

The political discourse on the professional qualification of disadvantaged women: emancipation or hegemony?

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the logic, assumptions and beliefs present in the context of the Thousand Women Program created in 2006. The article verifies the program's contribution to the social construction of the professional roles attributed to disadvantaged women. The qualitative research was based on the transdisciplinary approach, which refers to the epistemological principles of critical discourse studies of Fairclough, Chouliaraki and Fairclough, together with the theory of social construction of target populations and with references to feminist studies. The results showed that the political discourse and policy design elements of the Thousand Women Program, based on social constructs and institutional cultures, promote skills in traditionally female areas with limited emancipation of women. The conclusion shows that there is a contradiction between the program's discourse and its actual practice, because it reiterates the logic that maintains hegemony and gender polarization.

Keywords: Public Policy. Social construction. Gender. Critical discourse analysis.

O discurso político sobre a qualificação profissional de mulheres desfavorecidas: emancipação ou hegemonia?

Resumo

O objetivo do artigo é analisar as lógicas, os pressupostos e as crenças presentes no contexto do Programa Mulheres Mil, verificando sua contribuição para a construção social dos papéis profissionais atribuídos às mulheres desfavorecidas. Para tanto, foi analisado o projeto do Programa Mulheres Mil, desenvolvido pelos idealizadores do programa, em 2006. A pesquisa, de natureza qualitativa, baseou-se na proposta transdisciplinar, que dialoga com os princípios epistemológicos dos estudos discursivos críticos de Fairclough, Chouliaraki e Fairclough, conjugados com a teoria da construção social de populações-alvo e com referenciais dos estudos feministas. Os resultados evidenciaram que o discurso político e os elementos do *policy design* do Programa Mulheres Mil, pautados em construções sociais e culturas institucionais, promovem qualificações em áreas tradicionalmente femininas, com limitada emancipação das mulheres. Conclui-se que há uma contradição entre o discurso do programa e sua prática concreta, pois se reitera a lógica que mantém a hegemonia e a polarização de gênero.

Palavras-chave: Política pública. Construção social. Gênero. Análise de discurso crítica.

El discurso político acerca de la cualificación profesional de mujeres desfavorecidas: ¿Emancipación o hegemonía?

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las lógicas, las suposiciones y las creencias presentes en el contexto del Programa Mujeres Mil, para verificar su contribución a la construcción social de los roles profesionales asignados a las mujeres desfavorecidas. Para ello, se analizó el proyecto del Programa Mujeres Mil, desarrollado por los creadores del programa, en 2006. La investigación, de carácter cualitativo, se basó en la propuesta transdisciplinaria, que dialoga con los principios epistemológicos de los estudios discursivos críticos de Fairclough, Chouliaraki y Fairclough, en conjunción con la teoría de la construcción social de poblaciones objetivo y con referencias de estudios feministas. Los resultados mostraron que el discurso político y los elementos del *policy design* del Programa Mujeres Mil, guiados por construcciones sociales y culturas institucionales, promueven cualificaciones en áreas tradicionalmente femeninas, con una limitada emancipación de las mujeres. Se concluye que existe una contradicción entre el discurso del programa y su práctica concreta, ya que reproduce la lógica que mantiene la hegemonía y la polarización de género.

Palabras clave: Política pública. Construcción social. Género. Análisis crítico del discurso.

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Educação, Cidadania e Desenvolvimento Sustentável

INTRODUCTION

An agenda related to gender issues was put in place in Brazil based on the platform of actions established at the Fourth World Conference on Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1995 Beijing Conference), and on the history of the women's movement in the country (FARAH, 2004).

This agenda offered guidelines for the creation of the Thousand Women Program, implemented in 2005 in the Northeast Region of Brazil. The program is presented as a governmental attempt to foster greater gender equity and overcome the difficulties faced by women in social vulnerability due to limited income, low education and triple burden. The program was established by Administrative Rule no. 1,015, of 21 July 2011, and it was recognized as an affirmative public policy. It proposes that women living in communities with a low level of urban development should have educational, professional and technological training that would enable them to raise their level of education, emancipation and access to the world of work, by stimulating entrepreneurship, solidarity economy and employability (BRASIL, 2012).

When analyzing the production of subjectivities in the public policies for gender equity in the work field, Carpenedo (2011) concluded that the public policies indeed propose the reduction of gender inequalities in the world of work; however, they produce new hierarchies among the subjects and at the same time reproduce the established hierarchies between men and women. The policies naturalize the caregiving and reproductive role of women, or encourage the creation of associations and cooperatives, which are presented more as an alternative to deal with vulnerability and misery, rather than as an alternative to include women in the productive sector.

Therefore, this gender focus often impacts on the promotion of social welfare for the majority of the women involved in the program, but does not offer autonomy, neither to these women nor to women as a group (STROMQUIST, 1996). This was shown in research carried out on the Thousand Women Program in some Brazilian states, which presented results and conclusions demonstrating that the program provided increased self-esteem; however, it was not able to change the scenario of female vulnerability, it did not contribute in a significant way to improve education, to the entry and/or return of these women to the labor market and to the promotion of social change, since most women find themselves unemployed or working in the informal market (BRAGA, 2011; OLIVEIRA, 2013; LAGOS, 2014; ARAÚJO, 2015).

Therefore, taking into account the theory of social construction and policy design of public policies addressing gender, education, professional training and work, as well as the propositions of Stromquist (1996) and Carpenedo (2011), the aim of this article is to analyze the assumptions and beliefs observed in the context of the Thousand Women Program, the program's contribution to the social construction of the professional roles assigned to disadvantaged women.

* Source: Ministry of Education (2013) – The Thousand Women Program (Programa Mulheres Mil).

THEORY OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND POLICY DESIGN

The social construction of target population theory was introduced in the late 1980s by Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram, as a way of understanding the political process. According to Ingram, Schneider and Deleon (2007), the approach focuses on the socially constructed values applied to target populations, and the consequent effects of these values on people and democracy. According to Berger and Luckman (1985) and Holzner (1968), social construction has epistemological bases in interpretative science, and it is originated in the subfield of the sociology of knowledge, which is understood as different ways the ‘realities’ of the world are shaped and defined. This includes images, stereotypes, and the attribution of values to objects, people, and events.

Social constructions are often generalized, intersubjective and, as they are ‘naturally’ part of our way of life, it is not easy to see them as constructions. However, social constructions are not always hegemonic and they can be disputed. Different realities based on different beliefs, expectations and interpretations may exist between different groups and individuals (SCHNEIDER and INGRAM, 1997). Thus, the theory seeks to explain why some groups are favored more than others, regardless of traditional notions of political power and how policy design can reinforce or change such advantages (PIERCE, SIDDIKI, JONES et al., 2014).

The social construction of target population theory was based on eight assumptions, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1
Assumptions of the Theory of Social Construction and Policy Design

Assumptions	Main authors
<i>Model of the Individual</i>	
1- Actors cannot process all the information relevant to make a decision, and therefore rely on mental heuristics to decide what information to retain.	Bryan D. Jones. Hebert Simon.
2- Mental heuristics filter information in a biased manner, thereby resulting in a tendency for individuals to confirm new information that is consistent with preexisting beliefs and reject information that is not.	Douglass North. Charles G. Lord, Lee Ross and Mark R. Lepper. Geoffrey D. Munro and Peter H. Ditto.
3- People use social constructions in a subjective manner that is evaluative.	Murray Jacob Edelman.
4- Social reality is boundedly relative where individuals perceive generalizable patterns of social constructions within objective conditions.	Patricia Hill Collins. Murray Jacob Edelman.
<i>Power</i>	
5- Power is not equally distributed among individuals within a political environment	Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz. Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan. Steven Lukes.
<i>Political environment</i>	
6- Policy creates future politics that feeds forward to create new policy and politics.	Theodore Lowi. Elmer Eric Schattschneider.
7- Policies send messages to citizens that affect their orientation and participation patterns.	Helen Ingram and Anne L. Schneider.
8- Policies are created in an environment of political uncertainty.	John W. Kigdon.

Source: Adapted from Pierce, Siddiki, Jones et al. (2014).

The theory holds that social constructs are important political attributes that are often incorporated in the political discourse and in the elements of policy design. The theory recognizes that policy design has fundamental social and political consequences, not only on material welfare, but also on social reputation and on how segments of the population view their relationships with government. The incorporation of social construction of target populations, therefore, as part of policy design, helps to explain why public policy can sometimes have a positive effect on society and at other times can deliberately fail in its purpose, being unsuccessful in solving important public problems, perpetuating injustices and failing to support democratic institutions (INGRAM, SCHNEIDER and DELEON, 2007).

According to Ingram, Schneider and Deleon (2007), policy designs reproduce the prevailing institutional culture, power relations and social constructions; although, they can sometimes escape this pattern and produce change. An analysis of social construction, therefore, can help to define the conditions that will lead to the reproduction of values or to changes. According to Schneider and Sidney (2009), one of the byproducts that emerged partially from the work of Schneider and Ingram (1997) regarding the policy design approach, is that policy studies no longer include solely the rational and instrumental components of design, but also incorporate the components imbued with values, such as social constructs, rationale and implicit assumptions.

Thus the theory of policy design includes the technical aspects of a policy and its underlying ideas, values, and meanings within society as a whole. Schneider and Ingram (1997) propose that policy design should be analyzed in the following dimensions: a) definition of the problem to be solved and the policy's goals; b) target populations; c) rules; d) tools; e) agents and implementation structures; f) social constructions; g) rationales; and h) underlying assumptions.

Consequently, assumptions related to the categories a) model of the individual; b) power; and c) political environment, interact to form a central proposition in the theory, which is related to target populations (or target groups).

According to this proposition, there is a connection between the characteristics of the target population and the way the population is treated in policy design. Attribution of benefits, especially to advantaged groups, burdens for deviant groups, hidden benefits or hidden burdens for contenders, and inadequate and humiliating aid to dependent groups constitute a pattern found in many political arenas. Two dimensions of the theory are fundamental in this proposition: political power and the positive or negative social construction of the group in relation to its greater or lesser merit and its greater or lesser contribution to general welfare (INGRAM, SCHNEIDER and DELEON, 2007).

Thus advantaged groups have high levels of resources of political power and enjoy positive social construction together with important 'deserving' people in the political and social general hierarchy and in social welfare. These groups tend to get a greater share of benefits than of burdens. Providing benefits to these groups creates political capital for policymakers. As for the group of contenders, it has substantial political resources; however, it is considered relatively selfish, dishonest, and morally suspicious. The contenders are susceptible to receiving benefits because of their political power; notwithstanding, these benefits are difficult to identify or are hidden in the details of the legislation (INGRAM, SCHNEIDER and DELEON, 2007).

In this sense, the authors add that the group of dependents are positively constructed as 'deserving', at least regarding sympathy and compassion; however, the lack of political power considerably restricts the receipt of benefits, which tend to be inadequate and bounded by rules. Because dependent groups do not play a strong role in creating national wealth, they are seen to be 'good' people, but considerably less 'deserving' of real investment than the privileged groups. Dependent groups have less political power than advantaged groups and are more positively constructed than the deviant (marginalized) group, although constructions often emphasize their impotence and deficiency (Schneider and Ingram, 1997).

Deviant groups lack political power and positive social constructions and receive a disproportionate share of burdens and penalties. The politics of burdens came to dominate much of public policy for deviant groups, since they have few (or no) advocacy groups willing to represent them. Other target populations do not have any kind of positive or negative social construction, even if they have political power. The theory also admits that there are other groups in transit, moving from one position to another (INGRAM, SCHNEIDER and DELEON, 2007).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

The term 'gender' used with its modern meaning emerged among American feminists who wished to insist on the fundamentally social character of gender-based distinctions. The word meant a rejection of biological determinism implicit in the use of terms, such as 'sex' or 'sexual difference'. In this approach, gender is used to designate social relations between the sexes, and its use repudiates biological justifications and becomes a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. According to this definition, gender is a social category imposed on a sexed body (SCOTT, 1995). According to Louro (2013), in Brazil, it was in the late 1980s that feminists began to use the term gender. However, it is worth mentioning that the theoretical concerns regarding gender as a category of analysis only appeared at the end of the 20th century.

According to Scott (1995), in its simplest usage, 'gender' is synonymous with 'women' and, in such circumstances, the use of the term is intended to indicate the erudition and seriousness of a job, since 'gender' has a more objective and neutral connotation for social sciences than 'women'. In this usage, the author adds, "the term gender does not necessarily imply taking a position on inequality or power, nor even designating the injured party" (SCOTT, 1995, p. 6). Therefore, it is observed that a dichotomous and polarized thinking about gender is constant in the analysis and in the understanding of the societies: masculine versus feminine, which are related to each other within an invariable logic of domination and submission (LOURO, 2013). The term 'gender' continues to conceive and naturalize the existence of a binary view of cultural and social roles, i.e., categories of analysis are still divided between the two poles: man and woman (SALIH, 2013).

Carvalho (2008) carried out research with the aim of understanding the gender relations from the patterns of material organization of the home, between 1870 and 1920. The author concluded that the female and male actions in the domestic space, described as centrifugal actions (women) and centripetal actions (men), produced material repertoires and different forms of mobilization. Feminine actions – extended throughout the home, however, without compromising the specific identity of their spaces and objects and concentrated on artistic representations of elements of nature – contributed to the formation of a personal profile encouraged to give up their own individuality in favor of an integrative action of the differences of its members. Male actions, in turn, demonstrate a form of material appropriation aimed at strengthening an individualized profile. For the man, converging all the things in the home, including his wife. However, this centralizing force did not exclude the existence of sexually marked territories, on the contrary, it stimulated an ideal of complementary coexistence between husband and wife.

Thus, one of the dichotomies that organized modern thought consisted in the separation of the public and private spheres, which was constituted as an effect of the rise of the bourgeoisie in the capitalist mode of production. In this dichotomy, women were assigned to functions in private spaces, while men had access to public spaces of work. The valued functions were those exercised in the public spaces of political decisions, while the work carried out in the domestic and private spaces was always considered of less value. One of the main consequences of these reflections and the practices that guide them is the possibility of an evaluative look at the home, the domestic work, the work that countless women continue to do. (LAGO, SOUZA, KASZUBOWSKI et al., 2009).

Taking into account the binary view of the sexes, therefore, women continue to be considered a secondary force in the labor market in various instances (entrepreneurs, labor market institutions, policymakers and even economic theories) and, despite the increase of employment rates and its consequence contributing to the economy of the countries, women are still considered more expensive and less productive, although there is no statistical evidence of gender-segmented productivity. The viewpoint that considers women a secondary labor force contributes to weaken her position and confine her to a subordinate place in the labor market, as has occurred in the history of mankind, written by men (ABRAMO, 2007).

However, in order to deconstruct the dichotomous thoughts between sex (biological)/gender (social), some scholars use post-structuralist theories to support new formulations about genders. Among these scholars are Scott (1995) and Butler (2013), as highlighted by Louro (2013). For Scott (1995, p. 21), gender

[...] is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power [...] Gender, then, provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction.

In this new understanding, gender is not nominal, nor is it a set of floating attributes, because its effect is produced and imposed by the practices that regulate gender coherence. "In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (BUTLER, 2013, p. 48). For the author, there is no gender identity behind gender expressions; i.e., this identity is constituted by the very expressions understood as its results.

Thus, the assumption in this study is that gender relations built throughout the history of women were built on power relations between the sexes. It is also assumed that public policies greatly reinforce social constructions, being one of the influences that creates and perpetuates stigmas and stereotypes related to women in society, through the formulation of the policies' goals, rules, tools, implementation structures, rationale, beliefs, and underlying assumptions.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative case study using bibliographic and documentary research. Data were analyzed based on a transdisciplinary proposal that dialogues with the epistemological principles of the critical discourse studies of Fairclough (2000; 2001; 2003), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), the social construction of target population theory and the theory of social construction and policy design (Schneider and Ingram 1997), as well as in the field of feminist studies (CARVALHO, 2008; CARPENEDO, 2011; BUTLER, 2013; LOURO, 2013).

The purpose of the research was to investigate the logics, assumptions and beliefs in the context of the Thousand Women Program, verifying its contribution to the social construction of the professional roles attributed to disadvantaged women, according to the analytical framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). Thus, the analysis came from the perception of the following problem: public policies of gender equity propose the reduction of gender inequalities while reproducing the hierarchies between men and women, through the strengthening of the caregiving and reproductive role of women, naturalizing these roles (CARPENEDO, 2011).

The study then sought to expose the problems and the obstacles to be surpassed in order to solve them, as well as the permanent characteristics in the Thousand Women Program that end up contributing to the problems (the network of practices). Three correlated focuses of analysis were adopted: 1) analysis of the context; 2) analysis of the particular practice; and 3) discourse analysis.

Finally, the study identified ways to overcome the obstacles, reflecting on the analysis and presenting contributions of the research.

CORPUS ANALYSIS

In this study, the data were collected through the following procedures: a) selection of the corpus analysis; b) critical reading; c) identification of the most relevant sections for the purpose of the analysis.

The corpus analysis is of the document 'Projeto Programa Mulheres Mil' (BRASIL, 2006), written by the creators of the program in 2006. The project counts on 67 pages and it is organized around objectives, purposes, problems to be overcome, partners, contributions, methods, activities, resources and results expected from the program.

The document of the project was chosen because it was used as base for the methodological Guide of the program and subsidiary for the policy to be institutionalized in 13 states of the North and Northeast of Brazil between 2007 and 2010.

ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES

The categories adopted to conduct the discursive-linguistic analysis were:

- Interdiscursivity (Are there obvious forms to characterize the global sample, in terms of gendered discourse? What are the discourses articulated in the text and how are they articulated?);
- Intertextuality relationships (What are the voices and texts included in the material of analysis? How are the voices designated in the text? Are they reported directly or indirectly?);
- The transitivity system (How are women represented? What types of predominant processes are there?)

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to improve inclusion and permanence of women in the labor market, the Thousand Women Program was integrated into the III National Plan for Policies for Women (PNPM). The program was first and foremost the result of the international cooperation between Brazil and Canada. It was conceived and structured on the basis of the knowledge developed by the Canadian Community Colleges in their experiences of promoting equity, serving disadvantaged populations and developing and applying the system of assessment and recognition of prior learning.

The program started as an experiment in the state of Rio Grande do Norte in 2005, and was expanded after 2007 based on the positive evaluation from the partners involved. The expansion focused on the North and Northeast regions, counting on 13 pilot projects, benefiting 1,191 women between 2007 and 2010.

In 2013, the Thousand Women Program was present in 112 units of the Federal Network of Vocational, Scientific and Technological Education and benefited 10,000 Brazilian women. From August 2013, the National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment (Pronatec) became part of the National Thousand Women Program, serving 75,669 women between 2011 and 2014.

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) and the Secretariat of Professional and Technological Education of the Ministry of Education (Setec/MEC) were responsible for designing the project analyzed in this study, which set the bases for the Thousand Women Program. The project was then distributed internally in the Federal Government of Brazil and after that became available to the general public for consultation via the internet. This means that, at the beginning, the access to the project was restricted among those that created it and partners. Later on it was made available for analysis to managers, teachers, instructors, technical-administrative professionals, and researchers of the Thousand Women Program.

The project of the Thousand Women Program in the North and Northeast, however, presents complex interdiscursivity, considered as a hybrid category, partially promotional. It uses the discursive category of 'project', which is increasingly adopted by the managerial public administration, as a means of making financial resources available for its implementation, with elements of prestigious propaganda or of corporation: "the Cefets (Federal Centers of Technological Education), in partnership with Canadian Colleges, are the instruments of educational and social change for these women". (BRASIL, 2006, p. 10).

Part of the self-promotional material is also supported by the narrative discourse. Sections entitled "Equity", "Sharing Knowledge" and "Development of Competencies", for example, can be interpreted as a story about the impacts of the two partner institutions on equity, knowledge, training and citizenship.

The political discourse, in turn, can be interpreted as a harmonious re-articulation of other statements, bringing together the discourses of Human Capital Theory, which starts from the assumption that investment in education translates linearly into emancipation and social and economic change for the citizens; and the discourses associated with the economic and social development of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the United Nations (UN):

[...] The knowledge to be shared, i.e., systems, access, PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition), forms of training, all this is deeply related to educational and social emancipation of disadvantaged women, responding to the economic need of well-prepared work force (BRASIL, 2006, p. 17).

The text presented in the project explicitly refers to other Federal Government documents: “the Government clearly sees equity and the promotion of citizenship as the foundation of a strong Brazilian democracy” (BRASIL, 2006, p. 8). The project also draws on CIDA and UN texts: “Gender equality is one of the six priorities of the program and it is a crucial issue in CIDA and a clear priority in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals” (BRASIL, 2006, p. 40).

The voices of institutions are indirectly related to the text, representing aspects of their context and their ideational meaning. Therefore, ACCC and Setec/MEC justify the relevance of the program in the struggle against female poverty in the following excerpts:

1. Women’s social and economic emancipation (no matter race, age or other demographic characteristic) leads to improvement of the families’ health and lives and the same for the community, including more care towards the environment. The educational emancipation of women (through traditional or customized educational training programs) leads to a higher inclusion of women in social and political arenas (BRASIL, 2006, p. 7).
2. However, it is unlikely that most marginalized women will apply for the regular programs. The Cefets’ ability to serve this population through appropriate skill assessments, targeted training programs, and labor market relationships, will help these people in accessing important formal sectors of work (BRASIL, 2006, p. 12).
3. Disadvantaged women were selected to be the focus in the development of new or upgraded training systems in the Cefets for many reasons. The educational and economic emancipation of women will show the most immediate, visible and lasting impact in their communities. The secondary effects of significant jobs for disadvantaged women are well documented and accepted. Gender equality is one of the six priorities of the program and it is a crucial theme for CIDA, as well as a clear priority in the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. Empowering women has recognized impacts in terms of environmental protection, health and community development (BRASIL, 2006, p. 40).

Thus, the Thousand Women Program is part of an international context of promotion of gender equity through labor, re-connecting with the discourses put forward by International Labour Organization (OLT), which advocates for poverty reduction among women, mainly by providing economic autonomy. According to excerpt 4:

4. A woman who receives support in a Cefet in order to [a] identify her skills and interests and develop entrepreneurial skills that allow her to become a member in a cooperative to sell crafts. She will be able to manage some activities of the cooperative. She will be able to become a member of a group of women with the same intention and skills and start up another business. She will be able to take part in business organizations in her community and develop political interests and awareness (BRASIL, 2006, p. 7).

According to Carpenedo (2011), international conventions, treaties and partnerships have played an important role in promoting gender equality policies in Brazil, since they have leveraged the production of specific policy interventions for women in the country. Thus, this international context encouraged cooperation between ACCC and Setec/MEC, for the development and implementation of the Thousand Women Program. However, Labrecque (2010) comments that, even if women are integrated into the labor market or even involved in income generation, inequalities, particularly between the sexes, remain.

Against this backdrop, it is important to ask: How are women portrayed in the project? In excerpts 2 and 3, they are portrayed as a disempowered group, considered “*marginalized*”, “*disadvantaged*”. It is therefore assumed that these women have no active voice in society, as they are portrayed as ‘passive’ in the texts, which then considers the project’s goals – social, economic and educational emancipation and training – and Cefets as the main body responsible for the improvement to these women’s lives (as shown in excerpts 1, 2 and 3: *lead, allow, serve, help*). In this case, women are the participants who benefit from the process (*emancipation, training*), and they are characterized in the discourse as ‘beneficiaries’.

It is also noticed that the women of the program are instrumentalized in order to improve the quality of life and health of the family and the development of their community, as is observed in excerpt 3. This is achieved through relational and circumstantial processes, because the relationship between the terms shows causality (*will show the most immediate, visible and lasting impact; has recognized impacts*). According to Dobrowolsky (2007 apud LABRECQUE, 2010), the instrumentalization of women occurs when they are positioned in the policy in a strategic manner. Consequently, the instrumental logic is constituted by considering women a resource, a profitable investment, based on the discourse of commodification. Therefore, as Silveira (2003) points out, it is not enough to include women without asking how this inclusion takes place. It is necessary to ask whether such proposals are intended to change the logic of inequalities or whether they are nothing more than an instrumentalization of women as substitutes for the absence of social policies.

Ingram, Schneider and Deleon (2007) argue that there is a link between the characteristics of the target population and the way these populations are treated in policy design. In this way, dependent groups (here considered marginalized and disadvantaged women) are positively constructed as deserving, at least in relation to sympathy and compassion. However, the lack of political power considerably restricts the receipt of benefits, which tend to be inadequate and bounded by rules. Therefore, social constructs generally emphasize their impotence and deficiency (SCHNEIDER and INGRAM, 1997).

The project also highlights the structure of the Cefets and the methodology of the program, which is organized around the system of access, permanence and success, based on the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) methodology developed in Canada. Services of access include looking for participant women, providing infrastructure, and facilitating admission and reception. In order to promote women's access to the program, an access office should be structured and a multidisciplinary team should be set up and trained for the program.

Some tools are used to identify prior knowledge, such as the socioeconomic questionnaire, which provides personal information and the employment status prior to entering the course. In turn, the interview aims to gather additional information about the woman, such as identifying a situation of domestic violence.

Another tool used is the life map, which aims to create opportunity and environment for the exchange of women's life experiences, so they can be shared and registered, validated and valued. This forms a portfolio, a document that collects information, describes knowledge, skills and competencies, including formal and informal documentation. The portfolio is designed to assess and certify prior learning and it can be used to optimize the learning path of the participant in a course, in the program, or can be used to present the participant to a potential employer. All these documents form the descriptive memorial of these women.

Taking into consideration these processes, in the analysis of excerpts 5, 6 and 7, it is observed that the project's creators assume that the Cefets and the methodology of the program should function as a factory/company:

5. Brazilian partners strongly believe that in four years it is possible to develop an infrastructure and a sustainable access and training system in order to serve marginalized women and help them to find relevant jobs or to advance in their education (BRASIL, 2006, p. 10).
6. The Cefets capacity – similar to the capacity of the Canadian colleges – to serve disadvantaged women in order to [a] improve their potential work-force, depends on a systemic methodology. The institutions need to develop systems, infrastructure, implement tools and techniques to serve these women, as well as offer customized training and skill development techniques to academic updating. Institutions need to establish formal relations with the employer community, methodologies to develop programs towards the employer needs and methods to offer programs to target-populations (BRASIL, 2006, p. 14).
7. Many Canadian colleges and institutes have departments or access offices that centralize infrastructure and access services. This is the model of department that will be customized and implemented in this project (BRASIL, 2006, p. 15).

Institutes and partners have strong beliefs that the development of appropriate infrastructure and structured methodology around access, permanence and success will consequently lead to the success of the program, thereby ensuring significant employment and continuing education for women. These facts are represented by the mental processes of excerpt 5: *strongly believe*. In this case, it is referring to the Brazilian partners (represented by the Cefets and the organizations of the “5S” system – a group of institutions related to sectors of the economy, which provide training and support for employees and companies) and the sentences are cognitive because they bring ‘feelings’, ‘thoughts’ and ‘desires’ (*Brazilian partners strongly believe*). The verb *to believe*, which represents the mental processes, is gradual, for it indicates points on a scale, using the lexical gradability *strongly*.

Therefore, discourses on the functioning of institutes are based on the scientific organization of work, which is based on centralization, hierarchy, order, systematization, unity of direction, control, rationalization and division of labor. According to Faria (2004), this discourse refers to the belief in an elite that has the duty to lead the destinies of the world to help the weakest, an idea that prevailed in ancient Greece on the society of citizens and non-citizens.

Thus, as women are portrayed as disempowered (marginalized, disadvantaged), encouraging greater participation in the labor market may not necessarily imply a greater incentive to their political participation, because, in this case, women act as beneficiaries and not as agents and actors in the policy design. These facts are represented through material processes in excerpts 5 and 6: *serve, develop, implement, offer*. Therefore, the main actors in the sentences are the Canadian partners and the Cefet, with the women being classified only as beneficiaries.

Considering this, the order of the discourse rearticulated in the project is contradictory, as it aims to emancipate poor women through education and work, while at the same time relying on the political discourse that assumes that disadvantaged women would not be able to provide for themselves their social and economic inclusion, as well as contribute to democracy and the country’s development.

Thus, the rationales, beliefs and assumptions of the creators of the Thousand Women Program influenced the choice of courses offered by public policy, leading to the option, in most cases, of Initial and Continuing Education (FIC) courses, lasting between 160 and 200 hours (Chart 2).

Chart 2

Courses offered by the Thousand Women Program in Brazilian States

States	Courses
Bahia	Housekeeping; Elderly Caregiving; Cookery
Ceará	Housekeeping; Food Handling; Sewing
Distrito Federal	Customer Service; Secretary; Crafts; Voluntary Association
Espírito Santo	Crafts; Preparation of Sweets and Preserves; Food Preparation, Storage and Freezing; Sewing; Elderly Caregiving; Housekeeping; Secretary; Receptionist; Waitress; Customer Relationship and Management
Goiás	Sculpture in Soapstone; Craft Liquor; Crafts
Maranhão	Food Handling, Storage and Freezing; Construction: Design and Painting
Mato Grosso	Crafts (Bio jewels)
Mato Grosso do Sul	Nutrition
Minas Gerais	Nutrition; Elderly Caregiving
Pará	Computer Operation
Paraíba	Fishing; Fish Preparation; Use of Fish Residues for Crafts

Continue

Paraná	Kitchen Assistant; Craft; Elderly Caregiving
Pernambuco	Nutrition; Creative Decoration; Interior Design
Piauí	Textiles; Agroecology; Family Farming
Rio de Janeiro	Crafts (<i>Fuxico</i>); Elderly/Children Caregiving; Housekeeping; Kitchen Assistant
Rio Grande do Norte	Fishing; Fish Preparation; Tilapia Leather Processing; Craft; Textiles, Elderly Caregiving, Administrative Assistant and Natural and Phytotherapeutic Products
Rio Grande do Sul	Tourism and Hospitality, Cookery, Crafts, Food Production and Processing
Rondônia	Crafts (Bio jewel); Fish Processing; Digital Literacy Basics and Technological Inclusion; Farm Chicken Rearing
Roraima	Improvement of the Schooling of Women Within the Boa Vista Prison; Recycling; Kitchen Assistant
Santa Catarina	Computing; Crafts.
Sergipe	Craft from Recyclable Materials and Seafood Shells; Food Handling and Preparation
São Paulo	Digital Inclusion for Seniors; Crafts
Tocantins	Crafts; Textiles; Elderly/Child Caregiving; Baker; Computer Assembler and Repairer; Oil Plants Producer; Organic Horticulture; Administrative Assistance; Housekeeping

Source: Adapted from Santos and Freitas (2014).

It is noticed that the methodology adopted by the program emphasizes the participant's prior learning in order to establish the courses to be offered. As a result, considering that the program focuses on populations with low education, it offered courses in areas considered 'feminine', marked by the traditional role of the woman in the society, i.e. to organize, to sew, to cook, tidying, caring and reproducing. The figure of women linked to domesticity, privacy, comfort and the welfare of the family has been naturalized for centuries (STROMQUIST, 1996; CARVALHO, 2008; CARPENEDO, 2011) and are representations valued by the Thousand Women Program.

As Carpenedo (2011) points out, this belief leads to a traditional division of labor based on gender, which helps perpetuate the maintenance of women in professions and functions of informal markets, often without links and coverage of social security systems. Women would be engaged in productive activities connected to care and attention to others, due to a cultural and material production of 'feminine' in the processes of socialization and education.

Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) argue that political tools are a concentrated form of knowledge about social control and how to exercise this control. In this case, these tools keep women in areas recognized as 'feminine', reproducing and reinforcing the gender division that exists in the labor market. The same authors emphasize that the public policies tools are technical and social devices, organizing the specific social relations between the State and the beneficiaries of the policy, according to the representations and meanings that they entail.

Schneider and Ingram (1997) point out that, from the behavioral point of view, the choice of political tools reflects assumptions and prejudices about how different people behave. Therefore, these assumptions can be a powerful reinforcement in social constructions and institutional cultures, being one of the influences that create and perpetuate stigmas and stereotypes in society (INGRAM, SCHNEIDER and DELEON, 2007).

This study corroborates the arguments of Ingram, Schneider, and Deleon (2007) understanding that social constructs are important political attributes, which are often incorporated into political discourse and elements of policy design, strongly influencing choices, positioning, directions and the reproduction of citizens daily life.

The same authors, however, point out that social constructs of target groups can change and policy design is an important, though not the only, drive of change. Keeping in mind that the policy can provide focus, resources, arenas and rapid mobilization of political actors, which are essential to transform dominant social constructs, the suggestion is to promote greater integration of the actors involved in the public policy and of the solutions appropriate to the context of the regions served by the program. In this way, the chosen courses must be connected with the productive demands of the localities and with the local development of the cities where the program is implemented.

In addition, it is recommended that the program identifies the determinants that often produce or reproduce gender inequalities. This promotes productive inclusion of women in formal sectors that are stereotypically non-traditional for women, with the aim of offering the possibility of higher income and social protection.

Regarding educational inclusion, the suggestion is to give priority to technical courses included in the Youth and Adult Education Program (Proeja), so that continuity of studies is linked to the professional qualification of the women participating in the program. It is also recommended to restructure the program, especially regarding the methodology chosen to implement it, emphasizing not only the greater awareness of women regarding gender equality, but also educating the family, especially men, on the understanding that inequalities have historical and social roots and therefore can be challenged and redefined.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The set of discourses identified in the Thousand Women Program allows to explore the beliefs, the rationales and the assumptions that guided the formulation and implementation of the policy.

The program's discourse brings a cross-cutting statement throughout the course of politics, which is based on gender equality. However it is a statement repeated and valued throughout the document analyzed. It is something more on the level of political rhetoric than of substantive politics, because it is more oriented to what it should be than to what it is.

Thus, the Thousand Women Program discourse has ideological effects, since it reproduces the existing hierarchies between men and women in the labor market. Therefore, gender norms prevailing in society are reasserted rather than challenged. It is also hegemonic in the sense that gender as a cross-cutting issue (idea disseminated after the Beijing Conference of 1995), constitutes a 'regulatory practice' of international governance, stemming from the United Nations system, and which, in recent years, has sought to train women in the labor market, without questioning the social and political landscape. In this way, the structural causes of gender inequalities are not challenged, nor are power relations at all levels.

Most importantly, however, is to reflect on the capacity of making changes and of restructuring public policies with a gender perspective in terms of efficacy and effectiveness in the promotion of gender equality. Thus, the analysis of the Thousand Women Program discourse, points to the complexity and limits that permeate the process of formulating these public policies.

This study contributes to a greater understanding that social constructs are also important political attributes, which are often incorporated into political discourse and policy design elements and can contribute to the change or maintenance of the status quo of particular groups. Therefore, the identification of beliefs, images of reality and stereotypes, which society builds, maintains or modifies over time, can help in understanding the effects of the policies. It is necessary to look at them and reflect on the extent to which the choice of alternatives and the decision-making processes have been influenced by social constructions.

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