

**CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION IN GENDER STUDIES IN BRAZIL:
HERITAGE AND CERAMIST WOMEN OF JEQUITINHONHA VALLEY**

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"For ere this the tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sickness which bring the Fates upon men; for in misery men grow old quickly. But the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered, all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men." (Hesiod, Works and Days, v. 90-95).

ABSTRACT

This article has the objective of discussing Gender Studies and its cultural construction in Brazil, alongside Heritage Studies. We have chosen to bring to the fore the women artisans of Jequitinhonha Valley because this case study brings essential elements about the construction of female and male local identities in a fluid point of view connected with social, cultural, historical heritage, space and craft issues. The ceramist women of the region let us notice the elastic element in identities that are not marked at all. The exchange of social and gender roles is constant, regardless of the much crystalized "community *pater familias*" that consolidates sex as a determinant of well-marked and sectorized functions. In the case of artisan ceramist women of Jequitinhonha region, there are breakings of paradigms,

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boundaries, asymmetrical barriers, function, craft, and gender construction, oscillating between the paternalist traditionalism of fixed functions and the fluid and dynamic social system of the daily economic demands.

KEYWORDS: gender studies; Material and immaterial heritage; ceramist women; Jequitinhonha Valley

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo trazer à tona as discussões sobre os estudos de gênero e sua construção cultural no Brasil, conjuntamente com estudos patrimoniais. Escolhemos problematizar as mulheres artesãs do Vale do Jequitinhonha, pois este estudo de caso traz elementos importantes sobre a construção das identidades locais femininas e masculinas de um ponto de vista fluido ligado às questões sociais, às questões culturais, questões de herança histórica, questões espaciais e de ofício. As mulheres ceramistas da região provocam a discussão de caráter plástico das identidades nada marcadas. A troca de papéis sociais e de gênero são constantes, apesar da tão cristalizada “comunidade *pater familias*”, consolidada no sexo como determinante de funções bem marcadas e setorizadas. No caso das mulheres artesãs ceramistas da região do Jequitinhonha há uma quebra de paradigmas, de fronteiras e de barreiras assimétricas de função de ofício e construção de gênero, oscilando entre o tradicionalismo paternalista de funções fixas e o fluido e dinâmico sistema social das demandas cotidianas econômicas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estudos de Gênero; Patrimônio material e imaterial; mulheres ceramistas; Vale do Jequitinhonha

INTRODUCTION

This discussion is based on gender issues in Latin America, especially in Brazil, to put light in to the historiographical and colonialist aspects of the transformations in the conceptual discourse of gender. Therefore, we discuss patriarchy and its consequences in power discourses, inserting the discussion of intersectionality and interdisciplinary studies. We understand that the construction of identities is given despite of the plurality of subjects in contrast to the static of traditions. The women ceramists of Vale do Jequitinhonha are part of the movement of traditions, identity and belonging. The legacy and the identity processes are completed and resignified in the materiality of the clay. We will present as main documentation the official dossier for 2018, the IEPHA, which brings us a trajectory of values in the logic of patrimonialization of the doings of the women of Jequitinhonha, both material and immaterial. Finally, the feminine that emerges from the craft of the Jequitinhonha doll makers goes beyond knowing how to make ceramics, it involves a whole social dynamic of

sustenance and cultural legacy that makes room for a masculinity built within the economic-social logic, valuing heritage and from the memory of a know-how coming from women in the region. Masculinity is added to traditions and resignified in the economic logic of contemporaneity. The fluidity of power dynamics opens, in this context, from a matrilineal ballast of trade dynamics.

GENDER STUDIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND BRAZIL

The questions discussed by Gender Studies in Brazil are increasing in all of the human sciences. From the 1930s onwards, with the ascension of the feminist movement on historiographic studies, gender research objects expanded on a large scale and, increasingly, cultural studies emerged and led to a transformation of the epistemological field in the past decades.

The studies about women throughout History are increasingly inserted into post-colonialism and post-modernism paradigms. The empirical and conceptual fields are increasingly reviewed, and the past and present History cross themselves in a dialectical movement of knowledge directed to the subject inserted at local communities, acting as agent subjects in cultural studies. Glaydson da Silva (2004) bring us back to Gilles Lipovetsky (2000) when pointing to us there is a profound change experienced in fights for feminine emancipation (DA SILVA, 2004, p. 353).

The post-colonial studies were guided by a rereading of colonial History, from the postmodernist studies focused on sexuality, moral order, and everyday life. It is a tendency that highlighted the women as historical subjects after the 1980s, particularly in Mexico and Brazil (SOCOLOW, 2015). Another important point in Latin America is the overlapping of three exceptionally dynamic subfields: Family History; a Social History influenced by the European micro-history and the "new Social History" in the USA, besides a Cultural History lineage strongly influenced by Foucault and intimately connected with the French History of mentalities and other theories of speech and representation that, on the other hand, were grouped under the label of post-structuralist or postmodernist studies. When these three subfields joined, the patriarchal family, for long recognized as a political and economic institution central in Latin America History, was re-examined by social historians,

demographers, and historical anthropologists interested in study of women, everyday life, and historical actors from non-elite (CAULFIELD, 2001).

According to Caulfield (2001), the innovations brought by the social sciences about women and gender throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s resulted in a large collection of data, accumulated on a wide variety of analyzed case studies about family and community life, and new manners to understand social identities and power structures in the History of Latin America.

GENDER AND PATRIARCHALISM IN BRAZIL

According to De Arruda Campos et al. (2008), the studies about Brazilian women were linked to the slavery order that legally existed until 1888, which “treated free and slave women in a very different way, prescribing unequal behaviors to both³.” (DE ARRUDA CAMPOS et al. 2008, p. 2). In Freyre’s *Brasil* (2003), the influence of family in the Colonial Brazil organization was directly linked to Portuguese Catholicism thoroughly articulated with politics and economics (FREYRE, 2003, p. 4). The domestic life, under the basis of the slavery patriarchalism, reinforced a violent and excluding universe, a process that still had consequences in the present.

Throughout History, it is possible to highlight the nineteenth-century feminist fights like, for example: the first schools for girls in Rio de Janeiro, a project accomplished by Nísia Floresta Augusta; the fight for universal suffrage, already in the beginning of the twentieth century, with the advent of the Brazilian Republic in 1889; it is also worth to emphasize the women's march alongside the General Strike from 1917 for better work conditions. The right to vote in Vargas era (around 1932) was a massive conquest for the feminist movements, which created a series of posterior movements related to the right to divorce, the labor rights, the emergence of the birth control pill in the 1960s, and the liberty to manage their own bodies. The maternal condition put the woman in the position of the sacrifice of the woman-being, and to add to this there was also the guilty of working outside home due to economic problems that were devastating the poorer population (DE OSTOS, 2012, p. 322)

³ From the original text: “*tratava mulheres livres de forma muito diferente de escravas, prescrevendo comportamentos desiguais a umas e outras*”

and women increasingly craving for autonomy and equal rights at society. In the 1970s and 1980s, the feminist movements won much more prominence, leaving a fighting legacy for the 21st century, with more plural questions, matured in the gender diversity and intersectionality linked to black women and social movements in social media, reaching an extensive theoretical and methodological discussion in academic researches.

The fight and the highlighted place of woman in the Brazilian family can be traced back a long way, even considering that it was linked to daily tasks and more restricted to the domestic ambient. In Colonial Brazil, for example, the female tasks were directly linked to manual works. According to Lages (2007), the roles attributed for women were exclusive to their gender, that is, the reproduction of social roles related to sewing, the kitchen, and/or others manual works, the social power relation was in agreement to the operation of the social rules (LAGES, 2007, p. 17 quoted in BARBOSA; D'ÁVILA, 2014, p. 142).

According to D'Ávila (2014), the artisan woman, while a woman with a craft, is in daily contact with the ideology⁴ of naturalizing sexed and unequal social roles (D'AVILA, 2014, p. 143). For Hirata (2007), the work division has two sectorized organizing principles, in which men and women works has a hierarchic principle of aggregate value and valorization of the male work instead of the feminine. The naturalization of this ideology lowers the female labor in this hierarchical scale, referring to the biological sex the social roles marked by the patriarchalism (HIRATA, 2007, p. 599 quoted in D'AVILA, 2014).

GENDER AND THE PATRIARCHAL POWER IN THE BRAZILIAN SOCIETY

It is crucial when we are treating gender issues to point out that the construction of identity and patriarchal power has an origin from a historical construction of the western society and its power relations. According to Bourdieu, misogyny is a specific type of power relation feedbacking itself secularly in modern and contemporary societies, and it is something constructed and nourished by western culture (BOURDIEU, 2012), reaching significative echoes in Brazilian society.

⁴ According to Marilena Chauí (2017), the ideology has fundamental traces consisted of taking ideas apart from the historical and social reality, in a way that the ideas explain the reality, whereas the same reality makes the ideas comprehensive. Chauí, Marilena. *O que é ideologia*. Brasiliense, 2017.

The gender, identity, and heritage issues outlined by women derive from a historical construction of the societies and its power relations. Bourdieu (2012) also points out that the idea of misogyny is endorsed by cultures⁵. The familiar structure associated with the *pater familias* condition women to historical submission, especially in the westernized world. The secondary role given to women results in inequalities marked by gender differences in social spheres.

For Foucault, in *Microfísica do poder*⁶ (1979), power cannot be understood as a sort of "entity" or as an idea or theoretical identity but comprehended as a concrete praxis of world actions. The multiple daily directions of actions from institutions are spaces for exerting power (FOUCAULT, 1979). The patriarchy is a political-social institution of masculine domination in contemporary societies, also acting in political, economic, social, and familiar institutions. The valorization of men's power, according to Millet, reinforces itself in the biological determinism of the differences between male and female sexes (MILLET, 1969, p. 58). The patriarchy support and manifests itself, according to Sylvia Walby (1990) in its public and private shapes. In this point of view, women are controlled in the private family sphere, being put aside from essential decisions that compose the public sphere. For Walby, there is women's access to public and private spaces, but the invisible subordination to which women are subjected, that occurs in ideological and psychological levels, put them apart from the decisive power that is experienced in the public sphere (WALBY, 1990, p. 2).

Judith Butler bring us the idea of existing universalist patriarchy that has a conception connected with the oppression, whose chauvinist dependence is marked by the continuity processes and reinforced by the oppression thought, necessary for the construction of

⁵ The introduction of the culture concept will happen in ethnology as well in Anthropology under two different conceptions, on the one hand, the universalist, defined by B. Taylor in the nineteenth century, approaching knowledge, belief, art, moral, customs and other capacities acquired by the man in society, under the universalist ethnology sphere. On the other hand, F. Boas, from anthropologic studies *in situ* will approach "the cultures" in the plural, under particularist paradigm, that is, culture as particular, held in cultural specificity. Couche, Denys. *A noção de cultura nas ciências sociais*, Trad. Viviane Ribeiro. Ed. EDUSC, 1999.

⁶ A collection of articles, interviews, and courses by Michel Foucault. The title in English can be translated as *Microphysics of Power*.

asymmetry between male and female, sustained by the historically reinforced patriarchal power (BUTLER, 2003, p. 31).

The feminine identity formed itself in the middle of these historical realities, and women fight for more participation in public and political life in the western world as a whole, but in Brazil, specifically, the fight increases in the proportion that women understand their important role in society.

HERITAGE, MEMORY AND FLUID IDENTITIES CONSTRUCTION

Stuart Hall reflects on the subject throughout History and points out that there are three conceptions of identity, namely: the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the postmodern subject (HALL, 2015, p. 10). For Thomas Laqueur, the biological determinism was linked to the 19th century positivist school of thought, redefining "women's nature", and, by contrast, men's nature as well (LAQUEUR, 1987 quoted in MATOS, 2001). The enlightenment subject had a fixed identity and, according to the period's precept, was determined by their capacity of reason and consciousness. The sociological subject, as is in its name, had their support from other subjects, in actions and relations that were accepted and performed socially. The postmodern subject is unsteady, suture diverse identities, and live-in new processes.

The identity conceptions, from the recognizing of others, come into existence with studies approaching the plurality of the subjects. Bauman ponders that identity and its multiple shapes from the liquidity prerogative of a fluid society, which, in turn, contrasts with what seems to be static, the traditions and the constant (BAUMAN, 1998). The non-linear time postulates the non-permanence, where uncertainty and fast and inconsistent changes hover. The memories and traditions put themselves in the crisis of historiography from a new conception of historical time. According to Le Goff, the practice of historiography is diffuse in

the past, and although memory⁷ is not History, it is an object of the same that gives voice to orality, more linked to traditions (LE GOFF, 2013, p. 51).

The case studies of ceramist artisan women frame them into a tradition, identity, and belonging movement promoted by the material and immaterial legacy. In other words, the support and appreciation for this legacy and the identity construction happen due to the "moulding the clay" craft and the construction of memories and spoken language. Despite the legacy and the memory bonds, the identity processes break over time, leading to what can be observed at women communities given the issues and economic dimension of the local. The women then acquire vital importance in the community, and the manual craft, previously smaller, has more primordial and aggregated value in the community. In Brazil, this phenomenon is widespread in the women's pottery craft, which gives new meaning, providing a voice for the women and masters that detain the local cultural legacy power.

The postmodernism reflections about the construction of fluid identities, connect themselves with women through gender and power issues at communities. These reflections make these case studies with artisan women ideal paradigms to the inversion of the patriarchal logic of power. The material culture moulded by women perpetuate the traditional memory of the collective and brings a legacy built in the conquest of women's space, which casts doubt on the crystalized, though fallacious, family nucleus that is concentrated on the figure of *pater familias*. The makings of these women break the static order of these fake ideals propelled by years in western society, exalting and enunciating their due place from "know-how" with clay.

THE WOMEN AND THE TRADITIONAL BRAZILIAN HANDICRAFT: A REFLECTION ABOUT ART AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT

The women's representation as an artist is little discussed, just as the female artistic production in Brazil. Ana Mae Barbosa, Brazilian educator, a pioneer in art-education, said she does not find something that "dealt about the artistic production of women or their

⁷ A collection of articles, interviews, and courses by Michel Foucault. The title in English can be translated as *Microphysics of Power*.

appreciative ambit to complete our multicultural panorama⁸." (BARBOSA, 1999, p. 15, *own translation*). Such artistic-cultural production still struggles with capital purposes, and neither enjoys gender equity or social valorization. Which is easily noted by the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases regulation, which does not differentiate Art from other areas of knowledge, and approximate and limit it to the "Languages" area. There is no highlight of Art in basic formal education, which leads us to think about the existence of a positivist and technical heritage in this aspect.

[...] Is verified that Art, historically produced and in production by humanity, still doesn't has been sufficiently taught and learned by most of Brazilian youth, because still appears as reproduction instead of reflection in the basic schooling without without re-signifying the contents covered or re-elaborating the knowledge in Art by teachers and students⁹. (VIEIRA, 2006, p. 68, *own translation*).

In this way, there is even less evidence of the artisan or artist women, compared to the masculine figure performing these same activities. Even Art History has clear oppression marks. Women that obtained some relevance or recognition because of their artistic makings were few, but for these, there was a justification tied to a male company. If not justified, it suffered from contempt, like that of Hans Hoffmann, who according to G. Levin (2011) in a biographical work, said once to Lee Krasner, expressionist painter: "This is so good that is impossible to know that a woman made it¹⁰." (LEVIN, 2011, *own translation*).

Art, even if marked and oppressed, has already been a study object of social transformation. Many studies demonstrate how art can modify lives and communities. Additionally, the gender passed and passes by a re-signifying process. Bourdieu brings up the discussion about the male order by evidencing the androcentric view, built symbolically to ratify the male domination, grounded in the social, work, or art division, putting women into

⁸ From the original text: "tratasse da produção artística da mulher ou de seu viés apreciativo para completar nosso panorama multicultural."

⁹ From the original text: verifica-se que a Arte, historicamente produzida e em produção pela humanidade, ainda não tem sido suficientemente ensinada e apreendida pela maioria dos jovens brasileiros, pois ainda surge como reprodução e não como reflexão na escolarização básica sem ressignificação dos conteúdos abordados nem reelaboração dos saberes em Arte por professores e alunos.

¹⁰ From the original text: "Isso é tão bom que não dá pra saber que foi feito por uma mulher".

the inside spaces of home and exercising non-recognized manual works, *a priori*, as a craft of social value (BOURDIEU, 2012, p. 18).

THE ARTISAN WOMEN FROM JEQUITINHONHA VALLEY: HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



FIGURE 1: Vale do Jequitinhonha and its microregions Source: Portal Polo Jequitinhonha apud Dossier IEPHA.

The handicraft in the Jequitinhonha Valley is recognized as an immaterial heritage of the state of Minas Gerais¹¹. This recognition was made in 2018, after the elaboration of a careful dossier, made by IEPHA¹², along with Instituto Sociocultural Valemais. The results of the field, historical and bibliographical surveys brought documental deepening, besides the registration of 122 people (at the time) that performed the craft in 21 municipalities from the upper, mid, and lower Jequitinhonha River. The interviewed were mainly from Turmalina, Minas Novas, Ponto dos Volantes, Caraí, Itinga, Itaobim, and Araçuaí, where the most highlighted productions were concentrated. The dossier points out the need for this recognition as a social improvement factor and culture preservation (JORNAL ESTADO DE MINAS GERAIS, 2018).

¹¹ <http://www.iepha.mg.gov.br/>

¹² The Instituto Estadual do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Minas Gerais, Iepha-MG, is a foundation bounded by the state's Secretary of Culture that acts in the field of the cultural heritage.

The dossier reunites data of diverse types of production, but such handicrafts preserve something in common, the craft always respects the use of nature as raw material. According to *Dossiê de Registro do Artesanato em barro do Vale do Jequitinhonha: saberes, ofício e expressões artísticas em Minas Gerais* (2018):

Each of these communities has its own features, which mark the specificities existing in the production of its pieces, such as, for example, the color tones, the base of the pigments (clay, ore and plants), the expressions, among others¹³.

The dossier proves that the artisanal craft of clay has always been an expressive activity in the Minas Gerais' society, and also demonstrates that the cultural formation was influenced not only by the indigenous people that inhabited Brazil before the invasion of the Portuguese but also by the colonizer's and African people's tradition. It is recognizable that diversity is a fundamental feature of production and craft. However, during many years the handicraft was only socially accepted when produced by women. This thought still struggles with the new significations about femininity and masculinity.

The dossier (2018) affirms that in the region, in the 19th century, ceramic was a feminine activity, and it remained so until the beginning of the 20th century. Only from the second half of this century, men were observed in this activity. According to IEPHA (2018), from the second half of the seventies, the so-called women artisans produced domestic utilities, such as clay pans. To them it was granted the title of "artisan masters" of clay craft. The fact that they preserved the technique taught by their predecessors justifies the title.

It is known that the Jequitinhonha region passed by times of extreme poverty, lack of resources, lack of public politics, exacerbated exploration of natural resources, such as ores and the eucalyptus planting. It is known even today as a region with terrible socio-economical indexes and it was because of this that CODEVALE was created in the seventies which, in 1971, homologates the Regulamento Geral da Comissão do

¹³ From the original text: "*Cada uma dessas comunidades apresenta características próprias, que marcam as especificidades existentes nas produções de suas peças, como, por exemplo, as tonalidades de cores, a base dos pigmentos (barro, minério e plantas), as expressões, entre outros.*"

Desenvolvimento do Vale do Jequitinhonha that aimed to assist the region's development with features already presented by its inhabitants, the most highlighted being the clay craft.

At that time, according to studies carried out by the Fundação João Pinheiro, clay handicrafts were the fourth most common type in Minas Gerais, appearing in 47.3% of Minas Gerais municipalities, and the Jequitinhonha Valley region was the main producer, with occurrence clay crafts in 83.3% of the municipalities. In the other regions, the rates were much lower than this, "varying between 65.4% in Region VIII, of Rio Doce and Mucuri, and 26.2% in Region III, of the South of Minas". According to the document, of all the main types of handicrafts, ceramics was "what reveals (revealed) greater specialization by region", as "the concentration, both quantitative and qualitative, in the Jequitinhonha Valley region was clear¹⁴. (DOSSIÊ IEPHA 2018 quoted in QUIRINO, p. 45, 1979, own translation).

Another highlighted point the Dossier presents is that, besides the obvious need for jobs, cultural heritage, and abundance of raw material, the incentive and improvement of production by local residents, both men and women, was also done due to diverse enhancement courses that arrived in the Jequitinhonha Valley after the decree and the development commission established.

Art, nature, and culture are the networks that sustained and sustain the economic balance of the region. Though the gender functions were and are marked by social prejudices, it is undeniable to observe such fact in the speeches by the residents and artisans. Besides that, the own declaration on the Dossier says "the handicraft in clay at Jequitinhonha Valley is originated from the entanglement of life, nature, culture, and art¹⁵." (DOSSIÊ IEPHA 2018, *own translation*).

¹⁴ From the original text: "Naquela época, segundo os estudos realizados pela Fundação João Pinheiro, o artesanato em barro era o quarto tipo mais frequente em Minas Gerais, aparecendo em 47,3% dos municípios mineiros, e a região do Vale do Jequitinhonha era a principal produtora, com ocorrência do artesanato em barro em 83,3% dos municípios. Nas demais regiões os índices eram muito inferiores a este, "variando entre 65,4% na Região VIII, do Rio Doce e Mucuri, e 26,2% na Região III, do Sul de Minas". Segundo o documento, de todos os principais tipos de artesanato, a cerâmica era "o que revela[va] maior especialização por região", pois era "nítida a concentração, tanto quantitativa como qualitativa, na região do Vale do Jequitinhonha."

¹⁵ From the original text: "que o artesanato em barro no Vale do Jequitinhonha é oriundo do entrelaçamento da vida, natureza, cultura e arte."



FIGURE 2: Terezinha Gomes modeling the arm of a doll, community of Cachoeira do Fanado, Minas Novas. Source: Iepha/MG Collection, IEPHA DOSSIER, 2018.

The implemented actions at the time not only resulted in apprenticeships, attachments, and detachments but brought new arrivals and made the region's handicraft gain the media.

In general, and, even with the imposed contradictions and challenges, the reported transformations led to the valuation and dissemination of handicrafts in the Jequitinhonha Valley, which, consequently, enabled both the financial return and “a considerable increase in the number of ceramists working in the region, but also contributed to the settlement of the population in the countryside¹⁶. (DOSSIÊ IEPHA 2018 quoted in DALGLISH 2014, p. 13, own translation)

According to the national law, through a national decree, craft and the knowledge historically ran on Jequitinhonha Valley characterize itself by its knowledge, celebrations, ways of expression, and places:

Knowledge: crafts and ways of doing (knowledge and ways of doing rooted in the daily lives of communities); Celebrations: rituals and parties that mark the collective experience of work, religion, entertainment and other social life practices; Forms of expression: literary, musical, plastic, scenic and

¹⁶ From the original text: “Em geral e, mesmo com algumas contradições e desafios impostos, as transformações relatadas levaram a valorização e divulgação do artesanato do Vale do Jequitinhonha, o que, conseqüentemente, possibilitou tanto o retorno financeiro como “um aumento considerável no número de ceramistas atuantes na região, como também contribuiu para a fixação da população no campo.”

playful manifestations; Places: markets, fairs, shrines, squares and other spaces where collective cultural practices are concentrated and reproduced¹⁷. (Decreto no. 3.551/2000 / Lei no. 7.285/2011, own translation).

It is problematized in this order: what are the systemic changes processes in the social, political, and economic spheres in which ceramist women are put as protagonists of a tradition passed as a legacy? It is necessary to rethink these elements, refuting the naturalist concept linked to the gender and distancing from the social positivist effort. For this, it is vital to understand not only the systemic changes that bring the hypothesis of the female empowerment but also characterize which are the triggers of the gender role changes, the speeches built in the bodies and official institutes registers about the two groups, realize the identity implications imposed to the women and comprise how these women keep the cultural traditions.

THE CASE OF THE WOMEN ARTISAN FROM JEQUITINHONHA VALLEY: CRAFT AND FEMALE VALORIZATION

The artisan women's communities from Jequitinhonha Valley are inserted in the contemporaneity and the construction of their repertoire in a community far from large metropolis and urban centers. A story is shared about women who have shaped themselves in the traditional "know-how" craft, producing material culture based on the cultural construction memory in accord with the identity construction and deconstruction, very connected with the colonial and patriarchal past. According to Sônia Matos (2001), the meanings of the dichotomy male-female produced by the subject operate in the speeches and gender and identity practices. For the ceramist women that live and interact in the production spots, the gender recognition happens in the difference, that in its turn is rooted in the symbolic division of gender present in the produced objects, in the colours, shapes, and emotions (BOURDIEU, 1995 quoted in MATOS, 2001, p. 59).

¹⁷ From the original text: *Saberes: ofícios e modos de fazer (conhecimentos e modos de fazer enraizado no cotidiano das comunidades); Celebrações: rituais e festas que marcam a vivência coletiva do trabalho, da religiosidade, do entretenimento e de outras práticas da vida social; Formas de expressão: manifestações literárias, musicais, plásticas, cênicas e lúdicas; Lugares: mercados, feiras, santuários, praças e demais espaços onde se concentram e reproduzem práticas culturais coletivas.*

The doll makers from Jequitinhonha Valley, for example, have a craft specificity and highlight in this region. The documentary “Izabel Mendes da Cunha – mãos moldes” brings up the story of a woman producing pottery dolls well-known around the world. Representations that, according to Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural de Arte e Cultura Brasileiras (2020), compose the broad universe of Izabel's imaginary: female figures, brides – these the most valorized and well-known –, breastfeeding mothers, men and women into party costumes, among other motifs. The pieces have a richly detailed physiognomy, with hairdos, jewelry, and some paintings representing lace.

MISTRESS IZABEL, DOLL MAKER FROM JEQUITINHONHA VALLEY – HANDICRAFT AND GENDER RECOGNITION

Even with long years of work, the effective recognition of the artisan women and other artisans of the region is only beginning with the handicraft encouragement campaigns in regions like Jequitinhonha Valley. Among these campaigns, there is the creation of the culture division in the Comissão do Desenvolvimento Vale de Jequitinhonha (CODEVALE¹⁸) in 1972, and the installation of an advanced campus of the Projeto Rondon¹⁹ in Araçuaí, in

¹⁸ A criação da Comissão de Desenvolvimento do Vale do Jequitinhonha (CODEVALE) ocorreu em 1964 e objetivava a incorporação do sertão mineiro aos projetos políticos do estado de Minas Gerais. Era uma autarquia de âmbito estadual, inspirada na Superintendência de Desenvolvimento do Nordeste (Sudene), agência do governo federal que buscava solucionar os problemas socioeconômicos dessa outra região. O Vale possuía baixos indicadores socioeconômicos, trazia uma imagem de uma região ao subdesenvolvida. Assim, colocando a região nos planos do governo pretendia-se mudar essa situação. Para tanto, a Comissão tinha 20 anos para levantar dados, planejar e instituir as melhorias. (IEPHA, 2018).

The creation of the Vale do Jequitinhonha Development Commission (CODEVALE) took place in 1964 and aimed to incorporate the Minas Gerais hinterland into the political projects of the state of Minas Gerais. It was a statewide autarchy, inspired by the Superintendence for the Development of the Northeast (Sudene), an agency of the federal government that sought to solve the socioeconomic problems of that other region. The Valley had low socioeconomic indicators, it brought an image of an underdeveloped region. Thus, placing the region in the government's plans was intended to change this situation. To do so, the Commission had 20 years to gather data, plan and institute improvements. (IEPHA, 2018).

¹⁹ O Projeto Rondon foi criado pelo Decreto n.º 62.927, nasceu de uma ideia de um grupo de estudantes e professores que objetivava conhecer a realidade amazônica no então território federal de Rondônia, para que assim pudessem propor ações de melhorias. O projeto se expandiu para outras partes do território brasileiro com o passar dos anos e hoje responde ao Ministério da Defesa, em parceria com o Ministério da Educação, o Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Agrário, o Ministério da Saúde, o Ministério do Meio Ambiente, o Ministério da Integração Nacional, o Ministério do Esporte e a Secretaria de Governo da Presidência da República. (AMATO, 2015 e PORTAL MINISTÉRIO DA DEFESA, 2021).

The Rondon Project was created by Decree No. 62.927, was born from an idea of a group of students and teachers who aimed to get to know the Amazon reality in the then federal territory of Rondônia, so that they could propose improvement actions. The project has expanded to other parts of the Brazilian territory over the years and today responds to the Ministry of Defense, in partnership with

1973. Such organizations led to the exhibition of Mistress Izabel's works in São Paulo in 1975, at SESC²⁰, for the first time.

Despite having participated for years of many collective art exhibitions and having received, in 2004, a prize by Latin America's UNESCO, Mrs. Izabel only made her first individual exhibition in 2009, with 85 years. We also highlight that she received the Ordem do Mérito Cultural, in 2005, and the prize Culturas Populares, in 2009, both from Brazilian ministry of Culture.

This region is internationally known for its economic poverty and natural richness. Besides the ceramist women, other crafts such as weaving the braid with vegetable fibres and works in lace, leather, wood, and embroideries are also noted (MATOS, 2001, p. 58). Everyday activities built together with local handicrafts produced, because of the social isolation traits, system of family and sponsorships, among other elements that are common in the configuration of identities historically perceived in colonial inheritances. Florestan Fernandes, in his work "A integração do negro na sociedade de classes: ensaio de interpretação sociológica" (2008) brings out the population's rarefaction in the spaces that are isolated from the interior of the so-called "caipira" and interiorized culture, and the dynamics of rustic family groupings that are much more restricted to a spatial sphere (CANDIDO, 2001 apud FERNANDES, 2008, p. 215). Cândido identifies the sphere of nuclear family erected in the standards of the *pater familias*, hierarchical in the domestic figure of *compadrio* (FERNANDES, 2008, p. 216).

As an acting subject, Izabel was not exempted of symbols passed through generations that formed the conception and understanding of the individual, through similarities and strong marking of the differences (CANCLINI, 1997). Izabel, in one of her speeches in the documentary, starts to describe which gender was chosen to sculpt from

the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social and Agrarian Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of National Integration, the Ministry of Sports and the Government Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic (AMATO, 2015 e PORTAL MINISTÉRIO DA DEFESA, 2021).

²⁰ By our translation, SESC (Serviço Social do Comércio) is a Brazilian private institution focused primarily on the social well-being of its employees and family, but open to the community in general. It acts in the areas of education, health, leisure, culture, and assistance.

clay. There is no concern or nuisance in the way of speech, only a description that seems evident to her, who recognizes the female because of its trace forms.

In this incorporation of what “being a woman” is, one can bring up Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, which describes a system of durable dispositions, passed from generation to generation. A structuring of practices and reproductions, that when incorporated link themselves to naturalism. According to the author, once the rules are internalized, the subject will act without worrying or paying attention to what should do and speak (BOURDIEU, 1989).

According to Canclini (1997), it is possible to observe the speeches built through institutions as State and Church. Izabel, the doll maker from Jequitinhonha Valley and well-known artist, was taught from hegemonic concepts that pervade the patronizing ideals, that by its turn, are found historically crystallized and marked by the permanence experienced in the speech naturalization *habitus* (CANCLINI, 1997; BOURDIEU, 1989).

FEMALE RECOGNIZING: THE FLUIDITY OF THE GENDER ASSIGNMENTS ON CLAY MOULDING

For women artisans in Jequitinhonha, there is not, theoretically, anything to discuss regarding to the male and female physical traces, and there is even less discussion about their protagonism condition in their community. The masculinities and femininities assigned to women and men mould the gender transience and mobility, which can be thought and reworked in concrete subjects, seeking overlapping actions and categories that are dynamic, even with strong cultural frontiers and crystalized in patronizing masculinity. It is possible to observe this dynamic and fluidity in the ceramist’s craft involving men in practice, without fixity (MATOS, 2001, p. 72).

The male and female spaces, according to Matos (2001), are well marked in the Jequitinhonha Valley. The opposition between the farm and the house, from the tough work (from the farm) linked to males and the light work linked to females, is latent and apparent. However, when there is an inherent need, a survival social demand, the men work with ceramic; therefore, gender demarcation is diluted (MATOS, 2001).

The identity built and reframed by these artisan women casts doubt in the History of female gender through a limiting concept. Specific actions legitimize the gender in hard standards, perpetuating social and economic conditions in a determined environment.

THE MASCULINITY AND LOCAL GENDER TRANSFORMATIONS: TOPSY-TURVY PATRIARCHALISM – ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND GENDER FLUIDITY

The Brazilian rural caboclo communities²¹ were linked to the material domestic economy of making potteries traditionally. The women ceramist communities from Jequitinhonha Valley have encouraged the utilitarian production for economic purposes about thirty years ago through the entities Mãos de Minas and the Codevale and autonomous merchants. The continuity, according to Moreira (2007), would not be possible without the production encouragement due to the economic market, which is increasingly valorizing traditional objects from Jequitinhonha Valley (MOREIRA, 2007, p. 85).

The gender practices and speeches, according to Sônia Matos (2001) are rooted in the symbolic metaphor of the male-female dichotomy, in which women naturalize the distinctions in gender division in the work's and craft's world. The ceramist craft visibility is linked to domestic space makings, in principle, connected, by nature, with the female world (BOURDIEU, 1995, p. 96).

Sônia Matos, in her article titled "*Artefatos de gênero na arte do barro: masculinidades e femininidades*"²² shows empirically, that is, by interviews, craft inversion examples, inside the logic of valorization of the ceramist craft between the men of the community. The construction of the patriarchal wedding speech and the men and women social places in the community construction are linked to the act of providing for a family, so that the capacity and duty of sustaining women and children are given for the man (MATOS, 2001). To think about social discursive issues of gender, Foucault brings us back to the sexuality beyond psychology, since it is possible to socially build expressions of desire,

²¹ Direct reference to small rural producers of historic occupation" In: Lima, Deborah Magalhães. "A construção histórica do termo caboclo: sobre estruturas e representações sociais no meio rural amazônico." *Novos cadernos NAEA* 2.2 (2009).

²² Free translation: "Gender artifacts in clay art: masculinities and femininities".

emotions, motivations, corporal conducts, and practices that mould the individual in a physical and psychological state. This model is supported by discourses and normative practices of the family and the social order, rooted by the determinist thought, reigning in the 19th century and a considerable part of the 20th century (FOUCAULT, 1997). Thus, the discourses prevail in the local communities as in the Jequitinhonha Valley, postulating values, social and cultural rules to men and women.

However, there are important driving forces that may invert the order of values, in which, in certain moments, there are gender mobility and transience effected by subjects submerged into the variations of the universe of economic needs. The sexes denaturalization in the ceramic craft is seen under the non-perennial perspective, or we can say seasonal of gender borders. The economic necessity forces the dynamic of the roles and social identities' liquidity (BAUMAN, 1995). Sônia Matos exemplifies that the owners of small rural properties, category of the highest concentration of ceramists, are marked by the inversion between the spaces of the "house" and the "field", by the inversion of the services considered light, linked to the woman and of the services considered harsh, linked to the men. The dilution of the limits happens on the called economic "precision", where there is not work division by the sex.

According to Matos (2001), the men ceramists learn to work with clay with their mothers. However, they do not assume the craft with pride, to not be excluded from the logic of the social discourse characterized by the patriarchal rules, of biological basis, that put them in a level above the woman, having the right to make exceptions and inversions in the "precision" ambit, according to Strathern (1992, p. 178). In the Jequitinhonha Valley, many men started to dedicate themselves to the components modelling, tradition that remain and unconsciously introject the female character. The man works as an auxiliary in this craft since the holders of the know-how in making ceramics are the women, the local master artists (MATOS, 2001, p. 73). The modernity and the economic needs have attenuated the gender and craft social roles, bringing the men for the clay modelling, a responsibility that resolves around financial issues related to the object, for example, the worry about the non-sale of their work in ceramics.

Sonia Matos' work, which takes into account the interviews with the women artisan ceramists from Jequitinhonha, brings the experiences in orality, allowing us to comprehend the gender borders. The male/female categories are fluid, even if they are crystallized in the rigid patronizing logic. Adaptations in the body are necessary for the craft, for example, adaptation of the "big and heavy hands" for modelling, learning how to do a craft that requires delicacy and accuracy, category of the female behaviour (MATOS, 2001; ALMEIDA, 1970). The risk of losing masculinity directs the men to craft reordering, rehabilitation, and reframing. To this end, many men started to make sculpture, because this activity, as the opposite of the pottery practice craft, traditionally feminized, brings prestige and is framed in the male universe. The sculptures are objects of greater prestige, since the elite attributes excellent value to the sculptures, elevating the men ceramist status, and in turn, mark gender distinction in the clay craft.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

It is important to rescue that the cultural and heritage construction produced by women in the Jequitinhonha Valley has a well-marked cultural identity in the experiences and processes that pervades local and popular traditional models. These are also inserted in the contemporaneity of the global context, marked by the transnationality of the economic markets, that produce material goods for symbolic consumption (MARQUES, 2000, p. 126).

The gender issues, discussed under the material perspective experienced in the lives of women and men under the local patriarchy, bounce the fluidity of the identities and the malleability of the adaptations of convenient speech. The individuals in the discourse do not realize the complexity of the social relations, and the necessity of new practical assessments in thinking about gender categories, because of the reasons exposed above, is necessary by the force of the symbolical consumption and the economic logic of community sustenance. The reflection concerning the clay art transmitted by women, who in turn, detain the status of masters and local artists, makes room for the incorporation of the masculine values, without, apparently, shaking the patronizing basis discourse, already crystallized and well-founded.

The gender differences perpetuated into the sectorized crafts are molded to the necessity of economic survival in a contemporary and global world. The pottery craft marks the feminine position at community; even this marking is open to the mobility in the relations with the masculine. The masculinity is aggregated to the know-how traditionally constructed by the female memory, maintaining the traces and wisdom passed by the generations of women in Jequitinhonha. What is observed is an experience of great impact and female gender marking in the symbolic sphere. The male reframing and adaptation are evidence of the feminine matrix force in the community.

The pottery materiality, in its ways thought by women, is and was standardized in the female sphere inside the community. The elastic malleability of the craft dynamics, dictated in the economic necessity of the “precision” promote from a few decades the insertion of masculine universe. The ceramic universe shows its self as a resistance channel lived in the memories perpetuated by masters from Jequitinhonha. Thus, when we think of perpetuated memories, we associate only with material heritage, linked to wealth, which are inherited or have some affective value. It is necessary to emphasize also that refers to the things produced by our ancestors, which result in experiences and memories, collective or individual.

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