


“Woman will rule”: female presence in the Paraíba press in the early 1960’s

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Abstract

This article investigates the discourses and representations around women in the official newspaper A União between the years 1960 and 1964. The purpose of this study is to discuss the female presence in the periodical, emphasizing the publications that contest the hegemonic paradigm of the “ideal woman” of the researched period. In order to conduct this analysis, contributions from Cultural History, debates about gender and discussions regarding the use of press as a historical source were used as a theoretical contribution. The subject is relevant considering the necessity to historically contextualize gender representations and highlight forms of resistance of historical subjects underrepresented by traditional history. The results show the advances in the situation of women: the writings of women discuss on topics considered “men’s issues”, publications question the inferiority of the female sex and important female figures appear with some frequency, especially the educators.

Keywords: Gender. History of Education. Press.

“A mulher vai mandar”: a presença feminina na imprensa paraibana entre 1960-1964

Resumo

O presente artigo aborda os discursos e representações em torno das mulheres no jornal oficial A União entre os anos de 1960 e 1964. O objetivo deste trabalho é discutir a presença feminina no periódico, enfatizando as publicações que contestam o paradigma tradicional e hegemônico de “mulher ideal” da época. Para conduzir esta análise, foi utilizado como aporte teórico as contribuições da História Cultural, os debates sobre gênero e as discussões a respeito do uso dos impressos como fonte. A temática se mostra pertinente diante da necessidade de contextualizar historicamente as representações gênero e colocar em evidência formas de resistência de sujeitos históricos sub-representados pela história tradicional. Os resultados evidenciam os avanços na situação da mulher em relação às décadas passadas: os escritos de mulheres discutem sobre temas



considerados “assuntos de homem”, publicações questionam a inferiorização do sexo feminino e figuras femininas importantes aparecem com certa frequência, sobretudo as educadoras.

Palavras-chave: Gênero. História da Educação. Imprensa.

1 Introduction

2 The advance of feminist discussions, especially in the second half of the 20th century, was responsible for putting into question the dominant gender patterns in Western society. The "golden years" was a period when gender distinctions were much more evident. How were women represented in the printed media of this period? Were there questionings of the hegemonic paradigm of the "ideal woman"? To what extent did women overcome the confinement to the domestic sphere and placed themselves in the public space? This article seeks to answer these questions by addressing the representation of women in the printed materials of the newspaper "A União" at the end of the "Golden Years", more specifically, from 1960 to 1964.

The theoretical contribution used consisted in the contributions of Cultural History, in the discussions about the use of printed matter as a historical source and in the debates about gender. Cultural History emerges with the proposal to radicalize even more the process started by the Annales School, instituting new problems, new objects and new approaches. This new conception of history makes this work possible, since it turns the gender debates into a relevant research object and validates the use of newspapers as a documental source for historiographical production.

The studies on the use of printed matter as a historical source instrumentalize and help the appropriate conduct of the study of the sources raised. The analysis of the discourses present in printed matter should be considered taking into account its social context of enunciation and its dialogical character, as Souza (2009, p. 3) states " written discourse is, in a sense, an integral part of a large-scale ideological discussion: it responds to something, refutes, confirms, anticipates potential responses and objections, seeks support, etc."

Extrapolating the focus on the discourse itself, De Luca's (2005, p. 114) contribution is of interest when he states that texts become of interest "less for what they





say than for how they say it, for the terms they use, for the semantic fields they trace and, we could complement, also for the interdict, for the zones of silence they establish." To complete the conduct of an effectively critical analysis of printed matter, it is essential to understand newspaper publications as partial texts, driven by passions and interests.

Gender debates are also fundamental to the effectiveness of this study.

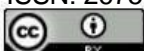
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Considering the importance of reconstructing the trajectory of women as historical subjects in order to realize how their inferiorization is a "social invention" built from discourses that produce "truths" (SCOTT, 1995) was one of the starting points for the production of this article. As Darsie et al. (2018, p. 191) would say, "what it means to 'be a woman' or 'be a man' can vary profoundly in different historical and cultural contexts." Another essential thought in discussions of gender is to observe power relations not as a simple dichotomy of dominator and dominated, but territories in which there is the possibility of resistance and confrontations.

The theme treated is current and pertinent, since reconstituting and bringing to the surface gender debates in different historical contexts is fundamental to highlight the essentially social and historical character of inequalities between the sexes. Added to this is the importance of bringing to light the history and the resistance of historical subjects made invisible by a traditionally masculine and excluding history. The text will begin by clarifying the concept of the "ideal woman" typical of the historical period under study, and then the documentary evidence that points to changes in this paradigm will be pointed out: texts that question gender inequality, writings by women addressing issues that were not considered "women's issues" and a brief mapping of how women appear in the periodical in the researched period. Women educators appear as relevant figures for Paraíba's society and highlight the importance of teaching as a strategy for women to penetrate spaces previously restricted to males.

2 Methodology

The source used, the newspaper "A União" appears in the 19th century as the official periodical of the State of Paraíba and represents, to a great extent, the positions defended by the established power. "A União" circulated primarily among the middle and



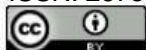


literate classes of society. It must be considered that the high rates of illiteracy of the Paraíba population at the time limited the penetration of the ideas conveyed in the paper by the totality of the social body.

The newspaper had 8 pages and circulated 6 days a week. Most of the news was focused on politics, edicts, and official communications; its other elements were the sports section, social column, chronicles, and local events. Literary supplements and the leaf "Paraíba Universitária" were not fixed, but appeared with some constancy. This wealth of elements allows us to observe women in different spaces, to follow important debates regarding education and to observe the importance of women educators from Paraíba.

To put into practice the research that gave rise to this article, the methodology of socio-historical documentary research by Rodrigues and França (2010) was used. The first step was the precise definition of the object of work: women and women educators in Paraíba between the 1960s and 1964. This section was chosen because it was considered relevant to investigate the representations of the feminine in the last moments of the so-called Golden Years. The second step described by the authors is the identification of the historical source. The official newspaper "A União" was chosen, used in a critical way considering the history of the document, its material form, its content, by whom it was written and with what purpose. The third step was to characterize precisely the source used. In the case of the selected news items, the edition number, date of the newspaper, title and author of the news item and the quadrant in which it is located in the periodical were specified. The next step, the care with the terms present in the sources, was not a problematic element for this research. Since it deals with the history of the present time, few terms led to the need for deciphering. The last step constitutes an essential element of the object of this study. Taking into account the speech of subalternized social actors, fundamentally what we do when we study women, in view of their invisibility as subjects of traditional history (PEDRO, 2005, p. 84).

The research began with the reading and classification of the bibliography about the theme, divided into four thematic axes: historical contextualization, use of the press





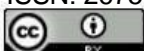
as a source, contributions from Cultural History and use of gender as a category of historical analysis. Then, data was collected from the collections that provide access to the periodical "A União". From the data collection, it was made the cataloging of the documental sources divided in the following subthemes: women, writings by women, writings about women, women educators, Paraíba's education and Brazilian education. The next step was the analysis of the catalogued sources in four axes: women educators from Paraíba, the feminine voices in "A União", the "traditional" role of the woman and the questioning of the "traditional" role of the woman from the writings.

3 The "ideal woman" of the Golden Years

The "Golden Years" include the period from 1945 to 1964, a time when gender distinctions were much more marked than today. This period is represented by developmentalism, populism, consumerism, the influence of the "American way of life", and hopes for a better future. There is a significant increase in the level of education of the population, especially of the female contingent, but it is important to consider what Pinsky (2014, p. 18) says:

Women's schooling is now valued alongside the ingrained conceptions that women should devote themselves primarily to the home and to their children, so that women's work continues to be surrounded by prejudice and seen as subsidiary to that of the head of the family.

Even with a greater insertion of women in basic education and the labor market, the ideology of an "ideal woman" remained strong, sweet, fragile, obedient, dedicated, maternal and confined to the space of the home (PINSKY, 2014). The duty of femininity of the female gender can be observed in several publications in the researched printed media. In interviews in the social column "De brôto para brôto" a society girl is asked about the qualities she appreciates in a woman, to which she replies "A woman should have the delicacy of a rose and the softness of a lily." To the question "What should be a





woman's greatest concern?" she replies "Every woman should always walk within an absolutely Christian morality" (A União, 15/9/63, p. 6).

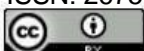
On the other hand, when questioned about what should be the woman's biggest concern, another young woman from Paraíba society answers: "to print a feminine touch in her attitudes and actions" (AIÃO, 09/22/63, p.6). These answers are repeated in the interviews with the young women present in the periodical. The synthesis of the ideal of the "good woman" of the Golden Years can be found in the answer of the lady of the society Marieta Silva to the questioning about the woman's role in society:

Woman and society need each other. Woman is indispensable to society as a spouse, mother, educator, religious, social worker or even as an ornament. She must help her fellows and love them as herself. She must be morally strong, kindly kind. It is up to her to avoid a false concept of society by not exaggeratingly valuing apparent qualities or cultivating futilities. The woman should be elegant, combining moral and aesthetic qualities. Society must reward her by giving her respect, protection and affection. In the same way, welcoming her children for whom she has made an effort to reserve this right. (A UNIÃO, 17/12/63, p.4).

Wife, mother, ornament. This was the rule crystallized in the minds of men and women of the time. Affirmations about the "ideal woman" were even more constant in male publications. In the chronicle "Mulheres que não são" (Women who are not), Aurelio de Albuquerque is indignant about the case in which starlets from Rio and São Paulo organized a soccer match.

I asked - would women who, on stage, are distinguished by their femininity, by the beauty of their bodies and curves, put on football boots, sweat, run around the pitches, as if they were men? No. Creatures, many of them femininely feminine, should not, just for commercial purposes, abandon their physical grace, the lightness of their forms, and go for the kick, the kick, the roughness. And in every state there were chroniclers condemning the gesture of the starlets, who lent themselves to such an outrageous role (...) In fact, the woman's first obligation is precisely this: to know how to be a woman. (A União, 03/5/62, p.6)

According to Albuquerque, a woman's obligation is to know how to "be a woman." Considering the title and the premise the text of another chronicler, Carlos Romero, seems to point to a different view. The publication entitled "Feminism" begins by stating





that world peace would only occur if international problems were entrusted to women. But not because they would have a greater political and intellectual capacity, but because they are more "cordial" and "sentimental" and would solve problems with grace, lightness and elegance. He says that ambassadors should be replaced by misses. A text that at a first glance may seem liberating, only serves to reinforce stereotypes of the female sex.

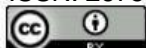
These continuously repeated discourses produced a "truth" that was the fruit of social creations. This social invention that women should perform a predetermined behavior in society limited their practical life by confining them to a limited role characterized mostly by obedience and submission, but this was not the only option. As already mentioned, where there is domination there is room for resistance and confrontation. The situation of hope and optimism typical of the investigated period was transformed in its last years, giving way to social and political instability. These conflicts reinforced questions to the prevailing paradigms, one of them was the solid gender roles.

4 Women's writing: exception and rule

In the five years of the periodical researched, 43 women wrote. There was a predominance of poetry, which spoke of love, nature, and paid homage to great personalities. Some prose texts talked about general themes such as social events, recipes, trips, and tributes. However, some texts eschewed the "feminine themes" rule by discussing politics, economics, and society. These texts were predominantly found in the supplement "Paraíba Universitária" written by undergraduate students of various courses.

The importance of these writings to understand the position of women in the investigated period is considerable. As Nascimento, Machado and Almeida (2020, p. 4) state):

The practices, representations and readings of women from Paraíba, when they take over the pages of newspapers, bring with them their claims and aspirations throughout their trajectory as women, thus, their writings are full of intentionality.



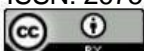


Texts such as "Parallel between American and Brazilian development" (A UNIÃO, 05/15/60, p. 4) by the student Silvia Soares discussed the character of Brazilian colonization and its effects on contemporary society. In "A universidade e a realidade brasileira" (A UNIÃO, 03/31/62, p. 4 and 7), Maria Bernadete Fernandes analyzes the Brazilian economy in a situation of "dependence on foreign capital and insufficient standards of living", the society as anti-democratic and criticizes the extreme inequality that Brazil suffers.

Another interesting text is "The importance of the University in the formation of Brazilian culture" (A UNIÃO, 14/04/62, p. 4 and 7) by Maria Elizabeth Moreno, an engineering student. Moreno criticizes the elitization of access to culture in Brazil and the process of "cultural depersonalization of the people" by foreign influence. The student analyzes that "the Brazilian University has been restricted almost to transmitting the past culture, forgetting that it, in order to survive, has to receive a constant creative breath" and demands from the institutions a deep investigation of the Brazilian reality in order to solve the problem raised about the culture in the country.

Ofélia Amorim, cited in the text "Feminine Leadership", was part of UEEP, a student union in the state. In two of her published texts, she speaks of the importance of the Peasant Leagues and of her political performance as a student in the strengthening of this movement. In "The first congress of rural workers" (A UNIÃO, 10/28/61, p.4), Ofélia discusses the importance of politicizing rural workers, which is important to denounce "the oppression and the exploitation regime to which they are submitted". The following publication "SAMDU for the Peasant Leagues" (A UNIÃO, 05/27/62, p. 4) congratulates the conquest of the Leagues with the creation of SAMDU offices in the municipalities where they operate, concluding the text saying:

The Peasant Leagues, without moving away from their main objective, the struggle for radical AGRARIAN REFORM, are celebrating a new triumph. The voice of the peasant, as the landowners want, is not lost in the wind. It reaches the ears of the public powers and begins to find an echo. They will set out, fortified, for the final victory. And will soon have.





The students dominated the few publications that dealt with issues that were outside the pattern of women's publications of the time. The fact that they are young indicates a renewal, and the restriction of these subjects to the university periodical, which has editorial independence, shows how the silencing acted in the official press. The positions of all the texts studied here indicate an affinity with the political left: the mention of the importance of a radical agrarian reform, the criticism of the oppression of rural men, the elitization of access to culture in the country, the dependence on foreign capital and inequality.

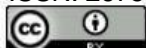
The freedom to defend causes linked to a progressive country project is undermined in the first half of 1964 after the civil-military coup. The newspaper *Paraíba Universitária* ceased to exist, the state government positioned itself in defense of the "democratic revolution" and the feminine voices that criticize, problematize and transgress disappeared from the periodical.

5 Questioning Gender Inequality

History is not made only of generalizations, of what is majoritarian and hegemonic, we must take into account the singular voices, the discontinuities. To break with a reconciling history that tends to "make smooth what in fact is not smooth" is essential to realize the persistence of the questioning of gender standards in the most diverse periods of history. It was in the 1960s, with the second wave of feminism, that these questions began to grow in the developed West. In Brazil, specifically in Paraíba, these ideas took a while to gain strength, but already in the beginning of the decade they appeared in a marginal way, in a few, but powerful publications.

The text "The woman will be in charge", without discriminated authorship, discusses the advance on the gender equality issue:

Is civilization moving toward matriarchy? - This is a question that is perfectly applicable in the present conjuncture of human destinies, and many are inclined, with well-founded reasons, to the affirmative. It is not just a question of formulating a very remote hypothesis, as if to vary the common themes of the moment: the question arises from very significant facts, by means of which it is

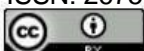




possible to evaluate the growing prestige of the female sex in the most diverse situations of modern life. A statistic drawn up in the United States attributes to women a marked preponderance in the total personal fortunes of that country. There, women are major property owners and financiers, they influence industry and commerce, and control armies of men. Certainly, divorce - in most cases obtained to the detriment of the male part - was the great leveling or even overcoming factor for the female element, liberated from this set of prejudices which, in a country of eminently patriarchal formation such as ours, confines women within the narrow space of a home. In Russia the situation in this respect is of a truly revolutionary character. There women predominate decisively in the most important branches of national activity - 75 percent of doctors are women, to cite one example. In certain sectors of science there is an identical preponderance. As for education, it is not even worth mentioning: around 80% in primary education, 60% in secondary education, and 60% in higher education. There is only one sector where they are in a frankly inferior situation - and that is politics. Such a situation suggests a question: Does this correspond to a real inferiority, or is it that the men are already sensing the danger of matriarchy, which, in Russia, depends only on the control of political cadres in order to be consummated? Yet women make up 17 percent of all representation in the USSR's supreme soviet and have already managed to include a female member in the Party's Central Committee itself, which is its highest organ. It will not be surprising in a few years to see a woman prime minister. (THE UNION, 04/29/60, p. 2)

The text analyzes how women advanced toward social equality internationally. It values the Soviet experience, proposing it as exemplary in reducing gender inequality, and briefly maps out the advances of women in the major powers of the time. The text concentrates its criticism on the low insertion of women in politics, but points to a perspective of change towards equality.

Another publication that deals with the subject of gender inequalities is a chronicle written by Germana Vidal. Vidal, daily chronicler of "A União" deals in her column mainly with domestic problems, family, trips, and childhood memories. In the text "Under the empire of the skirts" she says she believes in a "feminine superiority" and affirms that one should "put an end once and for all to this history of the fragile sex". But as the text unfolds it is possible to notice how problematic it becomes, even though it is a chronicle, a literary genre that should take into account the humorous and everyday tone, the later statements reiterate the normative ideas of what a woman of the time should be. In stating that it would be preferable to have a woman in the presidency, he continues:





It would be the mandate of beauty, gentleness, love, and also courage (...) All it would take would be an increased number in the Alvorada expenses, when even a single figure did not correspond to what had been noted down, added up and checked, and Madam President would leap fiercely from her office with a shovel and broom in hand, to assert her irrefusable authority. (A UNIÃO, 15/01/61, p. 5)

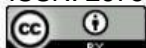
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The idea of the woman always linked to beauty and docility persists even though we idealize a female figure in the highest position of power in the country. The hypothetical president's way of enforcing her will would be through the violent use of elements linked to domestic chores such as the wooden spoon and the broom, and not through her arguments and authority. The columnist goes on to talk about a family case in which some of the women in her family were sitting at the table "preaching bravado" when the father decides to play and throw a beetle to scare them, and they all run. Vidal concludes, "End once and for all this history of the fragile sex, we said. But also put an end forever to every race of flying beetles. Because that's all that spoils our progressive plans."

Considering the dialogic character of the discourses present in the presses, the text makes us realize how the debate about gender equality was an issue dear to the society of the period. In the interviews of the social column "De brôto para brôto" cited in the previous topic the question "Do you think women have the same intellectual capacity as men?" appeared a few times. All the answers emphasized that yes, which makes us believe that it was an idea that women in general held at the time. At the same time, the other answers, like the rest of Vidal's text, reinforced gender stereotypes, stereotypes that ended up justifying the domination of women.

The text "Feminine Leadership", without discriminated authorship, is more critical and does not fall into the contradictions of the previous text.

Possibly, one of the most unfavorable taboos to the evolution of our political mentality is represented in the false principle of social inferiority of women - the mental habit that we, Brazilians, have of judging the woman to be a servant and an employee of the kitchen, with no right to aspire to any other performance that goes beyond the scope of domestic duties.(...) What we want to condemn only is the intransigent cultural vice that we inherited from the colonizers and exaggerate even more: the social dictatorship of men. To them are reserved almost all the





responsibilities and rights in the running of society; by force of a wrong philosophy of life, to men are delegated almost all the most serious obligations, interdicting to women the right of active participation in social life.

Even in the first quarter of the century the disdain for women's rights reached the point where many parents did not allow their daughters to learn to write so that they could avoid correspondence, 'notes to boyfriends' as they used to say, insinuating that female education would have no value other than this... (A UNIÃO, 10/10/1961, p. 3)

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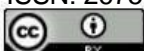
The text accuses the interdiction of women's active participation in social life and shows hope for the rupture with "this aleatory tradition of women's rights" and shows hope for the "liberation from this outdated cultural complex". It points to the difficulty that women faced when seeking insertion in basic education, a situation that was already undergoing transformation in the period, with the domination of basic teaching by the female sex.

The publication also praises the work of two academics, Iza Guerra and Ofélia Amorim, students from the School of Social Service and the Law School, respectively. They are highlighted in their struggles for agrarian reform and for the preservation of democracy and used as:

two magnificent examples of the modern woman. Of the woman who understands that female life is not only the inconsequential transit between the kitchen and the 'toilette', fulfilling a decorative role or a supporting role in the destiny of the society to which she belongs. (A União, 10/10/1961, p. 3)

Iza and Ofélia were active in the Catholic University Youth and defended the Peasant Leagues, movements considered leftist and persecuted in the context of repression. Ofélia will appear in the periodical as the author of some publications on themes that were not considered "feminine subjects", political themes and of critical reflection on society, transgressing the values of the time.

6 Representations of women in "The Union"



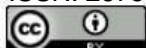


The standard of "being a woman" discussed in the first topic of this article dominated the pages of the newspaper "A União". They appeared mostly in the social columns, in beauty contests, and in the figure of the first ladies and their charity and social assistance actions. The only woman who was part of the body of effective collaborators of the periodical was the chronicler Germana Vidal, who, as mentioned, spoke of domestic themes, marriage, problems with maids, trips, and memories.

Female figures who appeared constantly and represented a form of resistance were the educators. Of the 927 news items surveyed, women educators from Paraíba appeared in 138. The illustrious female teachers were subjects in chronicles, honored and appeared in meetings with the state administration. Not only female primary school teachers, there were also female technicians in education (including at the federal level), principals of large schools in the state, active in the Secretariat of Education and Culture and, more rarely, university professors. It can be observed that women had conquered basic education, but the spaces related to the production of knowledge remained male dominated.

In several texts, female teachers were valued for their "feminine" characteristics linked to maternity, dedication and religiosity. There were also restrictions to basic education and higher education courses that were predominantly female, such as Nursing, Social Work and Dentistry. However, one cannot fail to observe how the importance given to female educators was a clear advance in the issue of female empowerment. The educators were women who left the confines of the private sphere and entered the public space, entering spaces that until then were forbidden to women. Women educators can be characterized as:

women imbricated in a multiple social process. In this process, at times, women were subjected to power practices that prescribed socially accepted modes of behavior, such as motherhood, kindness, care, obedience, etc. At other times, women took positions that enabled them to subvert or reconcile these social representations by also engaging as intellectuals. (GALVINCIO, 2019, p. 30)





These were the majority representations found in the periodicals. More occasionally we saw international, national and even local news of women acting in politics, but they were very rare considering the volume of printed matter researched. There was some insertion of the female gender in writers' events and in the literary supplements of the newspaper. At the beginning of 1964 more and more news of conservative women's organizations appeared. These groups turned to the defense of a political project that would institute a dictatorship, a repressive government that would represent even more obstacles in the struggle of women in the following years (COLLING, 2015).

7 Final considerations

This article sought to discuss the feminine presence in the official newspaper "A União" between the years 1960 and 1964. A period of intense social and political transformations in our country, the optimism and hope characteristic of the "Golden Years" gave way to conflict and abrupt transformations. In this text, we seek to question the sources in search of transgressions to the traditional paradigm of what it meant to "be a woman" at that time. After situating what this paradigm would be, we started with texts that directly questioned the confinement to this standard and gender inequality, showing this to be an issue under discussion at the time. Also discussed were the writings of women who debated issues such as economics, politics, and society, traditionally considered "men's issues. Finally, an overview was made of the representations of women in the periodical.

As we have seen, the female gender was under-represented in "A União". In the five years researched, only 43 women wrote for the periodical, of the 15 effective collaborators, only one was a woman, and the only space where women appeared in a constant way was in the social column of the newspaper. But there was resistance, the women who wrote there circulated their ideas and positioned themselves before society, the women educators appeared as the vanguard of this movement. They were important





figures in Paraíba society at the time, constantly appearing at political meetings, being honored, writing and circulating their ideas, showing the importance of teaching for the feminine conquest of public space and prestigious positions.

Observing not the general, but the singular voices and taking into account all the obstacles that the source used imposes, we were able to see more appropriately the Paraíba woman of the first years of the 1960s. She was in the homes, but also in the newspapers, in the books, in the schools, in the civil service, in the administrative sectors, and even in politics. The struggle will deepen over the decades and continues to the present day. Works that make "visible that which was hidden" are fundamental in the construction of a history that effectively contemplates all social actors.

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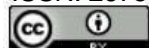
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