

## **“They Don't Play in Service”: Analysis of Female Work in the Context of Red Ceramic Production**

### **Gislaine Beretta**

Bacharel e licenciada em História. Especialista em Ensino integrado em Filosofia, Sociologia, História e Geografia pelo Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina (IFSC); Especialista em Africanidades e Cultura Afro-brasileira pela Universidade Norte do Paraná (Unopar), Brasil. E-mail: gicaberetta@hotmail.com - Orcid: 0000-0002-5488-8987

### **Juliano Bitencourt Campos**

Doutor em Arqueologia. Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Ambientais da Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense (PPGCA/UNESC), Brasil. E-mail: jbi@unesc.net - Orcid: 0000-0002-0300-1303

### **Nilzo Ivo Ladwig**

Doutor em Engenharia. Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Ambientais da Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense (PPGCA/UNESC), Brasil. E-mail: ladwig@unesc.net – Orcid: 0000-0003-3031-0192

### **Jairo José Zocche**

Doutor em Ecologia. Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Ambientais da Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense (PPGCA/UNESC), Brasil. E-mail: jjz@unesc.net - Orcid: 0000-0003-2291-3065

### **Vilson Menegon Bristot**

Doutor em Engenharia. Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação Associado em Sistemas Produtivos (PPGSP) entre Uniplac, Unesc, Univille e UnC, Brasil. E-mail: vilson.bristot@unesc.net - Orcid: 0000-0003-1814-6262

### **José Gustavo Santos da Silva**

Bacharel em Geografia. Mestrando do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Ambientais da Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense (PPGCA/UNESC), Brasil. E-mail: gustasantos92@gmail.com – Orcid: 0000-0003-0578-8266

### **Tatiane Beretta**

Licenciada em História pela Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense (UNESC), Brasil. E-mail: tatiane.beretta@hotmail.com - Orcid: 0000-0001-6542-1736

**Carlos dos Passos Paulo Matias**

Bacharel e licenciado em História. Mestre em Educação pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação (PPGE) da Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense (UNESC), Brasil.  
E-mail: prof.matias.carlos@gmail.com - Orcid: 0000-0002-6990-5970

**Abstract**

*The production of red ceramics (tiles and bricks) was an important activity for the economic development of the municipality of Morro da Fumaça, state of Santa Catarina, Brazil from the 1960s onwards. This segment was a major contributor to the introduction of labor female labor in the local economy. The activity still has great economic relevance for the municipality, since it is a source of tax collection and generation of direct and indirect jobs, for a representative portion of the population. This study aims to narrate the way in which the production and development of red ceramic production took place in the municipality of Morro da Fumaça, south of Santa Catarina, Brazil, confronting it with the social reality of the actors that make up the productive force sector, especially female workers. From the female performance, analyze the working conditions to which they were submitted. Such conditions, at times, imposed a double working day in the activity of ceramic production, work in a family nucleus with the inclusion of minor workers, in addition to the responsibilities with domestic chores.*

**Keywords:** Economy; Production; Job; Working Women.

**1. Introduction**

The act of transforming the burnt clay into useful objects on a daily basis is a practice that recalls prehistory (COOPER, 1987; NAVARRO, 2006). This know-how has improved over time, being incorporated beyond survival, as a cultural reference for a people (PADILHA, 2007). Homes that were previously temporary, have gained security and strength with the use of burnt bricks (ISAIA, 2007). The oldest dates for major works using burnt bricks date back to 700 BC (SINDICER, 2005), following an evolutionary process, but still artisan until the 18th century, when with the Industrial Revolution, a leap in quality took place. and quantity in the industrial manufacture of ceramic bricks (FLORENZANO, 2016, p. 03).

The word ceramics is derived from the Greek "kermamos" which refers to something made of earth "or" burnt thing "and is used in reference to inorganic materials, originating from non-metallic compounds (CALLISTER, 1991), which are solidified by burning (OLIVEIRA, 2008). Nowadays it takes on a broad meaning, ranging from the manufacture of baked clay objects, the raw material, the product itself, to the place of production of such products (SILVA, 2016). The red ceramics, commonly produced in pottery, are named as a result of the reddish color, acquired after the firing process, as a result of the high levels of iron compounds present in the raw material (ISAIA, 2007).

The brickworks appeared in the municipality of Morro da Fumaça at the beginning of the 20th century, gaining prominence in the national economy in the 1960s, due to the industrialization process that Brazil was going through at the time. The brick as a fundamental element of civil construction, became a product

required in that context. The raw material for its manufacture, abundant in the region, was one of the motivations that led to its unbridled exploration (CARIO; PINTO JUNIOR; FERNANDES, 2008).

The workforce for the production in the pottery did not need to be qualified, which is why many entrepreneurs hired entire families, usually from jobs considered subordinate or seasonal, such as those derived from fishing and agriculture. In this logic, women, as well as other members of the family, were introduced to the body of workers and they were assigned the most varied functions within the production process.

Taking into account this theme, we have outlined a study in which reflections are developed about the presence of women in the context of pottery, within the production process and also outside it. The article is not limited to presenting the ceramic worker as a commodity, or only as a labor force, on the contrary, it seeks to present her as a human being, active subject, woman, mother and worker, who lives and has her social relations in the environment work and out of it, which makes history and at the same time is part of one. Since the beginning of the 20th century, "female emancipation" has been seen as being modest, even though a small - but unprecedented - number of active women was produced in this period, in fields hitherto restricted exclusively to men and where in fact they distinguished notably (HOBBSAWM, 2005). This supposed "emancipation", was initially given by the middle layers of society, especially those that were located in Europe and were part of the bourgeois class. In the simplest layers, this "revolution" was felt later, slowly and gradually. Analyzing this situation, we can understand that women coming from less favorable situations already practiced the progressive act of work, however, it happened out of necessity, and was not characterized by emancipation, much less was recognized.

This study aims to unveil the way in which the implantation and development of red ceramic production took place in the municipality of Morro da Fumaça, south of Santa Catarina, Brazil, as well as the strategies used for its development, identifying in this process the introduction of workers to the industrial space, especially female workers.

## **2. Location and Characterization of the Study Area**

The municipality of Morro da Fumaça, located in the extreme south of Santa Catarina (Figure 1) is part of AMREC (Association of Municipalities in the Carboniferous Region). The Catarinense Carboniferous Region (RCC) stands out, nationally as a major producer of mineral coal, also standing out in relation to clay mining, a raw material used mainly by ceramic companies and potteries in the region, for the production of red ceramics and coatings (DNPM, 2001; CORRÊA et al., 2019). Currently, there is great economic diversity in the municipality, such as the presence of packaging companies, production of machinery and textiles, ceramic industries, with the production of bricks, clothing, rice agribusiness, extraction of clay and sand for civil construction (IBGE, 2019).

Both clay mining and its use in the ceramics and pottery industry cause damage to the environment, with mining done in open pit processes, which results in the suppression of vegetation, removal of the soil's fertile layer and exposure of the soil to erosive processes. (MECHI; SANCHES, 2010; PORTELA; GOMES, 2005). These activities have harmful effects on the balance of ecosystems, they also cause changes in the landscape that lead to discomfort in the environment of humans and other organisms that

live there (MECHI; SANCHES, 2010; CORRÊA et al, 2019).

In addition to the environmental impacts generated by the undeveloped exploitation of raw materials for pottery manufacturing, in the industrial production process, various fuels, including fossils such as coal, are burned for the cooking of ceramic pieces. This burning causes the release of a series of air pollutants, among which are particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, carbon monoxide (SILVA et al., 2012), which cause several respiratory comorbidities, both in workers, as well as in the resident population close to the production units (ALLIN et al., 2014)

The municipality is home to an estimated population of 18,000 inhabitants, whose demographic density is 194 ha / km<sup>2</sup> (IBGE, 2019).

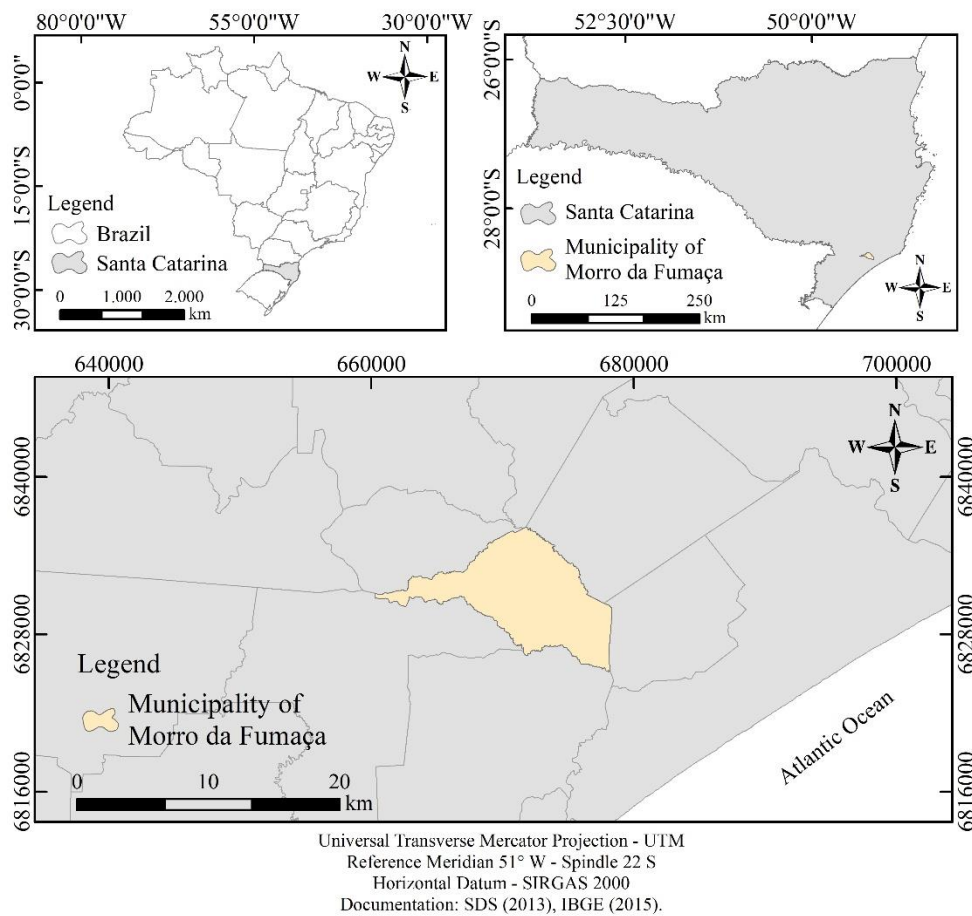


Figure 1 – Geographic location of the municipality of Morro da Fumaça - SC  
Source: Authors (2020)

The first potteries appeared in the city between the 1920s and 1930s, but still with little economic expression (ZANELATTO, 1998). According to Zanelatto (1998), because the written records on this period are limited, the information collected on the introduction of this segment in the city was obtained through oral interviews, which is why some ideas diverge, including as to the dates of origin of the first ones. potteries and their pioneering spirit. It is known that in the midst of the narratives, the possible names of the first families that were involved with the pottery activity in the municipality emerged, including Bertan, Bortolon, Coral, Cechinel, Frasson, Guglielmi, Guollo, Maccari, Maragno, Matiola, Pellegrin,

Polla, Rochi, Salvan, Sartor, Zaccaron, (CUNHA, 2003, p.70).

### **3. Results and Discussions**

The narratives show that as potteries developed, families that owned land and raw material on their land were abandoning crops and started to dedicate themselves to the production of red ceramics, as this activity provided them with visibility profit. With the high demand for bricks, dozens of potteries started to explore one of the most abundant resources that they had in the place, the clay. The use was such that it ended up depleting this raw material, requiring these producers to look for new sources in other nearby locations.

The removal of clay in an unplanned way, causes serious impacts and damages to the environment (KOPEZINSKI, 2000). The environmental impact can be positive when man's action on the environment improves the quality of a factor or parameter, or negative, when the quality worsens (ZILLI, 2019). In the production process observed in the brickworks, the impact is hardly positive (PORTELA; GOMES, 2005).

With the civil construction sector booming, Morro da Fumaça gained status as a municipality in 1962, influenced by the economic momentum experienced by the ceramic segment (ZANELATTO, 2011). This sector highlighted the potential of the municipality in relation to neighboring cities, favoring the abundant raw material and the migrant labor, numerous and cheap (CANCELLIER, 2007). At this stage, potteries expand their production, offering services to workers from more distant places, including, it is during this period that sales expand to other Brazilian states and it is precisely during this period that the growth of ceramics in Morro da Fumaça coincides with the extraordinary economic growth that occurred in Brazil in the 70s (ZANELATTO, 2011)".

In this context, several factors contributed to the expansion of potteries in the late 1960s, such as, for example, the expansion of the distribution of electric energy with the creation of the cooperative (CERMOFUL), the drainage of large areas of varzeas of the Urussanga River in 1967, allowing the exploration of matter (clay), the arrival of specific machinery (called marombas) for the installation of pottery, from the states of Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo, the creation of the National Housing Bank (BNH) which gave great boost in civil construction and, finally, the completion of the Federal Highway BR-101, facilitating the flow of production (ZANELATTO, 2011).

To supply this new demand, it was necessary to hire workers from other locations. Several of these individuals were attracted by the possibilities presented by the pottery owners. Among the "advantages", subsistence items were offered, such as water, electricity and housing, guarantees that generated direct links with the employer. These workers did not arrive alone, they brought their families with them, and in a short time, the population of the municipality practically doubled.

The potteries absorbed all members of the family nucleus that had productive capacity. This condition generally covered everyone in the household, including women and children. The main conditioning mechanism imposed by the owner was that of housing. The worker, even if he was unhappy, saw himself coerced to remain in the job, since most of the time, his residence belonged to the businessman and was linked to the employment contract. Housing, among other elements such as water, energy, and gas, are subsidies that guarantee the domination and permanence of the employee and his family in the pottery.

The housing offered to workers was of very poor quality, belonging to the pottery industry, which deducted from the wages paid by the rents for renting them. The amount of the rent was already deducted from the payment amount, which became a purely economic reasoning, since its calculation always favored the company. A common characteristic at this juncture was that many of the owners of the ceramics were also the owners of the local markets, which is why they settled their wage obligations with a purchase voucher. Receiving with vouchers further limited the real possibilities of development and autonomy for these families.

The natural conditions of the region and the abundant cheap labor, made possible the development of the ceramic sector of the city, which provided its national recognition. The history of the municipality has a very close relationship with this segment, as it was responsible for the economic growth of the place, and possibly even the name of the city was given in its reference.

It is not just today that women have been fighting for space in the job market, however, they “come up against” a series of situations that hinder their trajectory. These confrontations occur partly because it is a phenomenon that refers to gender relations. When we talk about gender relations, what are we talking about?

The term Gender was a concept constructed socially seeking to understand the relations established between men and women, the roles that each one assumes in society and the power relations established between them (COSTA, 2013). Therefore, talking about women, in terms of aspiration and project, rebellion and constant search for transformation, talking about everything that involves the female condition, is not just a desire to see this woman rehabilitated in the economic, social and cultural planes.

It's more than that. It is assuming the uncomfortable posture of being indignant at the historical phenomenon in which half of humanity has been excluded for thousands of years in different societies, over time. It is to believe that this condition, perpetuated in a universal dimension, must be radically transformed (TELES, 19990).

When it comes to equal rights, women are still disadvantaged, especially when it comes to the labor market. In many cases, she still needs to be doubly prepared and qualified for a role she wants, especially if it is also valued by competitors of the opposite sex. Even though the participation of women in the labor market increased, there was no decrease in professional inequalities between the sexes (ABRAMO, 2000).

“The burner has no weekend, holidays or holy days. If you have production, you have to work ”(SHUSTER, 1997)). When reading this outburst, one can assume that it is the story of a ceramic worker, whose life is summarized in the burning hours of a pottery oven. This really represents, the only difference, is that this information was given by a woman, who in order to maintain the family support, occupied the work functions that were of her deceased husband.

This is not a reality exclusive to this woman, nor is it restricted to this sector of the economy. The income of this and many families depends in part, or in its entirety, on women's work. According to information taken from the Senso carried out by the Federation of Industries of the State of Santa Catarina in 2010 about the number of workers in the State of Santa Catarina, there is an approximate calculation of 796,320 women in the most diverse areas of the economy.

Despite being a significant presence in the pottery space of Morro da Fumaça, women, little, or do not appear in the published historiography on the subject. Academic production regarding the daily lives of working women is a recent study. According to Matos, this was due to the “effervescence of women's



struggles and the initiative to place female experiences and experiences previously silenced in history” (MATOS, 2009). Provoking this type of debate in academic circles contributes to transforming mentalities reinforced by social hierarchies that assign roles to men and women within a society.

Only more recently, from 1975, with the establishment of the International Year of Women, did Brazilians resume the feminist movement, working in study groups and scheduling days of struggles and mobilization campaigns. Integrated with democratic movements, Brazilian feminists have joined ranks in movements for amnesty, political freedoms and a free and sovereign constituent (TELES, 1999).

Despite these advances, women still face daily challenges, struggle for their space, recognition, visibility, respect and autonomy in relation to men. With regard to Morro da Fumaça, more specifically to the ceramic space, in order to be able to contemplate and give visibility to the role that the female workforce represented within it, it seems important to historicize and to know how this sector of the economy is developed in the municipality.

The act of migrating occurred in practically all periods of history and for the most varied reasons and circumstances. Among the most common factors are those of economic origin, which include the migrations that occurred in the municipality of Morro da Fumaça. What characterizes this migration as an economic one is the reciprocal need for generation and income, both for the owner and for the future pottery worker.

Most of the workers who went to Morro da Fumaça in order to work in the pottery, agreed with the owner the job and the place to live and, in some cases, even the family belongings were brought by the new boss (ZANELATTO, 2011). Villar (1988) describes it as a “family pater” system, as it leases the families of workers on the company's own land and offers housing, electricity and additional remuneration for an individual capable of providing services. This type of situation generates dependence from the family group on its employer, a situation similar to others already witnessed in history.

As mentioned, the migrations took place in a familiar way, and all members of this group needed to work in the potteries. This was a real necessity, as living conditions were precarious and wages were very low. Taking into account the composition of the workers, it can be understood that they comprised a heterogeneous group that included men, women and children, and that the organizational form of production was structured according to the potential and physical capacity of each one.

Women performed any functions that were employed, however, they were generally assigned those that required skill and concentration. This did not mean that the tasks performed by these workers were simple or less important than those developed by men. In reality, many of them performed functions that required much more than their own physical strength. As is the case of the worker, Eva de Sá, who when becoming a widow needed to assume the obligations of her husband in a pottery oven as a burner, to do considered the hardest within this type of company, as it requires resistance and time availability from those who runs it.

The pottery worker is a woman whose life is determined by work. She lives at work and has the ability to privatize the production space, which is also the space where she takes care of, looks at her children, socializing them for life and qualifying them for work. The possibility to take the children to work and to superimpose their roles and their working hours is not a privilege for the worker. On the contrary, it is an arrangement suited to the interests of the owners of the brickworks who maintain a "qualified" workforce

for the job held in place for more than three generations (D, AQUINO, 1989/90, p.118).

The hours and obligations at the pottery were precisely followed, obeying the organization of production. Such organization was given by the system of sexual division, which directly reflected in the form of payment of each employee. The process took place through the "win according to what you can carry" system, that is, within this logic, you paid better to those who produced more, this generally favored men who had greater hand strength (SHUSTER, 1997). This strategy made female labor very cheap, since these workers did not have the same physical power as men, a determining factor in the monetary value they would receive.

The female labor force was quite advantageous to the company, because, the productive capacity of women was practically equal to that of men and the wages disbursed were lower than the same. Even though the worker performed activities that were the same or similar to those of men, the occupation performed by them was still rated as "help" or supplement. This is a characteristic of the sexual division of labor, which in turn manifests itself unevenly, as it separates the work of men and women into degrees of superiority and inferiority, leading to the understanding that the work of a man is worth more than that of other.

Because it is considered a work of less importance, more "light", which requires "little" physical effort, female labor is marginalized within the productive space of ceramics. However, as we can see below, women perform the most diverse types of tasks within this process, including those that are called masculine.

"- I'm a furnace now. I work in the oven."

- It's filling up a brick cariola to take to the oven, load a truck ...

"Q. - Why do you do that?

"- Because there is no bank."

Q. - And how is this job for the woman?

"-Ah! It's bad."

"- It is her husband who wins, she earns nothing ... Her service is awkward (encompassed) with her husband."

"- For me it doesn't pay anything. Just for him. It pays three hundred thousand ..."

Q. - And isn't it heavy to fill a carriola?

"- And, but what am I going to do?"

Q. Is it heavier than the cut?

"- Vichi ... Wow ... This service is for men, not for women."

"- I was a kneader too, now that I'm in the oven."

Q. - Did you knead clay?

"- Yeah, I kneaded. Like her there. Help her husband with the kite."

Q. - And help with the kite and the oven, which is the heaviest?

"- Ah! I find the oven." "- All of them are heavy because filling a cart there with that heavy shovel, my daughter, is not easy, no."

"- All two are heavy." "- Lower and raise ..." (D, AQUINO, 1989/90, p. 123).

Even carrying out various activities that required great physical development, the oppression that



women experienced is still undeniable. This unequal relationship subordinated the worker and subjected her to the domination of the boss, the supervisor and even the husband, and this only accentuated the question of power concentrated in male hands.

The need to earn income, required many women to enter the labor market early. In the logic of pottery, this occupation was laden with responsibilities, in many cases study and leisure, were in the background. The moment the worker became a mother, a new cycle began. Children now represented new concerns. Children give women and men a majority status, making them responsible for their own destiny, which ideally implies disconnecting from the family of origin and constituting a new family nucleus (SARTI, 1996).

The education given by these mothers and workers was about practical knowledge. The teaching was focused on observation, and the exchange of experiences. This type of learning, almost empirical, in these circumstances became more valid than what was offered by the school. This may be a reason that justifies the removal of these children from school education. Everything suggests that this was a common life practice for pottery families.

Even though they became parents and responsible for the organization of their home, their obligation to work in the pottery with their husband was not extinguished. In fact, this became even more necessary, as it is at this time when financial fragility was accentuated. This aspect highlights and highlights the overload of responsibilities carried by women in relation to men. We cannot forget that “the lack of a day care center was and still is an issue that is always present in the meetings of women from the periphery and some union members. And one of the priority flags, the creation of a nursery ”(TELES, 1999). They were assigned a double working day, where the responsibility for domestic activities and for the care of children was mixed with their economic activities developed within the factory space.

When working hours are added, the total time spent working inside and outside the home is always greater for women (BANDEIRA; PRETURLAN, 2013). In addition, these women were responsible for external activities, actions responsible for maintaining the house, such as trips to the supermarket, payment of bills, among other obligations. They had to face the difficulties of managing the low salary received by their family, dividing it between expenses, leisure and obligations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The brickworks appeared in Morro da Fumaça at the beginning of the twentieth century, and promote an unprecedented wave of economic development to the newly created municipality. The dynamics of progress are fraught with social inequalities, since those who actually generate wealth are not benefited by it. In this context, a mass of male and female workers emerges who are in charge of occupations that cause damage to health, with low wages, unfair employment ties, which provide few prospects for life. It is in this scenario of precariousness and exploitation that women are inserted in the potteries of the municipality of Morro da Fumaça.

This research explained how work relationships were maintained, especially the daily lives of workers in ceramic pottery, showing power and resistance relations inside and outside this space. We tried to treat these women as generators of their own stories and, in order for this to be possible, it was necessary to

diverge from the historiography already produced that favored positivist approaches.

From this research it can be said that the workers were present from the first ceramic installations in the municipality of Morro da Fumaça, operating the most diverse functions within this segment. We identified the unavoidable need for the female presence within the brick factories and the arbitrary form that they went through regarding their remuneration lower than that of men. It appears that history has tried to offer women the role of supporting, resigned and oppressed, for this reason, it is necessary to outline new proposals on how to write narratives, which does not segregate or subjugate any worker.

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