

"Pharmacolandas e Odontolandas": A study on the female presence in Pharmacy and Dentistry courses in São Luís – MA (1940-1970)



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ABSTRACT

The present work aims to analyze the female presence in higher education in the state of Maranhão, in the period 1940 – 1970, specifically in the Faculty of Pharmacy and Dentistry of São Luís. It also aims to identify women as students of higher education and their professional

performances, understanding higher education as a space for education, instruction and power. It also tends to perceive the validity and importance of higher education for women outside the academic sphere and also the social repercussion of female presences in spaces considered male par excellence. In this sense, it is important to highlight the institution of higher education as a privileged space of political and scientific knowledge, where gender relations gain connotation and notoriety, as they reflect the cultural constructs of society in general.

Keywords: Pharmacy and Dentistry, Female presence.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present work aims to analyze the female presence in higher education in the state of Maranhão, in the period 1940 – 1970, specifically in the Faculty of Pharmacy and Dentistry of São Luís. It also aims to identify women as students of higher education and their professional performances, understanding higher education as a space for education, instruction and power. It also tends to perceive the validity and importance of higher education for women outside the academic sphere and also the social repercussion of female presences in spaces considered male par excellence. In this sense, it is important to highlight the institution of higher education as a privileged space of political and scientific knowledge, where gender relations gain connotation and notoriety, as they reflect the cultural constructs of society in general.

By perceiving women as academics, we aim to analyze the power relations existing in higher education, especially because within the specificity of the Faculty in São Luís, the pharmacy course was considered more conducive to women, and dentistry was indicated to men, this aspect already demonstrates a selection of the sexes imbricated by gender relations, with an inclination towards a female presence in courses that sought careers culturally defined as more appropriate to women.

As a result of the effervescence of women's studies, the affirmation of gender equality, and the



greater presence of women in academia, the humanities and social sciences began to have much more systematized studies on the female condition.

It was necessary to discuss women and social groups, until then not privileged in historical writings, however, several authors call attention to the fact that women perform their experiences in a non-isolated way, with daily life, politics and experiences, in general, also being relational aspects, that is, aspects related to men and women in the social dilemmas experienced daily. Hence, the contemplative importance of gender studies is highlighted, as they seek to involve the dialectic of complex daily life involving men and women, women and women, men and men, thus, "[...] gender relations are a constitutive element of social relations based on the hierarchical differences that distinguish the sexes, and are therefore a primary form of significant power relations" (MATOS, 1997, p. 80).

2 DEVELOPMENT

Gender was used to question biology, so much sex would refer to the cultural inscriptions brought by the body and represented as something natural. Gender is the cultural reading constructed through the physical, that is, it would be the cultural approach to biological marks, however, biological marks are also cultural, after all, sex, as well as gender, is invented. Thus, gender represents the cultural meanings of the sexed body, whose biological reading is already imprinted with cultural marks. For Butler, performativity should be understood as a reiterative and referential practice, where the discourse produces effects and names them, it is the construction that is elaborated from a materiality, from the body, from sex. Therefore, the relationship between body, sex, behavior and desire is not linear, it is fluid and can be experienced in different ways, not only within the marks of heteronormativity.

Another factor that deserves to be highlighted was the search for legitimacy and academic breadth by historians of "minorities" and one of the characteristics of this legitimacy was the implementation of an opening in the theoretical conception of gender, highlighting the relational aspect with class and race/ethnicity. Currently, these three notions are understood as a tripod for a substantially more complex analysis, and cannot be ignored or demarcated in the sense of measuring them, although, even using them, we have to be aware that they do not account for the plurality of women's trajectories and behaviors.

Parity between race/ethnicity, class and gender is necessary in order to offer a less superficial and homogeneous analysis of women. It is in this perspective of articulation that the differences between women become more feasible and allow them to be pluralized in their context and time, as Verena Stolcke states "in what way to approach the way in which gender, class and race come together to create not only common factors, but also differences in women's experience" (STOLCKE, 1991, p. 102), cohesion factors are also differentiating.



Thinking about this way of crossing such approaches of gender, class and race/ethnicity, Kimberlé Crenshaw (2002) presents a model of intersectional experience for the perception of women and ethnicity, especially when dealing with violence and oppression against women, considering that the various women experienced sexism differently due to their social condition and/or race/ethnicity. A gender perspective that does not invalidate, on the contrary, privileges the diverse experiences and conditions of women and elaborates the academic construction based on these premises of differentiation.

The historical reflection that privileges the newspaper as a medium, analyzing it in its totality, aggregates diverse reflections on the production, circulation and consumption of a given society. On the other hand, the observation of sources related to official discourses is added to the observation of areas of a relative society that were formally regulators of this so-called society, sometimes as a reflection of real changes and other times as vague definitions that ended up having little social impact. One of the challenges in this methodological process is related to the approximations of these documentary typologies in their analysis. As it is possible to identify the typology of the sources organized for this research, they turn to newspapers and official discourses highlighted by documents prepared in a regulatory character, such as laws and decrees. The periodicals are an important part of the selected inventory and they focus on the construction of meanings, discourses and representations present in societies immersed in media cultural production.

The methodology used is based on the perspective in which the idea of truth present in the journalistic text and/or official discourse is the substrate for considerations about what is considered and/or conveyed as being true at a given historical moment, so we will approach a view on the sources of research, understanding them as 'truths' and relative statements.

At the end of the nineteenth century, higher education was limited in number of institutions and students, concentrating courses in the areas of Medicine, Law, Engineering and Agronomy and was established in only seven cities: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Ouro Preto, Salvador, Recife/Olinda, Cruz das Almas and Pelotas. It was during the period of the First Republic that the number of higher education schools multiplied, reaching other cities and, among them, São Luís, with the foundation of the Faculty of Law, in 1918, and the Faculty of Pharmacy and Dentistry of Maranhão, in 1922 and 1925, respectively.

Even with an encouraging picture of the expansion of higher education in the country, women's access to such courses was limited and slow, some factors help to understand this process: the idea of female intellectual disability; the attachment of women to the domestic sphere (such as the one already mentioned above) and, therefore, the lack of need to obtain extensive knowledge. Also the conception of women's work, for girls from lower classes, associating it with the role of mother in the performance of care for children in primary schools and promoting the massification of women in the teaching of



the first letters, where normal education courses were spread throughout the country.

The association of female education with the teaching of the Normal School contributed to the fact that many women saw this level of education as its apex, especially because it did not have the characteristics of classical and scientific education, which, in turn, were preparatory for higher education. Only in 1971, with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education – nº 5692, 11/08/71, there was equivalence between normal and secondary education, but, in practice, the difference between professional and academic courses remained, limiting the chances of those who did not take a more academic orientation course, even though the course was used as a way to fill the gaps to have access to higher education.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the growth of women in higher education became significant, especially in courses in areas considered feminine. Thus, women had a higher concentration of women in secondary education preparation courses in the areas of Letters, Humanities and Philosophy and a lower number of students in bachelor's degree and science courses, so much so that the number of female enrollments only registered a large increase from the registration of courses in the areas already mentioned.

In São Luís, the educational situation, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resembled the national scenario, with the beginning of the republican period as a time of attempts to organize education in the state. One of the milestones in this process was the foundation of the Normal School in São Luís, in 1890.

Despite the precariousness of female education and the great difference in the number of schools and enrollments offered to both sexes³, which showed the priority of male education, there were small advances at the turn of the century. Women's progress in education was more feasible when women were able to access public secondary education, not only in normal schools, but also in preparatory courses for higher education, which was made possible by the educational reform of 1879 (ABRANTES, 2012, p. 256).

The beginning of the twentieth century also marks the establishment of isolated Faculties in Maranhão: in 1918, the Faculty of Law and in 1922, the Faculty of Pharmacy, counting, in 1925, with the creation of the Dentistry course and becoming the Faculty of Pharmacy and Dentistry of Maranhão. These higher education schools established themselves as a mostly male space, at least in the first years of operation, however, even so, women were registered in the academic environment and the first to graduate in Law, in Maranhão, was Zélia Campos, in 1925.

During the Estado Novo, higher education institutions were closed and resumed operations in the 1940s, with this reopening a gradual greater female presence in the aforementioned courses, as well as the opening of new courses culminating in the federalization of higher education in the State and the creation of the Federal University of Maranhão, in 1966. During this period, it was possible to notice more and more women present in undergraduate courses, either as students or professors, and it is at



this point that some observations of this work are anchored, which seeks to write the history of higher education in Maranhão with emphasis on the analysis of the female presence, highlighting the spaces they occupied, their performances, conflicts involving gender issues and power struggles.

Thus, the proposal of this work culminates in a perspective that aims to break with the opposite poles of man x woman, dominator x dominated and problematizes the constitution of each pole, evidencing them as plural. The deconstruction suggests that the polarity and the implicit hierarchy should be historicized in order not to reproduce an analysis in which men are always seen as agents and women always suffer the action, this research seeks the multiple relationships of women in society, in instruction and professional practice, evidencing the way they built their practices when dialoguing, assimilating and resisting the asymmetries of gender, but also of origin, social condition and race, even if these questions were not always clearly posed to the interlocutors of this research or were read by them as a pertinent issue in their life histories.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge, as a synonym of power, was sectorized and disallowed to women as modern Western society was organized around science and knowledge. Women who showed a lot of knowledge were constantly watched and controlled, when they could not be controlled they were taxed, ridiculed and associated with negative aspects, a clear example of this was the dissemination of the image of the witch and the persecutions suffered by a significant number of women throughout the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries in Europe and in the places of its political influence. For women, knowledge should be limited and mediated by men, and women's rural and popular knowledge escaped this.

This process culminated in the Scientific Revolution, imposing negativity on forms of knowledge outside the axis legalized by science, which, for the most part, were mediated by poor women from rural areas and being harshly fought, causing a negative conception of the relationship between women and knowledge. This view extended for centuries, corroborating an ideal of female intellectual incapacity and their consequent inferiorization in the school, scientific and professional spheres, where it was believed that women should know only what is indispensable.

In Brazil, since the Proclamation of the Republic and the significant changes in the economic system, there has been a strengthening of cities, industry and commerce, resulting in new social and behavioral requirements. There was also a resignification of the female role in the private space and, with it, new patterns of marriage and motherhood, a fact that promoted a broad discussion among educators, politicians and intellectuals about the levels of education and quality of what should be offered to women in schools. The most widely accepted conception would be that such education should meet domestic desires, but, above all, the desires of the ideal of the nation, where women would contribute with aspects related to health, hygiene, food and instruction of their offspring, for the



formation of republican citizenship. In this way, the participation of women in the country's normalist courses was disseminated.

Differentiated education was advocated, because women were seen as less intelligent and more fragile than men. Home Economics was included in his curriculum, because 'the woman is the queen of the home'. The co-ed school was criticised for being 'promiscuous'. The formation of teachers was encouraged, because they, 'true mothers', have a 'vocation to the priesthood' which is the magisterium. Differentiated education was fought, arguing that it served to relegate women's labor to the 'reserve army', causing them to occupy positions with lower pay than those occupied by men in the labor market (ROSEMBERG, 2012, p. 338-339).

The most immediate consequence of this whole process was the greater presence of women in public spaces and educational institutions, as students and teachers, in factories, in commerce, etc., that is, it was increasingly notorious that women were outside the domestic axis, both those of the lower class (who, due to economic needs, already circulated in public spaces), as well as those of the middle and upper classes. Such female dynamics in the cities did not go unnoticed and caused several reactions, mostly of criticism and irony, an example of which were the various records made in newspapers that, from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, conveyed positions contrary to women's education and work under allegations that society would be harmed. Below is one of these approaches made in the newspaper **Notícias**, which circulated in São Luís in the 1950s.

The maelstrom of modern life, the economic crisis of the present day, brings, as a sad consequence, the distancing of women from the home. And this is one of the greatest or the greatest evils of the present hour. For hours and hours on end, sometimes for a whole day, the Mother remains outside the home. [...] And if we are sad to see that the proletarian mother is forced by economic deficiencies to withdraw from her duties at home, it is revolting to see the abandonment of the well-to-do homes for more futile reasons. The middle-class mother, trying to increase a budget, more or less sufficient, makes the mistake of devoting herself to occupations outside the home. [...] There is no amount of money capable of compensating for the moral damage suffered by the child who lacks the loving maternal vigilance. The woman's place was, is and always will be the home, because the woman of today, like the woman of yesterday and tomorrow, always has the same mission on earth - the sublime mission of 'Being a Mother' (MARTINS, 14 jul. 1952, p. 3).

Under the aegis of a "mission" of women in society, the **Women's Page** of the newspaper **Notícias**, written by Reinaldo Martins, addressed themes more focused on married women and mothers, reinforcing that every woman, even single women, exercised a little of motherhood, such as the teacher's imagery, as she combined profession with child care.

However, such justifications, which limited the education of young women, were increasingly confronted by the growing enrollment in secondary and higher education courses.

Of the global growth in higher education, the increase in women's participation was remarkable: from 26% in 1956 to 40% 15 years later. However, the expansion of enrollments has not occurred uniformly, so much so that, in Engineering, there are still only 3% of women. In fact, there is even an increase in the concentration of female students in a few



'feminine' careers which, culturally defined as more appropriate to women, have traditionally had a predominance of women among their students (BARROSO, 1976, p. 52).

The entry of women into higher education represented new possibilities of insertion in public spaces, as academic training expanded the branches of professional practice, even though, for this, women had to face constant challenges to prove competence or seek some branch that would bring them closer to the characteristics considered close to the feminine essence, for example, working with other women, elderly or children.

In another example of the writings in newspapers, the discomfort with the markedly sexist language of the speeches raised on the occasion of the May 1st commemorations stands out, in which a collaborator of the **Jornal do Maranhão**, signed only by Natasha, evidenced the mistake of the language in characterizing workers only as men.

Everyone was talking about workers, the square was full of men, the speakers were addressing the workers. Everything was work in a 'masculine' sense. And don't we, women, also have our role in the world of work? Of course we do. Today we find millions of women in factories, warehouses, shops, offices, not to mention what is most peculiar to women's work: the infirmaries, the nurseries, the gardens, the schools. Therefore, we see that women have entered the world of work, and still want to conquer new positions. We can already see women in the practice of law, in the courts, in medicine, women ambassadors, deputies... (NATASHA..., May 6, 1962, p. 3).

However, after this same author noted the achievements of women in the labor market, she ends the text by noting that women have the capacity to occupy any public office, but their greatest role would be developed in the home, that is, a reinforcement of the attributions historically attributed to women. Points:

And I concluded that women can conquer any field, no matter how high it may be, with their work, but the natural place, where their activity can best express itself and give them the greatest satisfactions, is a home: their own home. (NATASHA..., May 6, 1962, p. 3).

Having a greater number of women in secondary education, vocational courses, colleges and the labor market did not in itself represent female emancipation in terms of the roles of wife and mother, but it was still a reflection of the struggle of many Brazilian intellectual women who sought greater equality through education and professional experience.

In order to better understand the relationship between education and women in twentieth-century Brazil and with attention to the reality of Maranhão, this work emphasized a look at the historical context of society and formal higher education, as well as the propagation of behaviors involving women, with criticism, new demands and even the rupture of social standards about the feminine. Thus, it can be observed that the country was increasingly urbanized, with the expansion of education and the generation of new jobs, also resulting in greater training and female participation in professional courses, higher education and the labor market.



Still aiming to identify the influence of higher education for women, especially in Maranhão, this research was based on local documentary contributions, sources that told the history of higher education in the state and also through interviews with five women who attended higher education in the capital between the period 1950 and 1970.

4 CONCLUSION

In the written sources, it is possible to observe the constant record of women in the University, even if in smaller numbers, as in the Law and Dentistry courses, however There is no record of women authors of scientific articles or issuing opinions in these student spaces, in these same newspapers the dissemination of the feminine image was very much associated with beauty (with contests among students) or with being patients of men in advertisement images; in the Academic Directory sections, female participation is also noted, but in functions considered secondary, such as secretaries and treasurers.

In the interviews, it was possible to notice various forms of intimidation to which the women were subjected and which were often reported as something "normal". Firstly, it is noteworthy that all the interviewees stated that they were not interested in politics as university students, and that there was an association between the conception of politics and partisan issues, in which they demonstrated that they had no interest.

They also assumed a sexist discourse of knowledge, by attributing to men some knowledge, such as logic and mathematics, and to women others, such as humanities. During their undergraduate, graduate and work studies, they reported several conflicts in their daily lives, including situations of inferiority for being women, poor, black or from the Northeast. In college, they had to always demonstrate their competence through grade disputes, disputes over who would represent the class in academic papers, and demonstration of intellectual competence when their abilities were questioned.

Their discourses were, in general, based on the traditional female roles of wife, caregiver and mother, even for the only interviewee who did not have children. Despite this reinforcement of a vision of the feminine, which was already growing in people's imagination, the interviewees constructed discourses about their experiences where they were able to re-signify the female role with the categories of student and professional as added to the demands of the modern woman.

Thus, from the written sources and reports in the interviews, it can be emphasized that the instruction represented a huge step for the women, but it also brought with it some burdens because they were inserted in historically masculine spaces and, therefore, they had to develop some protection strategies such as seriousness and sobriety in the instruction environments, leaving no room to associate their images with frivolous situations or uncommitted to studies. Even as adults and doing a master's degree, a doctorate or taking public exams, they had to prove that they could be good students or



professionals, even if they were already mothers or married and lived through different situations in which their husbands or fathers put their professional choices in check and represented some barrier to the performance of their jobs, once again these interviewees resorted to strategies, sometimes with open confrontation and other times more veiled, to continue their goals.

Finally, the numerical increase of these women in higher education keeps, within each issue, several stories of struggles, of overcoming, personal and family, which were lived in environments that were sometimes hostile to women and preventing equal conditions in academic training and the exercise of the profession.



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