to the religious career, but, women did not receive any guidance other than submission to the Church and to marriage. The arrival of the royal family allowed for a small change in the social scenario, allowing women of the higher classes a greater interaction with society, beginning to attend parties, theaters and even go to the churches alone. However, the instruction was still undervalued, because, for women, the important was education, not instruction.

The education given to women, highlighting here that these women belonged exclusively to elites, focused on the training of dames that knew how to behave in social events, as well as wives who honored their husbands and added nobility to their homes, what mattered was the knowledge about etiquette and good manners. Women who were not slaves, but belonged to the poorest strata, had no opportunity of any type of education, not even domestic education. They learned, since very young, to develop crafts, such as sewing and handicraft to help provide for the house, because low-stratum women, unlike other classes, have always worked.

Gradually, women began to have access to education, but still very restricted, since their main

occupations in the work world were only teachers and writers, crafts naturalized as feminine. Many factors contributed to the advancement of women throughout the history of Brazilian society, among them, the main ones were: the end of slavery in the imperial period, the expansion of industries, the fall of the patriarchy, the contraceptive methods, access to education and, more recently, globalization and multiculturalism.

The industrial revolution was responsible for major changes in Europe and, consequently, reflected in all parts of the world during the 18th and 19th centuries, because it represented the transition from a manual production system for a system in which the machine began to replace part of the human labor. In this context, the woman found space to leave the restricted home tasks and join in factory work, which became interesting from a business point of view, having in view that it was a low-cost work force.

In the industrial phase, women and children started to be the most sought public to carry out the work in factories. Nevertheless, despite having been a period that allowed for women to enter the labor market, it was also hard, since women and children were exploited by their employers, with work days that ranged from 12 to 16 daily hours, low wages and poor working conditions. The supply of labor in the factories came to meet the need of livelihoods of numerous families, which, due to World War I and II, became women's duties, whereas many of the men remained long periods in battles and others never returned (PROBST, 2005).

In Brazil, a large part of the framework of workers of the first factories was composed by women who migrated from Europe (Italian, German, Polish, etc.). They worked in industries and farms, especially in the coffee plantations, and under a regime of submission that resembled slavery.

The society used to believe that only men had competence to exercise the tasks involving economics, commerce, politics, while women should stay locked in their homes, performing housework and caring for the well-being of their family. This context guided the historical construction of society for many years, until women began a slow process of social recognition.

The social transformations driven by capitalism provided a new reality for women, who left a life restricted to the house and became workers, along with housekeeping. The entry into the labor market represented a conquest, however full of conditions of exploitation and suffering, later resulting in demands for better working conditions (COSTA; ANDROSIO, 2012).

With the separation of domestic work and non-domestic employment, the families were gradually breaking with the patriarchal structure, since, now, the woman left a portion of the submission and went out to conquer her space in social life. Cattells (1999) points out that, with the fall of family structure, the patriarchal system of society began to fall apart, as there occur "[...] transformations of female work and awareness of women", allied to the "[...] growth of global informational economy, technological changes and the process of reproduction of the species" (CATTELS, 1999, p. 170).

In this scenario of cultural transformations, the medicine also collaborated to the emancipation of women and the rupture of male domination and of the Catholic Church, which, until then, gave the woman the role of breeder. With the contraceptive methods and the availability of contraceptives in the public network, women began to have dominion over their body, with fully possible family planning, thus, with less children, women can reconcile more easily the household chores and professional career (VENTURA, 2011).

Women's access to school, and in the future, to the university, was also a great milestone for the independence of women in social context, even more in a society that, historically, was born and developed denying the importance of instruction as occurred in Brazil. Initially, they began to have access to basic instruction for the domestic and religious life, and the women learned to read, write and also received some notions of mathematics, in order to maintain the family control of spending, because the social paradigm stated that "[...] a woman is already well educated when she reads correctly her prayers and know how to write the recipe of guava paste. More than that would be endanger the home" (harpsichord, 1973, p. 11). In relation to domestic education, Vidal (1996) emphasizes that:

Thus, female schools were used to produce certain manual skills in order to facilitate the entry of female students from the lower classes into the labor market, providing them with a profession consistent with what was conceived as "activities related to women's nature", always related to the domestic service [...] or still, as a worker of the textile industries, reliving in the factory the customs acquired inside the homes. These disciplines reveal, in the girl, the expectation of her future social performance as a woman (VIDAL, 1996, p. 32).

Until the end of the 19th century, the education of Brazilian women followed the Portuguese heritage, considering essential only the education to marriage and to the maintenance of the home. The study was one of the arduous achievements of women, who restricted to learn techniques of cutting and sewing and crafts and, later, the magisterium, whereas men could attend schools and universities.

In Brazil, only in 1827, the woman began to have the right to attend regular schools, and only later, in 1879, by means of the authorization of an imperial decree, she began to have access to the university, with Rita Lobato Velho Lopes as the first woman that finished medical school in the year 1887. The obstacles faced by women in the pursuit of knowledge are "[...] examples that confirm the male desire at the time to leave women stuck to the private life of the households", characteristic of the patriarchal system (SCARANTTI; FRONZA, 2016, p. 93).

More recently, with the rise of multiculturalism and globalization, the groups historically excluded, as is the case of women, began to gain more strength and gradually conquered their social emancipation and the recognition of their roles in society and in the family. The cultural diversity, combined with technological innovations, meant that women could occupy spheres that, until then, were exclusively male, proving that they have as much ability as men to perform male-labeled functions, combining domestic life with the public life, which demonstrates a true autonomy of women in Brazilian society.

3.2 Achievements and obstacles of women in contemporary society

The differentiation between genders and tasks created by the culture of society, characterized as a macho culture, went through a long process of social and personal transformation of the women themselves, who took on the challenge to delineate their lives according to their desires. The women were gradually redefining their identities, leaving behind the domination and subordination and assuming a new identity that values their independence and their role as mother, wife, housekeepers, student and professional.

The woman of contemporary society is guided by new references that allow playing various social

roles, previously exclusively occupied by men. The transformations of societies, of production systems, culture, as well as the globalization, allowed for a restructuring of women's identities, who began to be seen otherwise both inside their homes as well as in the labor market. In this direction, Hall (2002, p. 88) highlights that:

Everywhere, cultural identities are emerging, which are not fixed, but suspended, in transition between different positions; which draw their resources from different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of these complicated crossings and cultural mixtures that are increasingly common in the globalized world.

The social changes and the new roles assumed by women throughout history did not please a large part of society, since, in a patriarchal culture, the insertion of women in sectors beyond the doors of home proved to be a scandal. The rupture of the paradigm that the woman should be restricted to domestic tasks, while the man could have a public life and should provide for the family, was seen as a social crisis, as can be seen in the passage in which Freyre (1996, p. 72-73) addresses the cooking crisis related to the new generations of women who do not dedicate exclusively to the kitchen:

[...] the new generations of young women no longer know, among us, except among the most modest people, how to make a sweet or a traditional and regional stew. They no longer have the taste and time to read the old family cookbooks. When the truth is that, after religious books, candy and stew recipe books should receive the most careful reading from women. The sense of devotion and obligation must be completed in the women of Brazil, making them good Christians and, at the same time, good grocers, in order to better raise their children and contribute to national happiness. There are no happy people when women lack cooking. It is a fault as serious as that of religious faith.

The feminist movement was, undoubtedly, an important watershed that has transformed women's condition in various countries, as well as in Brazil. Among the ideals of feminism, there were the pursuit of equal rights, equal pay, appreciation and recognition of women in society and the eradication of all forms of discrimination and embarrassment, as well as the fight of the image of women imposed by man (TOURAINE, 2007).

In this context of struggle for freedom, the Bra-Burning, an event that occurred at the end of the 1960's in the United States, gathering approximately 400 women, activists of the Women's Liberation Movement, marked the initial phase of feminism in the world. In protest against the Miss America contest, held on 7 September 1968, shoes, makeup, bras, false eyelashes, magazines and other objects that symbolized the standard of beauty, were scattered on the ground with the goal of being burned, which did not occur because it was a private space. (Peter, 2010).

In Brazil, the movement developed in the late 19th century, early 20th century, and was inspired by the fight of the European women who fought for changes that went beyond the gender equality, but, above all, for the release of male domination and of the devaluation in society in general. Nisia Floresta and Bertha Lutz are considered the pioneers of the movement in Brazil. They fought for political rights and for changes

in the labor legislation in relation to the feminine and child work, as well as for the social emancipation of Brazilian women who were still under the influence of the patriarchy (ALVES, 2013).

One of the main achievements of women was the right to vote in the year 1932, moment when women begin to build their citizenship, which had been denied for many years. Initially, the vote was restricted to married women, since authorized by husbands and widows and single women who provided for themselves, and, only in 1934, such limitations were overcome and the vote became mandatory for women, as already long standing for men. Currently, women represent more than 50% of the electorate, and even with affirmative actions, such as the Law of Quotas, the number of female candidates is still low in comparison to other countries. (PIOVESAN, 2011, p. 67-69).

The cultural changes, along with those driven by social movements, provided women the conquest of new spaces and breaking of disregard paradigms socially imposed. In the view of some theologians, the woman had no soul, but, considering the important changes, she became the “actress” of her own life, with the objective of building up herself, seeking to be free, leading and valuing in relation to herself (TOURAINÉ, 2007, p.31).

The main changes in the labor market occurred from the 1980's and 1990's, when the female participation increased in the sectors of commerce, offices, public services, careers related to health and advocacy, spaces once occupied exclusively by men. One of the factors that contributed to the insertion of women in unheard labor spheres was the training by means of technical and higher courses, i.e., the knowledge was an important ally for the conquest of independence for women.

Currently, Brazilian women are reaching higher levels of education than men are and are achieving employment with greater ease, in comparison with the male sex. Although there are impasses for women to assume positions of greater prestige, gradually, they are expanding their professional performance and conquering new spaces, in the public and private sectors (TEYKAL; ROCHA-COUTINHO, 2007).

Nonetheless, even with the significant rise of women in the Brazilian economic scenario, they still integrate an affected group. The discrimination of women in the labor market is still a harsh reality that urgently needs to be combated, because the wage gap and the difficulty to achieve higher positions are still fruits of a culture that make women inferior in comparison to men.

While women find greater difficulties in the context of private companies, in the public sector, this reality is a little different, since the entrance through public service exams is providing an increasing number of women who achieve their professional careers “[...] which prevents discrimination by subjective and prejudiced reasons” (ARAÚJO, 2011, p. 102).

From the 20th century and more specifically in the 21st century, women began to occupy sectors until then exclusively male. They began to work at the same intensity as men, performing the same tasks and, sometimes, reaching educational levels higher than the male public, which proves that there really was a redefinition of the woman's labor role in contemporary society. The woman, even occupying the same functions, is not valued at the same level as the man, in both social as economical spheres.

According to article 5, paragraph I of the Federal Constitution of 1988, “[...] men and women are equal in rights and obligations”. This equality expressed by the constitutional text deals with formal equality, i.e., regardless of the differences of sex, race, color or other peculiarities, all people shall be treated in the same way, without distinction. However, we know that we are not all equal, as the purely formal equality

does not provide an actual equality (BRAZIL, 1988).

The material equality “[...] implies the unequal treatment of unequal situations of life, according to their inequalities”. The differentiated treatment between genders, races and classes are not discriminatory, but a means to promote equality between individuals who are in a situation of disparity, complying with the understanding of Aristotle, who already said “[...] equality consists in the same treat of similar persons” (TAVARES, 2012, p. 602-603).

In relation to material equality, we highlight the considerations of Rui Barbosa in his work *Oração aos Moços*: “The human appetites designed to reverse the norm of universal creation, intending not to give to each one, concerning what matters, but assign the same to everyone, as if everyone were equal” (BARBOSA, 2000, p. 25).

Although the constitutional text and the sparse laws bring a catalog of rights and guarantees for the female gender, both in relation to the labor market, as well as in family relationships and with society, there is need to leave the formal plan of the legal text and enter concrete actions that can provide equality of gender in its material sense. The lack of effectiveness of material equality, in the Brazilian legal system, is visible from the barriers that women still face in the labor market, such as wage inequality and difficult professional advancement.

The wage gap is one of the issues that denounces the inequality between genders in the Brazilian labor market. According to data from a research carried out by CATHO, published on the eve of International Women’s Day, 07 March 2017, the wage gap between men and women is increasing; in 200, it was approximately 52% and until the first few months of 2017, it had already achieved approximately 75.38%. The research evaluated management internship functions, pointing out that the higher wage difference is in the position of consultant, in which men earn 62.5% more than women do. According to the research, women earn more than men in only three areas: gyms and sports, social communication and production of events (CATHO, 2017).

The report of the International Labor Organization (ILO) “Women at Work: Trends to 2016”, published by the UN (United Nations), concluded that, from the analysis of 178 countries, at the pace at which inequality between men and women in the labor market has persisted, there will be necessary 70 years to reach equal pay in the world. We realize that inequality between genders is a problem that is far from your solution, moreover, the rates of wage differences are increasing rather than decreasing, which signals a social regression at world level, which will increase even more the number of years for this issue to be overcome (ONUBR, 2016).

The issues involving gender are cultural constructs of each society in each period. In this context, it is possible to check that women’s labor redefinition in the contemporaneity was possible from historical, social, cultural and economic changes of society, driven by social movements. Still, there are many obstacles to be overcome, having in view that the culture of male domination is still present in the social environment.

Within a new perspective, the wife of contemporary society has a voice, has autonomy, freedom, is dedicated to her work, and when back home, devotes herself in the same intensity to her household chores of mother and wife. The freedom and autonomy achieved by women is the fruit of years of struggles to deconstruct concepts naturalized in society ruled by men, which considered them biologically and

intellectually inferior (PROST, 2003, p.4).

Although the aforementioned achievements have occurred in current days, assuming an identity of woman, in the current social context, is a challenging task, considering that the conquest of the labor market did not exclude the roles assigned to women. The double work shift is a reality that affects a large part of Brazilian women, because, in addition to being mothers and wives, they also need to devote themselves to professional career and, many times, reconcile all these functions with studies, which demonstrates that, historically, women have been presenting themselves as true warriors who do not flee from domestic roles and perform with praise the offices of professional life.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no doubt about the social relevance of issues related to gender and the emancipation of women in society, because between advances and setbacks, currently, women act not only in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere. Because of the many transformations, the role of women in society today is being reconsidered, once the identity that society has imposed for years has been restructured and women began to be the main responsible for their fates and choices, writing their stories, regardless of what the sexist society judged correct.

Men and women were born in full condition of equality, but the society, through its culture, plotted the discrimination between the sexes, not by biological issues, but by ideologies that preached the disregard of woman and attributed her only domestic roles. Today, we live in times marked by a formal equality between genders, but we are still far from reaching a substantial equality, in which both men and women can play the same roles, either within their homes, whether in the labor market, with the same appreciation.

The numerous achievements of women reveal how unfair and unequal the society was, in which only the man had rights, while the woman had only the duties of obedience and zealing for the house and the marriage. Currently, men and women have equal rights and obligations, but not all these victories have been consolidated, since there are several cases of discrimination and inequality between genders.

The process of redefining women's role gradually is being rethought and recognized by society, while their identity is being constructed. The difficulties encountered by women to assert themselves in the social sphere are reflections of a culture which, for many centuries, preached the male domination. Unfortunately, the paradigms constructed and naturalized by society will still extend for some time, because only the awareness and the change of the new generations will allow for a full insertion and the overcoming of obstacles that still exist.

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