

## Women and Labor in Brazil The History of an Issue and Prospects for the Future<sup>1</sup> — CRISTINA BRUSCHINI

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The issue of women and labor was the point of departure for studies on women in the Brazilian academe. In the late 1960s and early 1970s studies that became classics in the literature on women such as those by Saffioti<sup>2</sup> and Blay<sup>3</sup> approached the labor issue and quickly became obligatory references in Brazilian universities. The Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC) which had become a major political forum in the early 1970s for lack of alternative spaces included women's studies in its program in 1972 with emphasis on the labor issue. At the Carlos Chagas Foundation whose Research

Department began to open up to the issue beginning with a concern for educational issues seminars were held on women's conditions. In the first such debate in 1974 the issue of women and labor was discussed on the basis of an analysis of Saffioti's book *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes* (Women in Class Society). The year 1975 International Women's Year was a milestone in that there was a major boost in production of studies on the issue.

Still as Costa Barroso and Sarti pointed out<sup>4</sup> it was the appearance of feminism as a social movement that laid the ground work for the legitimacy of women's condition as an object of study. According to these authors the existence of an organized women's movement established a historical turning point whereafter scholarly production on women in the Social Sciences became broader and more critical. Although not all researchers involved in the issue declared themselves feminists or adhered to feminism the latter legitimized the issue as a scientific question. While interest and research flourished groups were formed to reflect and raise political demands.

Among a number of other topics related to the women's condition the labor issue was a priority in gender studies having been the first to receive a stamp of legitimacy even in Brazilian universities. This probably occurred in the first place because labor has always been a predominant theme in sociological theory. Second it was an

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<sup>2</sup> SAFFIOTI Heleieth *A Mulher na Sociedade de Classes mito e realidade* Sao Paulo Livraria Quatro Artes 1969.

<sup>3</sup> BLAY Eva *A Mulher e o Trabalho Qualificado na Industria Brasileira* Sao Paulo USP Department of Social Sciences School of Philosophy Literature and Human Sciences 1972 (doctoral thesis later published by Editora Atica under the title *Trabalho Domestocado a mulher na industria paulista* 1978).

<sup>4</sup> COSTA Albertina de O. BARROSO Carmen & SARTI Cynthia *Pesquisa Sobre Mulher no Brasil do limbo ao gueto?* *Cadernos de Pesquisa* (54) Sao Paulo Fundaçao Carlos Chagas/Cortez 1985 p. 5-15.

important theme for feminism which realized its potential for change in the North American and European schools which greatly influenced women's movements in Brazil. Paid labor was seen as a possible strategy for the emancipation of housewives from their subordinate role in the family. Sarti<sup>5</sup> recalls that the idea that the root of women's subordination lies in their exclusion from the world of production was the foundation for feminism both in its liberal and Marxist versions thus constituting an importance reference for making female labor a theoretical issue. As a legacy from the Marxist tradition Sarti goes on. Brazilian feminism considered women workers the main agents for changing women's condition thus pushing the interest in research on women towards a convergence with the labor issue which in itself had a guaranteed legitimacy in academe where analysis of the mode of production in capitalist society held a place of prestige.

As Costa Barroso and Sarti recall<sup>6</sup> in a first quality leap 1978 was a new milestone with two pioneering and promising initiatives: the seminar Women in the Labor Force in Latin America and the Research Contest on Women's Studies held by the Carlos Chagas Foundation. Organized by IUPERJ and coordinated by Neuma Aguiar the seminar Women in the Labor Force in Latin America brought together researchers from all over Latin America in Rio de Janeiro with the purpose of debating the issue of women's labor based on two considerations: the first of a theoretical order stated that the economic activities carried out predominantly by women were not adequately perceived within the Marxist theoretical framework which prevailed in Latin American universities in the 1970s.

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<sup>5</sup> SARTI Cynthia Trabalho Feminino de olho na literatura *Literatura Economica* 7 (1) INPES Economic and Social Planning Institute Rio de Janeiro INPES p 1 196 1985

<sup>6</sup> COSTA Albertina de O BARROSO Carmem & SARTI Cynthia op cit

Based on applied research some of which adopted qualitative methodologies or case studies and others of which were based on census or macrosocial data of another nature proposals brought to the seminar aimed to discuss Marxism's inadequacy or insufficiency for grasping and analyzing female labor and overcome such deficiencies. A second methodological consideration called attention to the inadequacy of available data gathering instruments for grasping information on women's labor. Representatives from official Brazilian and international agencies such as the Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute (IBGE) the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) took part in the debates which proposed to reformulate concepts and analyze prevailing data gathering instruments in order to foster the visibility of women's social participation.

The first of a series that has continued to this day the Research Contest on Women organized by the Carlos Chagas Foundation and sponsored by the Ford Foundation offered an opportunity for doing research on the condition of women. During the 1978 contest of the 127 research projects submitted 52 (40.9%) focused on the labor issue. Of the 20 projects approved nine analyzed the theme of women's labor from various perspectives. Two anthologies containing the results of the winning research projects were published one of which *Trabalhadoras do Brasil* (Working Women in Brazil) was devoted entirely to the issue of female labor.

Costa and Bruschini<sup>7</sup> analyzed scholarly production on gender in the journal *Cadernos de Pesquisa* published by the Carlos Chagas Foundation. Over the course of 20 years gender represented some 14% of a

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<sup>7</sup> COSTA Albertina de O & BRUSCHINI Cristina Uma Contribuição Impar os cadernos de pesquisa e a consolidação dos estudos de gênero *Cadernos de Pesquisa* (80) Sao Paulo Fundação Carlos Chagas Cortez Feb 1992 p 91 99

total of 550 articles published by 1991. The two authors showed that since 1975 when the women's issue made a place in this publication beginning with a special commemorative issue for International Women's Year labor was one of the priority issues having been the focus of 20 out of 70 articles analyzed. The angles by which women's activity was perceived followed trends on the analysis of women's labor as expressed in women's studies in general concentrating initially on macrosocial analyses of women's participation in the labor market and only later incorporating the necessary articulation between work and family.

### The main trends in the theoretical debate on women's labor

A brief analysis of the main trends in the theoretical debate on the issue of women's labor shows that the roadblocks caused by a certain perception of women's participation in Brazilian society (with a bias towards production) did not take long to appear. While the liberating role of paid female labor in underdeveloped countries was challenged<sup>8</sup> attention was called to the lack of references to women's reproductive role in the majority of these studies.

In the introduction to her analysis of studies on women's labor up until 1976 and summed up in her annotated bibliography on Brazilian women Maria Moraes pointed out that the labor force is not a neuter category defined exclusively in opposition to capital which commands the productive process. In real life a worker's gender helps define the very quality of the relationship between Labor and Capital: women constitute a *surgenis* portion of the labor force experiencing a double subordination to Man and Capital. Those who promise women that discrimination will no longer exist the day they occupy the same positions as men in

paid production make the basic mistake of limiting the concept of work to paid work excluding from this noble category a major portion of the work activities done by women. To speak of women and exclude domestic labor is thus a way of distorting the daily reality of the female sex<sup>9</sup>.

In the introduction written by its organizers the anthology *Trabalhadoras do Brasil* (Working Women in Brazil) also raised crucial questions which were to be debated in the years to follow. With a text containing considerable information on women's participation in the Brazilian labor market they state: we seek to call the attention of readers to the need to broaden the concept of work in order for it to more correctly estimate the volume of activities carried out daily by women and that are indispensable for social production. We also call attention to the need to consider the working woman as a person occupying a position within a domestic unit which in turn is part of a broader social structure. Without taking these questions into consideration it will be impossible to comprehend the situation of Brazilian working women<sup>10</sup>.

Indeed an analysis of the main trends in the theoretical debate on women's labor in Brazil shows that while the initial concern focused on the incorporation of women into the labor market or their expulsion from it under the effects of Capital, studies gradually displayed greater sensitivity towards cultural and symbolic factors which also help explain women's subordination in addition to their insertion in the space of family reproduction. In her review of the literature on the topic Sarti<sup>11</sup> shows how the first generation of studies focused exclusively on a production perspective.

<sup>9</sup> MULHER BRASILEIRA. *Bibliografia Anotada* 2. São Paulo: Fundação Carlos Chagas, Brasiliense, 1981, p. 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> BRUSCHINI, Cristina & ROSEMBERG, Fulvia (org.). *Trabalhadoras do Brasil*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, Fundação Carlos Chagas, 1982, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> SARTI, Cynthia, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> RODRIGUES, Jessita M. *A Mulher Operária: um estudo sobre as tecelãs*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1979.

without taking into account the fact that the place women occupy in society is also determined by their role in the family. Later an analysis of women's condition based on their role in the reproduction of the work force also had considerable weight in scholarly production on the topic, giving rise to the first discussions on domestic labor. Yet according to the author, research on female labor actually took a new direction when it began to focus on the articulation between production and the family. According to her, the work experience also implies a combination of these two spheres, through either interweaving or juxtaposition.

In later years, the backdrop for studies on women and labor was the noteworthy increase in the female work force observed in data from the 1980 Census, and these studies challenged prior research on the theme, according to which industrial development and economic growth do not necessarily increase women's participation in the labor force.<sup>12</sup> A new quality leap occurred through studies conceiving of female labor based on the notion of the sexual division of labor. According to this line of reasoning, expressed in studies such as those by Hirata and Humphrey<sup>13</sup> among others, which seek a more general explanation on the functioning of the capitalist market organization of the production process and labor, relies on preexisting social gender relations prevailing in all social spheres, including the factory and the family.

Describing theoretical production on the issue of female labor based on an analysis of papers presented in the Working Group (set up in 1979) on Women in the Labor Force at ANPOCS (the Brazilian National Association for Post Graduate Studies

in the Social Sciences). Lavinás and Castro<sup>14</sup> also mention that the initial studies sought to break with the invisibility, silence and underestimation of female labor, concentrating on economic variables and pointing to wage inequalities, occupational segregation and discrimination. In the late 1980s there was a new trend in the articles presented in this Working Group in the sense of reflecting on power relations and male domination. A reading of more than one hundred articles written over the course of ten years indicates that the discussion on women and work in this academic forum tended towards a proposal to analyze social gender relations and undertaking a critique of dichotomous explanations.

It is now possible to state that any analysis of women's labor which seeks to break with old dichotomies must be aware of the articulation between production and reproduction as well as social gender relations. While the field is relatively ripe, studies on women and labor still seek to overcome theoretical impasses emerging with the introduction of the gender concept. According to Castro<sup>15</sup>

beginning with the focus on gender, the debate was redirected towards the human, diversified and asymmetrical sphere in terms of relations between the sexes, with due care to ensure recognition of man as being and woman as being. It is thus not an issue of replacing the history of man with a history of woman, nor of tracing two histories in parallel, but of understanding the dynamics of social relations as sexualized. Still, as the same author states further on, if other cleavages such as ethnicity and generation are not

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<sup>12</sup> SAFFIOTI, Heleieth. op. cit. BLAY, Eva. op. cit. BRUSCHINI, Cristina. *Sexualização das Ocupações: o caso brasileiro*. Cadernos de Pesquisa (28). São Paulo: Fundação Carlos Chagas, March 1979.

<sup>13</sup> HIRATA, Helena & HUMPHREY, John. O Emprego Industrial Feminino e a Crise Econômica Brasileira. *Revista de Economia Política* (4). Oct/Dec 1984.

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<sup>14</sup> LAVINAS, Lena & CASTRO, Mary G. Do Feminino ao Gênero: a construção de um objeto. In COSTA, Albertina O. & BRUSCHINI, Cristina (org.) *Uma Questão de Gênero*. Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Tempos, São Paulo: Fundação Carlos Chagas, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> CASTRO, Mary Garcia. O Conceito de Gênero e as Análises sobre Mulher e Trabalho: notas sobre impasses teóricos. *Cadernos CRH - Centro de Recursos Humanos* (17). Salvador: Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1992. p. 80-105 (94).

considered in addition to gender one runs the risk of being stuck with conceptual idealizations

Meanwhile in other fields of knowledge only recently have there been repercussions from the more innovative trends in the theoretical debate on female labor Lobo<sup>16</sup> shows that the discussion on this theme was not even a concern for the Sociology of Labor where studies on industrialization and the working class (still the central issues) remained impermeable to the gender make up of the Brazilian labor force It was only in the 1980s when researchers already studying female labor began to analyze the sexual division of labor in the factory that the use of the category **gender** began to be examined in this field of Sociology which began to incorporate issues such as the various dynamics in the make up of male and female professional positions and their mutual non permutability

### **The impact of the theoretical debate on visibility of female labor**

While the first studies on the issue of women and labor were willing to use quantitative data and were sensitive to the gaps in available sources<sup>17</sup> this trend did not persist in the majority of the studies done in subsequent years While the association with the feminist movement provided the issue with legitimacy it also led to a certain reluctance towards the use of quantitative

methodologies<sup>18</sup> Since quantitative methods had gained their greatest impulse through opinion polls surveys and primary elections in the United States they were mistakenly identified with the positivist neutral and objective sociology prevailing in that country They were thus viewed with a certain distaste in feminist studies which proposed a kind of knowledge committed to changing the condition of women focusing on qualitative studies life histories and participatory research<sup>19</sup>

Fortunately however even some of the first studies on female labor focused on a critique of existing macro social indicators raising a concern over both the paucity of available data and their inadequacy for a precise assessment of women's situation The IUPERJ seminar in 1978 was a veritable milestone in this sense In the introduction to the book *Mulheres na Força de Trabalho na America Latina analises qualitativas* (Women in the Labor Force in Latin America qualitatives analysis) which includes several of the papers presented at the seminar there is an exploratory guide for understanding female labor Most of the critique refers to the inadequate measurement of women labor According to this criticism the influence of international agencies in the data gathering process leads to the use of categories that are more appropriate for developed countries than those of Latin America where capitalism coexists with other modes of production Latin American censuses take capitalist industrial production as their reference thus disguising domestic production small mercantile production and non paid family labor which are particularly applicable to women Domestic production of food and clothing is disguised as part of domestic activities

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<sup>16</sup> LOBO Elisabeth Souza O Trabalho como Linguagem o genero do trabalho In COSTA Albertina O & BRUSCHINI Cristina (org.) *Uma Questao de Genero* Rio de Janeiro Rosa dos Tempos Sao Paulo Fundacao Carlos Chagas 1992

<sup>17</sup> AGUIAR Neuma (coordinator) *Mulheres na Força de Trabalho na America Latina analises qualitativas* Petropolis Vozes 1984 BARROSO Carmem L M & MELLO Guiomar N O Acesso da Mulher ao Ensino Superior Brasileiro *Cadernos de Pesquisa* (15) Sao Paulo Fundacao Carlos Chagas Dec 1975 p 47 77 MIRANDA Glaura V A Educacao da Mulher Brasileira e sua Participacao nas Atividades Economicas em 1970 *Cadernos de Pesquisa* (15) Sao Paulo Fundacao Carlos Chagas Dec 1975 p 21 36 BLAY Eva op cit SAFFIOTI Heleth op cit

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<sup>18</sup> CAPELLER Wanda M L (org.) *A Metodologia de Estudos sobre Mulher* Rio de Janeiro Epiduc 1982

<sup>19</sup> BRUSCHINI Cristina O Uso de Abordagens Qualitativas em Pesquisas sobre Relacoes de Genero in COSTA Albertina O & BRUSCHINI Cristina (org.) *Uma Questao de Genero* Rio de Janeiro Rosa dos Tempos Sao Paulo Fundacao Carlos Chagas 1992

and is thus omitted from the official statistics. The ways in which questions on women's activities are formulated cover up data and women's labor is underrepresented. The period of time used as a reference to determine whether a person is economically active or not affects the volume of activity revealed by a given study. The broader the period used, the greater the rural female component is, since this contingent does a considerable amount of seasonal labor. The number of hours also affects estimation of female labor: it was the participants in the IUPERJ seminar who suggested that part-time work and secondary activities be considered in surveys. Another important suggestion referred to the concept of *life cycle*, including the total time that the individual had been married or cohabiting, spouse's average age, and number and age of sons and daughters, in order to better understand female activity. Identification of activities done in the home through budget time analyses was also proposed for detecting the volume of family labor, particularly for women. For the first time, criticism was aimed at the household model of Family and the concept of Head of Household, and there was an intense debate over the fact that the latter disguises both women's authority in the home and the activities they carry out with a market orientation.

While not all of these suggestions were incorporated into the field of study, the IUPERJ seminar was to have a visible impact on data gathering by official agencies in subsequent years, as the following will show. A good example of this multiplying effect was the 1982 report *Perfil Estatístico de Crianças e Mães no Brasil* (Statistical Profile of Children and Mothers in Brazil), the result of an agreement between the Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute (IBGE) and UNICEF, which is still in force today. Thanks to efforts by researchers with positions as experts at IBGE and who participated in the IUPERJ seminar, a meeting was held in the town of Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, in June 1981, where experts

and researchers proposed a tabular plan that was sensitive to the condition of women, children, and families. While the tables in the Statistical Profile were limited to the years 1970 and 1977, since results of the 1980 census were still not available, they had the innovative impact of allowing for an analysis of women's economic activity according to vital indicators such as marriage status and number of children. In the 1980 Brazilian census, there were at least two major contributions from theoretical and methodological reflections on female labor. The first relates to the concept of economic activity versus inactivity. In the census data, the economically inactive category includes individuals who do not work, whether because they have independent incomes or because they are considered incapable, as retired, pension earning, sick, or disabled, or as students or housewives. Despite the enormous volume of activity disguised under the label of Housework, and which keeps women from all different social strata occupied, domestic labor is not tallied as economic activity under this kind of survey. In addition, since women's reproductive role is highly publicized and socially accepted, the category of housewife is generally declared as the woman's main occupation, unless she exercises activities which are clearly identified as professional, because they are either paid or take up the greater share of her time. This bias can also be aggravated by the way questions are worded and the interviewer's own stance as a person imbued with prejudices concerning woman's role in society, thus tending to classify her primarily in the housewife category. In the 1970 Brazilian census, poor wording in the question on work added further to the underestimation of women's economic activity. Beginning with a double negative, Question 22<sup>20</sup> presents Housework as the first alternative, which

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<sup>20</sup> If you do not work and are not looking for work, what do you consider your main occupation?

may have led many women to declare themselves economically inactive since for women (particularly if they are married and have children) the reproductive role is considered the top priority. In the 1980 census the question was reformulated by broadening the reference period and changing the order of the alternative answers<sup>21</sup> and there was a significant increase in the number of women who declared themselves workers.

Another important contribution to the 1980 census from the first studies on female labor has to do with the concept of Head of Family. Up to and including the 1970 census the head of the household was always considered to be the man, even if he was not the provider. Census takers received instructions to classify women as heads of families only if they were widows, legally separated, or living some other kind of situation where the male provider was absent. During the 1970s criticism by gender studies led to a significant change in the way these data were gathered. Beginning with the 1980 census interviewers received instructions to let the interviewee designate the person who she/he believed to head the family<sup>22</sup>.

Far from having reached an ideal situation suffice it to recall that the 1990 census was only carried out in 1991 and that the results have still not been published. The way information on the presence of women in economic activities is gathered appears to have benefited from the impact of a critical assessment of the conceptual framework and methodologies adopted. More fluid and difficult to measure effects must also be occurring as a consequence

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<sup>21</sup> Have you worked in the last 12 months from September 1 1979 to August 31 1980? Question 28. If you answered Yes check the square  (that you have worked) and go on to question 30 (what occupation you exercised habitually during this period). If you answered No indicate your situation or occupation according to the following order (the alternative domestic chores appears as the eighth alternative).

<sup>22</sup> BRUSCHINI Cristina op cit

of the effects of feminism on the mass media and social representation more women are becoming aware of their productive role and are declaring themselves workers more census takers are sensitive enough to perceive whether an interviewee is more than a housewife to be classified in the Inactive/Housework category.

In addition although existing data are insufficient they have allowed for useful information on female labor to be obtained. Based on overall official data it has been possible to recognize some characteristics of working women and their participation in the labor market and to challenge certain hypotheses concerning female labor which have no backing in Brazilian socio-economic dynamics. For example data from the 1980 census showing a major expansion in the entry of women into the labor market in the 1970s a decade marked by industrialization and economic growth helped challenge the thesis that women would be excluded from the labor market with the expansion of capitalism a notion that prevailed in the first generation of studies on female labor in Brazil. Later data pertaining to the 1980s which contrary to the 1970s was marked by crises unemployment and high inflation showed that the intense exodus of women towards the labor market did not retreat thus contradicting the prevailing affirmation that women would be the first to be thrown out of the market during times of crisis<sup>23</sup>. In short as we stated in a previous study feminist critique of data and sources can and should be done in various stages beginning with the search for information as long as this search is based on a theoretical reference incorporating gender issues. As an example recall that labor statistics stratified by sex have always been present in the Brazilian censuses National Sample Household Surveys

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<sup>23</sup> BRUSCHINI Cristina Crescimento e Crise trabalho das brasileiras paulistas e nordestinas de 1970 a 1985 *Ciencia e Cultura* Volume 42 Issues 3/4 March April 1990

(PNADs) and other sources but that only after gender studies showed the importance of working women's position in the family in determining the ways in which they participate in the labor market did these data come to cross-analyzed in relation to others concerning age, marriage status, and position in the family<sup>24</sup>

### **The impact of the theoretical debate and visibility of female labor on social and political demands**

Reflection on women's work led to some gains in the production of sources of information with a greater visibility for female labor. Yet it was in the field of public policies that the most considerable gains were achieved in terms of new rights written into the 1988 Constitution as analyzed below.

Legislation on female labor prior to the new Constitution was based on premises such as women's frailty, defense of morality, protection of offspring, women's *natural domestic calling*, and the complementary nature of women's wages, all based on the ideal of the patriarchal family headed by the man, with the objective of protecting working women in their role as mothers. The legislation thus imposed a number of constraints on female labor. Over time and dictated by technological changes, expansion of the labor market, and pressure from women workers, numerous changes were introduced, indicating that the law is always subject to critique and reformulation. At the same time, however, the law is not always enforced, besides not being applicable to a major portion of working women. A critical review of this labor legislation (which dates back to the 1930s and 1940s) began to be undertaken in the 1970s and culminated in the 1980s when various women's groups drafted proposals to be submitted to the National Constituent Assembly through channels such as Women's Councils. In the São Paulo State Council on the Condition of Women

during 1987 and 1988 there was a weekly forum known as the Constitutional Space which debated existing legislation and on the basis of more recent data on women's conditions drafted State proposals that would later be taken to the Federal sphere. Incorporating various demands, the *Letter to Members of the Constituent Assembly* stated that legislation should be enforced and inspected and that any non-compliance should be strictly punished. Furthermore, that benefits should be broadened to include occupational categories still not covered. Whatever benefits that in the name of protection for women ended up giving them privileges vis-à-vis workmates of the opposite sex should be reviewed in light of technological changes in work processes and occupational health. Discussions with women workers and other groups of women during the drafting process showed that there were two positions. One position favored equality of the sexes among workers, except in relation to maternity, thus defending elimination of the protectionism contained in the law and keeping only the norms for protecting pregnant workers. The other position was in favor of maintaining differentiated criteria for the sexes, such as earlier retirement for women, based on the argument that since society is unequal and unfavorable in relation to women, they should receive some form of compensation. Equality and protection were thus the two opposing rallying cries during this major debate<sup>25</sup>.

An analysis of Article 7, Chapter II of the 1988 Constitution (*On social rights*) shows that several women's demands had been met. First, a certain protectionism was eliminated which had imposed constraints on women's labor, such as prohibition of nighttime, dangerous, or unhealthy labor, which ended up being forbidden for individuals under 18 years of age (section

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<sup>25</sup> BRUSCHINI, Cristina. *Trabalho da Mulher: igualdade ou proteção?* Cadernos de Pesquisa (61). São Paulo: Fundação Carlos Chagas, May 1987.

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<sup>24</sup> BRUSCHINI, Cristina. 1992. op. cit.



XXXIII) Second by assuming the biological differences between the sexes and viewing maternity as a social role the new Charter kept the right to maternity leave without loss of job or paying extending the length to 120 days (section XVIII) established paternity leave (section XIX) and proposed free daycare centers and pre schools for children and dependents of workers of both sexes from birth to the age of six years (section XXV) The Constitution prohibits differences in wages roles and hiring criteria on the basis of sex age color or marriage status (section XXX) proposes protection of women s labor market through specific incentives (section XX) and guaranteed that domestic workers (a category made up almost exclusively of women and which in 1980 included 20% of all working women) were to receive all the same rights as other workers in addition to be integrated into the Social Security system (specific clause)

Thus a number of demands were met that had been formulated by women themselves on the basis of new knowledge about women s social situation Despite reactions by various sectors of society and fears by women themselves that the new rights might lead to unemployment for women their productive activity did not decline in the years to follow even for those who had children From 1988 to 1989 rates of participation by mothers in the labor market remained unchanged 41.4% of them participated in the Sao Paulo labor market in 1988 while 41.9% did so the year after<sup>26</sup> For those who challenged the relevance of such measures or pointed to their defects there was ample evidence of concrete conditions for their success Amongst other reasons since the 1970s there had been a sharp drop in the birth rate all over the country both in urban and

rural areas the low percentage of working women with signed working papers (only 54% in urban areas and 14% in rural areas) meant that few had access to labor rights the low additional cost of new measures (0.09% for the extended maternity leave and 0.13% for paternity leave) according to a survey of 150 medium and large businesses by the National Confederation of Industries and the lower wages paid to working women in comparison to colleagues of the opposite sex Still one of the strongest arguments in favor of the inevitability of the new measures and that was published by newspapers soon after the Constitution was passed was the sexual division of labor and the concentration of women workers in female occupational ghettos The press coverage in Sao Paulo that we analyzed<sup>27</sup> included a curious story where the woman head of a major garment industry stated that it was impossible to change the labor profile as divided up between males and females Illustrating that which gender studies had already been stating particularly those dealing with the sexual division of labor this woman stated that even if business people (under pressure from new social fringe benefits) wanted to fire women they could hardly be expected to replace them with men who would never adapt to sectors identified with the world of women such as seamstry and garment making

### Gains impasses and prospects for the future

Currently in light of recent data on female labor the major challenge for feminism and gender studies appears to be a resumption of the struggle on two fronts that of equality between genders in the labor market and that of reproductive protection for women workers

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<sup>26</sup> SURVEY on Employment and Unemployment in Greater Sao Paulo *Maternidade e Trabalho da Mulher na Grande Sao Paulo Depois da Nova Constitução* Sao Paulo Fundaçao Seade n° 63 Dec Feb 1990

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<sup>27</sup> BRUSCHINI Cristina *Trabalho Feminino conquistas e propostas* (mimeo) Paper presented during the seminar Society Policy and Gender Relations at the Symposium on Public Policies and Women s Condition in Contemporary Brazil Universidade de Sao Paulo/Center for Studies on Social Gender Relations/Department of Sociology June 1989

Available information as of 1990<sup>28</sup> show that women continue to enter the labor market and remain there in addition to diversifying the positions they occupy. In 1990 39.2% of Brazilian women were working and the number of working women had reached 23 million, 18 million of whom were concentrated in cities. From 1981 to 1990 eight million women entered the labor market a constantly growing figure. Data also point to changes in the make up of the female labor force and which may have significant consequences for policies to meet the needs of working women and their families. In the 1980s it was older married women with family responsibilities that most increased their share of participation in the labor market. From 1981 to 1990 women of all ages worked more yet this increase was greatest in the 30-39 year age bracket where 55% of the women were economically active. Amongst married women while 20% worked in 1980 nearly 38% did so in 1990.

Although more finely stratified data are still not available on the occupations with greatest participation by women a study of the work sectors in which they participate the most show a marked presence in commerce administrative activities and public administration urban activities with a greater possibility of being formalized. The percentage of women workers with signed working papers reached 57% in urban areas and increased in rural areas from less than 10% in 1981 to a reported 18% in 1990.

Despite such new gains women still suffer discrimination in the labor market. They face a narrower range of opportunities than men greater obstacles to occupying managerial positions and lower wages than their male colleagues. While based on available data one can state that there was a certain wage gain for working women in the 1980s the presence of women in the

lower wage brackets is still higher than that of men and the percentage of women earning higher salaries is still lower than that of men. In 1990 according to data we analyzed from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) while 4.5% of Brazilian working men earned an average of less than one half the minimum wage nearly 12% of working women found themselves in the same situation. During that same year 6.4% of male workers and 3.9% of female workers earned more than ten times the minimum wage.<sup>29</sup>

This all leads one to believe that although society is capable of and interested in absorbing women into the labor market it appears unwilling to make major changes in the current form of discrimination with heavy social costs for working women unless women themselves resume previous levels of mobilization to make social and political demands.

Since the presence of working women is more marked in urban areas in the more developed regions of the country and in more formalized sectors of the economy particularly older married women with family responsibilities face more acute and obvious difficulties in reconciling domestic and professional activities. In addition in rural or more informal economic activities where reconciling tasks is more feasible income is lower and less stable and women workers do not have their rights respected. Therefore it is essential not to give up the struggle for social policies establishing concrete conditions to broaden the possibilities for choice by women with or without family responsibilities as to having a more regular paid economic activity in order for them to have access to labor benefits provided for under the Constitution. Yet it is necessary to invest in two fronts. First special protection must be provided for women including benefits to facilitate women workers reconciling their multiple activities. Some of these benefits however such as day care centers and longer school

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<sup>28</sup> BRUSCHINI Cristina. O Trabalho da Mulher no Brasil: tendências recentes (mimeo). Paper prepared for UNICEF. May 1993.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

semesters should be extended to all children. Others such as partial work days or flexibilization of hours should be planned for workers of both sexes so that both men and women have the concrete conditions to reconcile their domestic and professional activities.

Another front for struggle should be the demand for equal job opportunities for men and women with similar credentials. In this case, mechanisms should be proposed to allow for the implementation of *labor market protection for women through specific incentives under the terms of the law*, a measure that is written into the new Constitution (section XX, Article 7) as a first step. Some bills submitted to the House of Representatives by the National Council for the Rights of Women in 1989 suggested this. One of these bills proposed fiscal incentives for employers who presented an increase in the percentage of women amongst their personnel and balanced salaries for women and men. Another proposed that job advertisements should be prohibited which specified the candidates' gender, color, age, or family situation.<sup>30</sup>

Many other demands may come to be raised. However, none of them will be effective without a profound transformation of family organization. A more egalitarian family, with a division of labor where men share both professional and family and domestic responsibilities with women, is a prerequisite for women to conquer their citizenship.

Studies on women's labor have contributed to both a theoretical debate and gathering of reliable, updated data. Together with 1990s feminism through its current channels of expression, they have played a decisive role in this context. The resumption and deepening of the debate on equality and protection appears to be an encouraging prospect for the coming years of the 1990s.

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<sup>30</sup> BRUSCHINI, Cristina, 1989, op. cit.

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SILVIA CRISTINA YANNOULAS

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## **Equal but not Identical**

The author does a brief history of the issue of equality between the sexes affirming that this is a matter of praxis she points to different modes of interpretation represented by essentialists rationalists and a third line developed on the basis of reflections by Françoise Collin and Hannah Arendt This model called pluralist affirms that it is impossible to theoretically resolve the issue of sexual differences and seeks alternatives to the essentialist and rationalist projects without losing sight of the modern project

## **Egaux mais non pas Identiques**

Yannoulas presente brievement l evolution de la problematique de l egalite entre les sexes insistant qu il s agit la d une question en rapport avec la pratique Elle passe en revue differentes approches du probleme notamment les essentialistes les rationallynalistes et une troisieme voie developpee par Françoise Collin et Hannah Arendt Cette approche nommee pluraliste considere qu il est impossible de resoudre sur le plan theorique les differences entre les sexes et cherche des alternatives aux projets essentialiste et rationallynaliste sans oublier pour autant la modernite

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CRISTINA BRUSCHINI

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## **Women and Labor in Brazil the history of an issue and prospects for the future**

This article describes the history of reflection on women s labor analyzing the main directions the debates have taken in two areas the production of statistics which gave visibility to women s economic activity in Brazil and the drafting of legislation where the most significant point was women s participation in the 1988 Constituent Assembly The article does not do a theoretical or statistical presentation but rather a narrative on the main theoretical methodological and political questions pertaining to women s labor seeking to identify some prospects for the future

## **Travail Feminin trajectoire d'un theme, perspectives pour l'avenir**

Dans cet article l auteur decrit la trajectoire de la reflexion sur le travail feminin en signalant les deux versants du debat celui de la production des statistiques qui a permis une plus grande visibilite de l activite economique des femmes Celui de la formulation de nouvelles lois marque par la mobilisation des femmes a l occasion de l Assemblee Constituante de 1988 En se penchant sur quelques aspects theoriques metodologiques et politiques du travail feminin Bruschini cherche a cerner quelques perspectives pour l avenir de ce sujet absolument central dans les etudes feministes

## **Gender and Aging**

The retired people's movement and programs for the so called Third Age are analyzed as evidence of a new identity for the elderly in Brazil. The prevalence of men in the retired people's movement and that of women in the programs leads the author to include gender differences in this approach to aging. She also concludes that elderly men stress values like clarity and action while elderly women focus on freedom and personal satisfaction.

## **Genre et Vieillesse**

Le mouvement des retraites et les programmes pour le Troisième Âge sont ici traités comme l'évidence d'une nouvelle identité acquise par la vieillesse au Brésil. Le fait que les hommes soient majoritaires dans le mouvement des retraites et les femmes soient davantage présentes dans les programmes pour le Troisième Âge amène Debert à constater des différences de genre dans la façon d'aborder la vieillesse. Et à conclure par ailleurs que les hommes âgés accordent plus d'importance à des valeurs telles que la clarté et l'action, alors que les femmes privilégient la liberté et la satisfaction personnelle.

JUNE E. HAHNER

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## **Education and Ideology: pioneering professional women in 19th-century Latin America**

The relation between women's education in universities and the development of the feminist ideology is held in this article, which exposes the women's scholarship conditions in the Latin America of the last century. The differences between Brazil and other countries of the same continent like Argentina and Chile, which have created conditions for the education of women just after the advent of independence, are demonstrated through statistics and stories of feminist leaders of that time.

## **Education et Idéologie: les professions libérales en Amérique Latine au XIX siècle**

La relation entre l'éducation universitaire des femmes et le développement de l'idéologie féministe est présentée dans cet article à partir d'une exposition des conditions de scolarisation des femmes en Amérique Latine au XIX siècle. Les différences entre le Brésil et d'autres pays du continent comme l'Argentine et le Chili, qui ont permis la création de conditions pour l'éducation des femmes après l'indépendance, sont mises en évidence par des statistiques et l'histoire des leaders féminines de l'époque.

### **Negative Images - towards a black feminist cultural critique**

The lack of an analytical and/or self-critical sphere in Black feminism is Michele Wallace's point of departure in her analysis of cultural production by Black women, including herself, in the United States. Reinterpreting authors like Roland Barthes and Levi Strauss, she demonstrates the need for a cultural reading of this production as an act of resistance. She concludes that Black feminism's creativity inherently subverts both patriarchal hegemony and white cultural hegemony.

### **Images Negatives - pour une critique de la culture féministe et noire**

L'absence d'un corpus analytique et/ou autocritique du féminisme noir est le point de départ de l'analyse de Michele Wallace sur la production culturelle des femmes noires américaines, y compris elle-même. À l'appui de Roland Barthes et Levi Strauss, elle cherche à démontrer qu'il est absolument nécessaire de lire cette production culturelle comme un acte de résistance. La créativité du féminisme noir, en conclut-elle, est en elle-même subversive. Subversion contre l'hégémonie du patriarcat et de la culture blanche.

HELENA HIRATA  
DANIELE KERGOAT

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### **The Working Class Has Two Sexes**

The authors of this article point to a tendency in the literature to present the working class as homogeneous, thus disregarding the gender category as a function of the class category. Their analysis affirms that the Marxist theoretical framework is incapable of depicting the oppression suffered by women or of identifying articulations between sex and class as categories in solving gender contradictions. The paper also contains an analysis of these articulations in the context of developing countries.

### **La Classe Ouvrière a Deux Sexes**

Hirata et Kergoat insistent sur le fait que la classe ouvrière est presque toujours traitée d'une façon homogène, la catégorie genre étant méprisée par rapport à la catégorie classe. Leur analyse met en évidence les limites des outils théoriques marxistes dans la démonstration de l'oppression subie par les femmes et révèle l'insuffisance d'articuler sexe et classe en vue d'une solution aux contradictions de genre. L'article s'intéresse aussi aux articulations classe et genre dans la conjoncture des pays en développement.

### **Mme Durocher, Modiste and Midwife**

This article describes the early history of Mme Durocher the first woman to take the course in obstetrics at the School of Medicine in Rio de Janeiro. Beginning with her mother's arrival in a wave of French immigrants in the 19th century, there is a description of life in Rio de Janeiro at the time and participation by modistes in changing customs. Having inherited her mother's dressmaking shop and she herself a single mother, Mme Durocher is described as a strong woman facing financial difficulties and criticism.

### **Mme Durocher, Modiste et Sage-femme**

Mme Durocher a été la première femme ayant accompli la formation de sage femme à la Faculté de Médecine de Rio de Janeiro. Mott raconte sa vie à partir de l'arrivée de sa mère, une française au Brésil. En décrivant l'ambiance qui régnait à Rio dans le milieu de la mode du début de ce siècle, l'auteur nous promène de la vie des Durocher aux mœurs locales de bien des femmes modistes qui travaillaient et s'assumaient pleinement et montre le glissement de la jeune Durocher de la couture vers l'art de faire accoucher.

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ELIZABETH JELIN

### **Women and Human Rights**

In this article, Jelin does an approach between the feminist and human rights issues, comparing aspects where she sees this approach as possible and fruitful for women. After a brief account of the demands that culminated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she describes political moments in Latin America in which women, more than any other sector of society, led the struggle for these rights. Within the feminist sphere, the author points to reproductive rights as correlates of human rights.

### **Femmes et Droits de l'Homme**

Jelin rapproche dans cet article la problématique féministe et celle des droits de l'homme, en insistant sur les aspects bénéfiques aux femmes d'un tel rapprochement. Elle revient sur les faits historiques qui ont culminé avec la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et décrit les mouvements politiques en Amérique Latine où les femmes, de tout milieu social, étaient à la tête d'un combat semblable. En ce qui concerne le féminisme, l'auteur met en avant le droit à la reproduction comme équivalent aux droits de l'homme.

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