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## BRIEF STUDY OF WOMEN AND GENDER IN BRAZIL

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### ABSTRACT

In the present article we aim to present a brief historical and conceptual resumption on the studies of women and the emergence of the concept of gender in Brazil. We stress that this work is part of the research work Memories of women inserted in the labor market in Brazilian society: women in positions of judicial responsibility, of PhD in the Memory Program: Language and Society. To achieve our goal we opted for a bibliographical research, based on the main interlocutors Radl-Philipp (2010), Izquierdo (1998), Butler (2013) to conceptualize sex and gender; and Costa e Sardenberg (2008), Rago (1997), Figueiredo (2008) and Aud (2006) for the study of women and gender in Brazil. We considered in our studies that, despite advances, energetic attitudes are required in order to highlight the spaces in which women may subjective and have their rights respected and ensured within society in which they are inserted to establish meaningfully the reduction of social exclusion of women.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender came up to transpose the male and female vision and to set up a new form of female identity, because the gender relations are built through social-historical-cultural experiences (RADL-PHILIPP, 2010). We consider a conceptual and historic resumption necessary as a starting point for the discussions we intend to establish on this article, aiming to achieve our goal of presenting a brief historical and conceptual resumption on the studies of women and the emergence of the concept of gender in Brazil. It is worth analyzing that the different categories of gender and sex that have been built throughout history are marked with different theoretical-epistemological, ideological and political conceptions. Our reflections were based on different theoretical conceptions, based on the paradox between equality and difference and on the production processes of subjectivities, but in the present context of narratives of women inserted in the labor market, the conceptual differentiation between sex and gender is fundamental. Our analysis is precisely based on the meaning of the social construction of gender and gender identity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this we opted for a bibliographical research, based on the main interlocutors Radl-Philipp (2010), Izquierdo (1998), Butler (2013) and, to present the study of women and gender in Brazil, we dialogued with Silva (1992), Costa e Sardenberg (2008), Rago (1997), Figueiredo (2008), Hahner (1981), Soares (2008) and Aud (2006). It is worth noting that this work is part of a larger investigation developed in our doctoral thesis, in the Memory Program: Language and Society of Southwest State University of Bahia- UESB.

## DISCUSSION

According to Radl-Philipp (2010) the use of the concept of gender in the studies of women is dated from 1980s. But, in the 60s, we already had studies on the medical-psychological areas that mentioned the concept of gender. Therefore, in the context of women's study the concepts of sex and gender are introduced to determinate the character of male and female identities, their functions and social relations. According to Haraway, the sex/gender distinction is grouped around a

family of binomials that are part of a system of meanings “natural/culture, natural/history, natural/human, resource/product” (1994 apud IZQUIERDO, 1998, p. 27). This binary vision of male/female sex significantly contributes to the biological construction of social roles that originate a genital/biological matrix, providing a social perspective backed by reproductive sexuality and heterosexuality. According to the conception of sex and gender, for Izquierdo (1998), we can conceptualize sex as a category of biological and physiological characteristics presented between females and males. Meanwhile the gender is identified by the social, psychological and cultural configuration of biological sex. This classic concept of gender marks the differences between female and male. For Butler (2013), a subject unit may be contested by the conceptual paths of the gender by taking over in its construction of multiple interpretations for sex. Thus, “neither the gender is passively inscribed on the body, nor it is determined by nature.” (BUTLER, 2013, p. 23). In this perspective, we observe that the author deconstructs and denaturalizes the gender category through her contestation of the distinction between sex and gender; it allows analyzing gender without being implicitly linked to sex.

This mimetic view of gender and sex results in contesting the conceptual immutability of sex, being culturally constructed as well as gender. Thus, the conceptual differences of the sex and gender constructs turn out to be “discursive / cultural medium by which sexual nature or a natural sex is produced and established as pre-discursive, previous to culture, a literally neutral surface on which culture acts” (BUTLER, 2013, p. 25). For Silva (1992, p. 21), Brazilian society is a “dynamic and contradictory set of relations in which the exercise of male over female power prevails, with the aim of subjecting it to a situation of domination-exploitation”. Therefore, women's subordination is the first form of social oppression and destitution in human history. In contrast, in the Brazilian scenario we see that feminist critical awareness of the struggle for women's rights is described as recent, “outlining more clearly and broadly only in the last decades” of the 19th century. It is necessary to be clear that this universalization of women's subordination is presented in varying proportions depending on the societies, eras and social classes in which they are analyzed, as well as the circumstances and advances in the struggle for their rights. At the same time Europe and the United States experienced the feminine consciousness, on other Latin American countries the colonial and slave regime prevailed. In Brazil, feminist thinking emerged in the 19th century, introduced by Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta, pseudonym of Dionísia Gonçalves Pinto (1810-1885).

Nísia Floresta's thinking contrasted with the social mentality in the Brazilian scenario, in which the limitation of women's rights and submission within the relations and productions of a capitalist society prevailed, supported by the classification and separation of the sexes. Her writings contributed to break with the view of gender division culturally created throughout history. Thus, she considered that women had more skills than men to ensure the prevalence of public order. For this to happen, it would be necessary for women to have access to the educational process, the right to scientific knowledge. Floresta considered that scientific knowledge would be the only way to the rise and independence of women in Brazilian society. The conscience of feminism in Brazil assumes several conceptions in the struggle of the diverse rights of women, “it already was a suffragist, anarchist, socialist, communist, bourgeois and

reformist” (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 2008, p. 32). It is worth noting that in this struggle were included the right to vote, formal education, equal pay, the valorization of work, the control of their body and sexuality, as well as the construction of an egalitarian society. Costa and Sardenberg (2008, p. 33) report in their studies that slaveholding Brazil was an agrarian society, centered in the countryside, the situation of the bourgeois woman was precarious ‘above all because the patriarchal family was established according to the Portuguese Ordinances, giving her husband not only broad powers but also the cruel right to physically punish his wife.’ More specifically, women were confined to domestic obligations, subservience to their fathers and husbands, and reproduction. We stress that this precarious and oppressive condition was also experienced by women of the popular classes. Although they enjoyed greater personal freedom, their rights were not respected, restricting their functions to physical effort jobs to keep their offspring. “In way worse conditions lived the black women, slaves, victims of all kinds of oppression, exploitation and violence” (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 2008, p. 33). Therefore, the colonial period was marked by patriarchal power, invested by the father or husband, which were rarely questioned, and rare exceptions are presented in the history of “those who stood out for their atypical behavior, as 'heroines' - Joana Angélica, Maria Quitéria”, characterizing the timid existence of a feminist thinking (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 2008, p.33).

With the passage of the colonial period to the Republic, the changes of economic and social order are marked by the advent of industrialization, opening of ports to foreign trade, railways and urban growth, making evident the inequalities between men and women. For Costa and Sardenberg (2008, p. 35), in this period: “There is also a growing sense of national identity that, combined with liberal, bourgeois ideas, will foster a new economic, legal and political order in the country through the Independence of the Empire (1822); and, already in the second half of the century, the abolitionist campaigns, which would culminate with the end of the slave regime in 1888. The following year, in 1889, the proclamation of the Republic and the promulgation of a “new” Constitution, the 1891 one, elaborated according to the bourgeois liberal ideology”. We recall that through this Constitution, the universal suffrage was established, stating that all were equal before the law. This equality extended only to literate men, excluding the working-class male population and women. However, the first feminist manifestations were in favor of women's right to education and professionalization.

Women's aspirations for legal and political rights come with the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889. “The leaven of late 1880s Republican unrest not only strengthened feminist desire for political rights but also gave women additional arguments in favor of suffrage and opportunities to seek the vote. The Proclamation of the Republic, on November 15, 1889, initially offered the possibility of a more fluid and open political structure, with the extension of the vote, in theory, to all literate men, the issue of suffrage could become a more vital topic for educated feminists who experienced a sense of frustration and political deprivation (HAHNER, 1981, p. 80). The Proclamation of the Republic contributed to the emergence of various movements in favor of female suffrage, such as editorials *Female Sex and Female Voice* (1901), the foundation of the *Female Republican Party* (1910) and the creation of the *League for the Intellectual Emancipation of*

Women (1919), later becoming the Brazilian Federation for Female Progress - FBPF (1922). The FBPF had Bertha Lutz, responsible for the creation of several associations in the national territory and for the suffrage struggle at the parliamentary level in Brazil, women were granted the right to vote in 1932. "Its program was limited to combat discriminatory laws, prejudices and traditions that prevent equality between men and women in the context of bourgeois democracies" (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 2008, p. 38). The guarantee of the vote was part of one of the actions of the government of Getúlio Vargas, representing the industrial bourgeoisie, which sought popular support to strengthen its management. Among its populist actions was the creation of the Ministry of Labor, the female vote and the minimum wage.

In Brazil, in the early twentieth century, the departure of women to work in factories, offices and commerce is marked by a series of taboos and strategies "male, tacit agreements, unconfessed secrets that try to prevent their free circulation in public spaces or assimilation of practices that the bourgeois imagination has placed on the borders between freedom and interdiction" (RAGO, 1997, p. 63). In this sense, they do not open professional horizons for them, because education in general aims to prepare them for the domestic career. Working-class men themselves confabulate in directing women "into the private sphere of domestic life." (p. 64). In 1936, Bertha Lutz took over as deputy in the Federal Chamber, presenting the project Women Statute claiming better living conditions for women and social representation, including maternity leave and work protection. Confronting the FBPF, a bourgeois feminist movement developed in Brazil a mobilization of women from the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), known as leftist feminism. According to Costa and Sardenberg (2008, p. 39): "Its link with political events and conjunctures interested Stalinist world politics more than the interests of the women they claimed to represent. This was the case of the Women's Union, created to comply with the "popular front" policy established by the Third International in 1935; the Amnesty Women's Committee in 1945, which becomes the Women's Committee for Democracy; the Women's Institute of Constructive Service, established in 1946; the Brazilian Women's Federation in 1949 and several other entities. All always linked and in compliance with the PCB policy".

We affirm that these socialist movements did not specifically claim the rights of women, since its militancy reinforced the role of women in the family and society, reaffirming a social and ideological policy of oppression. Only after a few decades the PCB realized the neglect of feminist socialist movements, identifying the women oppression. In contrast to the bourgeois movement and the socialist feminist movement, the Feminist Communist League, led by Maria de Lourdes Nogueira, emerges as an anarchist movement in defense of the interests of Brazilian workers. Figueiredo (2008, p. 58) describes these movements as follows: "Liberal feminists, who would be the creators of neo-feminism, because they would continue the struggle of early-century suffragists, fighting for equal civil rights for all citizens without sex discrimination and emphasizing the equality and potential of both sexes, distorted by socio-cultural conditioning and limited access to power level by blocking the male group; the reformist party feminists, who had amnesty and political openness at a general level as priorities, and at the specific level, the creation of day care centers and protective legislation for female labor. These

include not only the majority of women from leftist groups, but also politically engaged academics and intellectuals, for whom the origin of gender symmetry continued to be the result of a capitalist system of production. Finally, the radical feminists believed that the nature of female oppression would be in the rise of patriarchy as an ideological system of power". These currents of feminist movements and other popular movements are silenced with the advent of the 1964 Military Coup, reappearing in the 1970s through student claims, debates about the roles played by men and women in society and sexual behaviors and conduct. This space conquered by women in the Humanities has become privileged because "It freed the scholar from a patriarchal ideological patrol and the disqualifying steps following feminist self-assertion. However, most academics could be classified as partisan feminist. Initially, the main themes studied were related to women in the workforce, women versus unions, politics, State, etc. Only later with radical feminists did the issue of oppression itself, its nature, its performance, sexual and economic exploitation within marriage, etc. begin to be addressed". (FIGUEIREDO, 2008, p.62).

It is noteworthy that the 70's was also marked by political amnesty, which contributed to the prisoners, fresh out of jails or returning from exile to seek effective participation in feminist movements. In 1975, representatives of the United Nations (UN) held a seminar commemorating the International Year of Women, discussing the condition of women in family and society and the sexual division of labor on the world stage. "In this regard, it should be remembered that despite the advances of the women's movement in Brazil, the situation of Brazilian women - including their level of awareness and social development - is still far below expectations, especially when considering those situated in the popular layers. In fact, only a small minority, generally belonging to the most favored classes, has benefited from the new spaces and conquered rights. Most women do not enjoy these advances, because they are not even aware of them. They live on the sidelines of the process of social change - a situation that is certainly not specific to women, but undoubtedly more serious in their case, due to the exploitation and oppression of gender as well as class. (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 2008, p. 32). In the 1980s, feminists began to use the term gender as a construct of an individual's identity. The gender category begins with the claims made by the feminist movement for equal rights. "Feminism deals, among the many relations of domination and oppression, with the relations of gender. These are power relations that are established throughout the social fabric, acting as invisible threads that cross social relations. Gender relations are also relations that involve all people, they are relations of dominance and subordination that are sustained by a rigid sexual division of labor and are expressed in specific forms of domination, both in the public and private spheres. Its importance is referred to not only the subject who suffers it, but also the first and most widespread power relationship that people live in almost all societies. It structures a form of behavior and a perception of society that is deformed beforehand, establishes a sort of perverted relationships that are present in every social fabric, and shelters an authoritarian conception of human relations and social action. Women, as a group that suffers specific forms of domination / subordination, are called to resist and transform this situation". (SOARES, 2008, p 236). The concept of gender contributed to the growth of the view on existing inequalities between men and women. In 1990, according to Auad (2006, p. 18) "A text

by Joan Scott, 'Genre: a useful category of historical analysis', has arrived in Brazil. This publication contributes to human sciences sectors recognizing the importance of social relations that establish based on perceived differences between males and females". Thus, we can affirm that the concept of gender was used in the context of feminist thinking to transpose the view of masculine and feminine and configure a new form of feminine identity, since gender relations are constructed through socio-historical-cultural experiences. In the last decades, women's movements have grown with the aim of legitimizing the female condition and transposing the stereotypical view of women submissive to men.

## Conclusions

The realization of this work came from our concerns about the female universe. We realized through our readings that the approaches present in academic studies relate different perspectives of gender identities, contributing to delimit their roles in society. We set our objectives to analyze how the speeches about women are constructed, as well as the configuration of the gender study in Brazil. We realized that history is constantly updated by social facts that reflect in the daily lives of men and women belonging to the environment in which they are inserted. The concepts are formed by the influences received. In this way, we cannot observe the concepts in isolation but inserted in a historical, cultural, political and social context. The same care should be taken when analyzing concepts such as sex / gender, feminism / sexism and man / woman that are settled in our social constructs. We realize the change of concepts in every culture, time, political system and geographic space, as well as its advances and setbacks. The conceptual variations were derived from the complexity of societies, which humanize the public through their claims and achievements and politicizing the private. Faced with so many epistemological currents, feminism as a doctrine that advocates equality between men and women, expresses the critical awareness of the redefinition of the role of women in the various spaces of the society. This critical awareness is built in the midst of the great transformations that initially occurred in the European countries, France and England, resulting from the change in the economic system. With capitalism the foundations of the liberal ideals of equality, liberty, and fraternity were built and brought by bourgeois democracy.

However, these ideals were still restricted to a man-centered bourgeois society. The woman was still reserved for private spaces directed at the roles of daughter, wife and mother, far from a public life. With the growth of the social movement by the capitalist economic system, in the relationship begins to be established the need for profit accumulation, especially within the private spaces - family. Thus, we realize that self-awareness arises among women of the middle classes, fighting for their public spaces in the most advanced countries. Societies with patriarchal characteristics were flooded with the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution, which contributed for men and women to sell their labor force in the market. However, the long history of women's submission has contributed to the process of lower wages, excessive and unhealthy working hours, women remained oppressed and exploited, and their rights to citizenship were denied. With the breakdown of domestic isolation and their participation in the world of work, a feeling of subversion against the exploitation to which they were subjected began to emerge, giving rise to feminist movements in their most varied ideological and

political formations, being the main trends in this historical period: bourgeois or suffragist feminism that demanded legal reforms based on equality in laws between men and women; and socialist feminism that did not recognize issues specific to women, but in a class movement without division. These two ideological currents dominated international feminism with moments of effervescence and disarticulation for over a century, giving way to a new feminist current in the 1960s, of the twentieth century, which comes to question behaviors, practices and patterns of women's role in family spheres, in the world of work and in society. These are contemporary movements aimed at transforming human relations of social, production and sexual discrimination, as well as providing a collective critical reflection on women's political praxis. We realize that the relations of differentiation between the public and the private existed only in the ideological world, as well as that the relations are neither natural nor biological, but built on their social and historical roots. The distinction between sex / gender contributes to differentiate the natural from the socially established, accentuating the social discriminations established by what may be suitable for women and men in societies. Social movements claiming feminist identity rights began in the first instance with the desire to have the right to vote, later these movements gained larger proportions signaling as claims of other social rights such as the recognition in the world of work and the fight against domestic violence.

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