



Diálogos Insurgentes, de Emilia Santos, 2022, acrílica sobre tela, 100 x 100 cm.

UIFA, UIA, IAB: Transnational Dialogues about Women Architects (1960-1967)*

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Abstract

The article discusses the transnational and interinstitutional debates of the 1960s between the Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil, the International Union of Architects and the International Union of Women Architects, which was created in France in 1963, as feminist activism intensified. It examines how, despite similarities between different professional fields in terms of gender hierarchies, differences in national contexts are closely related to how women struggled for equality in their practices and modes of institutional representation.

Keywords: Architecture, Profession, Institutions, Feminism, Transnational dialogues.

* Received on March 02, 2022, accepted on October 20, 2022. Translated by Jeffrey Hoff.

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Introduction

In a letter of April 1960, the French-Romanian architect Solange d'Herbez de La Tour informed the *Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil* (IAB) about the creation of the *Union Française des Femmes Architectes* (UFFA) and asked if a similar institution existed in Brazil. In October of the following year, once again addressing the IAB and mentioning its friendly response, she communicated that the UFFA had been established and expressed a desire to build solid relations with foreign women architects (La Tour, 1960).

In this letter, La Tour reported on connections already established with similar associations like those in Mexico and the United States, and perhaps looking at the Brazilian situation, announced the formation of a network of corresponding members to connect women architects who, in their respective professional environments, faced difficulties to establishing independent collective organizations. In conclusion, she requested that the IAB promote this contact, considering the intention of holding large meetings and the formation of a supranational institution – which would come to be the *Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes* (UIFA), which was created in 1963 (La Tour, 1961).

The letter expresses a clear effort to assure that the initiative sought only “the construction of friendly ties and an exchange of ideas” and that it did not imply breaking the “excellent relations” already established with male colleagues. After all, according to La Tour, at least in France, men and women architects had “equal standing” (La Tour, 1961:1). The diplomatic intention of the communication is evident. As we will see, La Tour’s trajectory and the reasons for the creation of an association dedicated to women architects appear to be inter-related facts that reveal some of the difficulties imposed on the professional work of women by the Parisian environment of the 1950s.

We know nothing about any possible Brazilian responses, institutional or others. A single handwritten note, on the letter, indicates that La Tour’s invitation should be included in the IAB newsletter, instructing those who are interested to write to the UFFA without intermediation of the *Instituto*. Thus, in 1961, the IAB appeared to not want to get involved in these issues. As we will see, shortly later, the tensions that expanded around gender hierarchy, inside and outside the profession; the strengthening of feminist activism; the broadening and consolidation of UIFA as an entity that disputed a place in the transnational network of professional interlocution; and the inclusion of the debate about representativity on the agenda of the International Union of Architects (certainly the main antagonist of the UIFA), would require the IAB to change its position. However, its perspective on the issue was different. It is this transnational and institutional debate, which questioned the ideal status and universal perspective of the professional architect, which this article will examine.

The *Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes* (UIFA)

A graduate in architecture from the University of Bucharest (1947) and in urban planning from the Polytechnical School in that city (1949), La Tour emigrated to France around 1950 and began to try to establish herself with an independent practice in building design amid violent reactions from a hostile male environment. According to her recollections, it was in a small room without heat, poor and alone, eating mostly bread, that she sketched her ideas for the competition *Logements économiques de première nécessité*, promoted in 1954 (Bellizzia, 1976). Associated to the *Bureau d'études de préfabrication J.J. Coulon*, La Tour led a team that formulated two of the thirteen winning projects, from among 97 competitors, in the competition that sought to respond to the post-war housing crisis with the construction of emergency housing projects (Croizé, 2009)¹.

The list of winners indicates that La Tour was an exception, considering both her gender, and her low legitimacy in comparison to an elite group of building companies and recognized French male

¹ The intention of this article is to understand these biographies in the context of the national and international history of the architectural field. However, it would have been quite useful to provide at least a brief biography of each one of the people who will be presented here. However, this was not possible for everyone, especially because almost no documentation is available. This is one more indication of the systematic erasure of the historiography of the trajectory of women architects, which has been well problematized by works such as that of the researchers Silvana Rubino, Lia Antunes, Ana Gabriela Godinho Lima, Andrea Gatti, Despina Stratigakos, and others.

architects such as Eugène Beaudouin (a winner of the *Grand Prix de Rome* and author of the first post-war *grand ensemble*, the *Cité Rotterdam*), Pierre Bailleau and Daniel Badani (chief architects responsible for the *Bâtiments Civils et Palais Nationaux*) or Clément Tambuté, the author of reconstruction plans already implemented at that time (Croizé, 2009; Peyceré, 2000).

Given the refusal by the *Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme* to award La Tour a prize, with the justification that she did not meet the legal requirement of having completed military service to be able to sign a public contract, which was due to the fact that she was not a man, she began a hunger strike on the *Esplanade des Invalides*, surrounded by protest posters, and in response to the negative repercussion of the case, she was granted the award. According to the few historic reports about her trajectory, there is a direct tie between La Tour's protagonism in the creation of the *Union Française des Femmes Architectes* and this episode, which illustrates the unequal access to professional opportunities and the absence of institutions of representation that respond to the problems that women architects face in their daily practice (Rosciano, 1991).

Thus, if interlocution and regulation of the profession concerned French architects at least since the mid nineteenth century, coinciding with the entrance of women to architecture schools in the country, the admission of these women architects to institutions for the representation and socialization of architects was not immediate. The *Société des Architectes Diplômés par le Gouvernement* recognized the registration of women in 1924, and even so, perhaps because it continued to operate very similarly to a "Gentleman's club", it is understandable that the eight women registered until 1943 were in the family circle of some member – that is the they were daughters, sisters or wives of these architects. This opening took place in the *Société centrale des architectes* only in 1975 (Dumont, 1989; Bouysse-Mesnage, 2018).

In contrast, in that year of 1943, three years after its creation by the Vichy Government, and at the height of the World War, the *Ordre des architectes*, dedicated to professional regulation, had 17 women members. Even if this is a tiny amount compared to the nearly three thousand male members, it can be understood that a group of women architects had a certain enthusiasm, perhaps they saw the new entity as an opportunity for institutional representation and participation in a professional network to which they previously did not have access. In fact, considering that practices like that of landscaping, scenography, and teaching, for example, were not regulated by the Order, nor was salaried work, the association of these women architects may reveal their desire to be inserted in a form of action of to which they had difficult access at that time: that of building design performed independently and without associates. More than this, it may be a way to respond to the lack of trust from a clientele still inclined to delegate their larger requests to male professionals or to couples (Bouysse-Mesnage, 2018).

In France, with the end of the World War in 1945, there was a noticeable increase of careers of women architects who worked alone in project management, a form of work that increased during the next decades (Bouysse-Mesnage, 2018). However, we do not know if this was the working condition of Solange D'Herbez de La Tour, given the erasure of nearly her entire trajectory². In any case, despite the increased number of women architects, barriers to their action continued to be placed for a long period, and during the 1950s, their situation within schools and the profession changed very little (Diener, 2013). In 1963 *Le Monde* interviewed three women architects who occupied different positions in the architectural field. The numbers that introduce the text are revealing: of the eight thousand architects registered in the order, nearly eighty were women, of whom only 30 worked in Paris, and 10 in their own firm (Bernheim, 1963).

The first woman interviewed, who had led her own firm for 10 years, was Marion Tournon-Branly³. A professor of architecture at the *Écoles américaines de Fontainebleau*, the daughter of a

² We have indications of the architect's participation in only three projects in the 1950s and 1960s, always in collaboration or co-authorship with men: the competition mentioned; part of the housing project of Massy-Antony, designed together with Gaston Appert, Robert Lechaugette and Pierre-Edouard Lambert; with whom she also developed a proposal for the competition for the 100,000 seat *Stade*.

³ Marion Tournon-Branly (1924-2016) was a French architect, daughter of architect Paul Tournon and the painter Élisabeth Branly. She graduated from the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, and worked with her father and with Auguste Perret. She taught architecture at the *Ecole d'Art de Fontainebleau* after 1960 and was the first woman professor in the course *Unité Pédagogique d'architecture n.7 (UP7)*, created in 1968. She was the first woman admitted to the *Académie*

former director of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, she could be defined, according to the article, as a professional “*bien placée*”, or well-placed. Even so she faced many problems in the profession. It was clear to her that clients presumed that certain projects were suitable for woman architects, yet not others. For example, women were offered schools, kindergartens, residences, or decorating services, but never factories or government buildings. She also mentioned the need to convince builders and clients of her design abilities and capacity to accompany construction, especially in terms of her technical responsibility. It was also a very tiring job. In her words, spending entire days on worksites was not comfortable. But the most difficult factors were related to the consequences of the “business” and the unexpected financial difficulties. Tournon-Branly thus concluded: “I often return to work after dinner, until midnight or one in the morning. Fortunately, I am single: I cannot imagine a husband becoming accustomed to these hours!” (Bernheim, 1963:1).

Despite these challenges, Tournon-Branly’s conditions appeared more favorable than those of the second person interviewed, Renée R., whose hidden last name explained a possible discomfort about her declaration, related to both family and professional issues. The erasure of possible authorship and the difficulty of continuing to perform the role of wife and mother are evident issues for her. This is how the article described her activity as a designer hired by an architectural design office:

Married with an architect, she works as a “*nègre*” in an office (which is not that of her husband!). She loves her work, but this causes serious family problems. For example, it is difficult to get home in time to accompany her children’s homework and prepare dinner. On the other hand, she believes that women often do better on those nights at the *charrette* (before presenting a project) than men. One important advantage for mothers: if you do not work for yourself, it is easy, after a few years of interruption, to find a job as a designer in an office (Bernheim, 1963:1)⁴.

The third interviewee was precisely Solange d’Herbez de La Tour, chosen for her work at the *Union Française des Femmes Architectes*, which at that time conducted its first international congress in Paris. She said that she had an explicit objective (to have clients and government administrations understand that women architects could be taken seriously) and a non-official objective (to help French women architects to give up their complexes, they are “desperately afraid”). Her advice to those aspiring to the practice was: that they have full command of their work (“workers and builders are watching you”), that they have a sense of organization, authority, a strong spirit of synthesis (“few women do”), punctuality (“many men are not on time”), and finally, a good sense of humor (Bernheim, 1963:2).

It is notable that when in 1954 La Tour challenged the fact that she was not granted an award by mounting a hunger strike, she had already been a member of the *Ordre des architectes* since 1950. Yet she did not use the entity as a tool for legal support. This perhaps was the route chosen by those who felt represented by the Order which, until 1973, had no record of the participation of any woman on its highest board. La Tour, to the contrary, decided to protest with her body, and outside institutional means. Thus, it was precisely in reaction to her professional experiences and to the impossibility of being represented by the already existing entities that La Tour founded the *Union Française des Femmes Architectes* in 1960. Soon afterwards, as its president, she began to establish an international network. Paris, in the early 1960s, was the right place for this, considering the intensification of feminist activism and the simultaneous creation of associations to represent women, in response to the growing number of women graduating from colleges (Simon, 2017:158).

The declarations to *Le Monde* show that even though explicit opposition to the insertion of women in the profession was partially overcome, there was still strong resistance to their efforts at integration, including not only individual opposition and discriminatory personal conduct, but biased educational policies and professional associations. Although a reasonable number of women had professional trajectories that at the time could be considered successful, the stereotype of the poor

d’Architecture in 1976. Her projects include homes, schools for children and for technical education, housing projects and monasteries.

⁴ The word “*nègre*” was not translated to emphasize its original meaning. It is used to indicate the true author of a work that is published under someone else’s signature (which is more common in literature, where it is known as a *ghost-writer*).

adjustment of women to the profession remained and was enrooted in the discipline (Stratigakos, 2016; Martinez, 2018).

This situation is not only related to the French scene, as revealed by the action of other national entities similar to the UFFA in this period: the Finnish union of women architects (Architecta, Finland, 1942); the Association of Women Architects (AWA, EUA, 1948); the Association of Women Architects (Japan, 1953), the *Associazione Italiana Donne Ingegneri e Architetti* (AIDIA, Italy, 1957) and the *Arquitectas Mexicanas Asociación Civil* (AMAC, Mexico, 1961) (Rosciano, 1991). In Brazil, we have news of the Associação Brasileira de Engenheiras e Arquitetas [the Brazilian Association of Women Engineers and Architects], which according to all indications was still active in the 1960s (Por iniciativa, 1937:3). The institutions have similar objectives: to organize efforts to provide mutual assistance to their careers, to discuss problems related to the profession, particularly related to the place of women, to stimulate the exchange of ideas and provide moral, intellectual, and material support to their members.

Image 1: The Creation of the Brazilian Association of Women Engineers and Architects, with a photo of Carmen Portinho.

Por iniciativa de um grupo de jovens engenheiras

Funda-se a Associação de Engenheiras e Architectas Brasileiras

Por iniciativa de um grupo de jovens engenheiras, foi fundada nesta capital, a Associação de Engenheiras e Architectas Brasileiras.

A novel associação tem por fim coordenar os esforços das mulheres engenheiras e architectas ou estudantes de engenharia e ar-

chitectura, no sentido de auxiliarem-se mutuamente na carreira, facilitarem o intercambio de idéas entre profisionaes de engenharia e architectura e collaborarem na solução dos problemas relacionados com o progresso.

A A. E. B. conjugará os esforços de suas associadas no sentido de:

- propugnar pela defesa dos interesses da classe de um modo geral;
- amparar moral, intellectual e materialmente suas socias;
- collaborar com outras associações de classe;
- promover conferencias, congressos, exposições, excursões e inqueritos com o objectivo de esclarecer a solução dos problemas modernos de engenharia, architectura e urbanismo;
- coordenar e utilizar todas as collaborações que julgar de utilidade para a execução do seu programma.

A directoria da A. E. A. B. está assim constituída: presidente, engenheira-civil Carmen Portinho; vice-presidente, engenheira-civil Elza Pinho; 1ª secretaria, engenheira-architecta Déa Paranhos; 2ª secretaria, engenheira-architecta Ila Araripe Macedo; thesoureira, Marina Aranha Miranda, engenheira-civil.



Dra. Carmen Portinho, presidente da nova Associação

Source: Por iniciativa de um grupo de jovens engenheiras. *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 27/07/1937, p.3.

Thus, it did not take long for the UFFA to expand its scope, and in 1963 it became the *Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes* (UIFA), a decision taken during the 1st International Congress of Women Architects. The foundational agenda of the new institution included the exchange of ideas and information, the struggle for equal rights for women in the profession, and debate about the restricted involvement of women in specific fields of architecture and urbanism historically associated to women (Simon, 2017). The theme of the encounter focused on “women architects in the world” and on the “demands of women in modern cities”. The objective was to define the place that should be occupied by these professionals and establish a permanent international entity for connections and action (La Tour, 1963a).

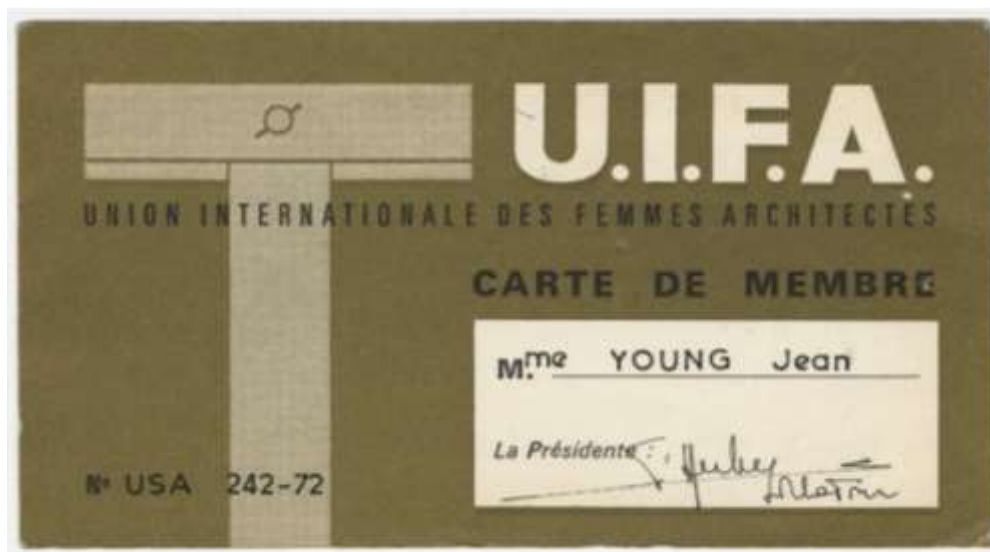
Due to this first international meeting, in February 1963 La Tour once again contacted the *Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil*, requesting that it send to its women members an invitation to the congress that would be held in Paris between June 26 and July 1 of that year. In April, a new letter lamented the lack of responses (La Tour, 1963b). In fact, it was not possible to find any indication of promotion of the event in Brazil or the participation of Brazilian women. Even so, the adhesion to the congress was significant, bringing together 100 women architects from 22 countries, mostly in Europe. For *Le Monde*, which once again gave space to the issue, the meeting made clear that, at that time, architecture was no longer a prerogative of men (Le Monde, 1963).

It is important to indicate that during the long history of women’s rights activism, it has been organized beyond frontiers since at least the mid nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century movements for women’s suffrage, socialism and peace had a transnational nature from the start. Evidently, it was not a single movement: diversity and differences, such as race, class, culture, politics, and organizational priorities shaped what women defined to be their interests. It is probably correct to affirm that at least in these first years, UIFA never called itself a feminist movement – a fact which does not prevent us from seeing it this way, especially if we understand feminism as any gesture that leads to protest against oppression and discrimination of women, or which demands the expansion of their civil and political rights, by individual or group initiative, even if adopting very different strategies and practices (Duarte, 2019). Thus, many studies indicate the creation of institutions and the formation of networks as one of the strategies most shared for the construction of a global feminism (Ferree; Trip, 2006; Baksh, Harcourt, 2015).

By 1969, UIFA had already become an effective international organization (Simon, 2017). Between 1963 and 2010 it organized sixteen congresses. At each encounter, a specific question was addressed, and in them it can be perceived that discussions of urban issues and housing broadened over the years to the themes of historic heritage and the environment. They included women such as Minette de Silva, Gae Aulenti, Denise Scott Brown, Alison Smithson, Jane Drew and Anna Bofill, for example. Many of them were apparently unaccompanied by their illustrious male companions. This longevity and scope of the entity contrast with its evident erasure in historiography, which appears to result, in turn, from two processes of invisibilization in historic narratives about architectural movements: that of the activities of women architects and of institutions and networks for collaboration, in favor of a heroic and individualist logic that ignores collective creation and associations⁵. The few historic texts available until now indicate that UIFA established itself as a new node of sociability, another network for the circulation of ideas in which, perhaps, other ideas had been formulated about the production of the built environment, even if at times it reproduced already established formats (Hervás; Blanco-Agüeira, 2020). They are alternative paths, feminine routes, for thinking about the profession, yet still to be taken by the historic narrative.

⁵ At the margin of the history of architecture produced in Brazil until the 1990s, the institutions now have importance in academic debates, and are understood considering their dynamic aspect, their relations with disciplinary movements and personal trajectories, and as historic products of a collective in a multipolar process of constitution, in constant and tense transformation, as nodes that allow addressing the history of architectural and urban production in a relational manner. There are studies that discuss the specificities of institutional archives and that are attentive to the traps of the official narratives, seeking to problematize them by convoking individual registers, from daily life and oral memory (Dedecca, 2021). These studies in the field are supported by various references of a historic approach to institutional memory, such as Michel Foucault, Marc Abélès, François Buton, Florent Champy, Mary Douglas, Claude Dubar, Arnaud Fossier, Éric Monnet, Brigitte Gaiti, Odile Henry, and others.

Image 2: Membership card UIFA for Jean Young (USA), signed by Solange D'Herbez de La Tour.



Source: IAWA Archives – Ms1998-022 – Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

The Union Internationale des Architectes (UIA)

At the 1st International Congress of Women Architects, there was a notable absence of one entity: the *Union Internationale des Architectes* or International Union of Architects. Founded in 1948, and based in Paris, the UIA was proposed as a new type of architecture organization, molded more by the conventions of cultural diplomacy and good international will than by intellectual debate, focusing on consensual objectives (Vago, 1998). In short time, although it remained a small organization in terms of administrative structure, the UIA became an institution of reference for international mediation of architectural issues (Glendinning, 2009).

Despite repeated invitations, the UIA did not send representatives to the congress of women architects. It is important to note that 1963 was an especially tense year within the International Union of Architects because of disputes involving its own 7th Congress, in Havana, and that triggered its worst diplomatic crisis until 1970, involving the insistent US campaign to cancel the encounter. Amid Cold War polarizations, the UIA did not by any means defend the event location based on any ideological alignment with the new Cuban regime, but as a way to honor the UIA's strongly defended position as a place of professional union and autonomy in relation to political disputes (Glendinning, 2009). At the meeting a conflict erupted about unequal opportunities within the institution, from the perspective of national representations, the result of a mobilization of economically poor countries. The opening to this agenda appears to result from a dual movement: that of the birth of a certain self-criticism by the UIA of hierarchical and power relations within it, and from the insistence of poor countries who saw themselves at the margin of its administrative levels and that used the Congress to strengthen ties to implement their intentions (Lu, 2011).

But even if these conflicts were the focus of its diplomatic efforts, it is very possible that the impossibility, or the lack of interest, or the refusal of the UIA to participate in the International Congress of Women was also linked to its intense defense of the idea of the universality of the professional architect. Animated by this ideal, and by its independence from political conflicts, the Union would seek, at least according to its by-laws, to facilitate and expand free contact among the world's architects, without distinction by race, nationality, religion, gender, education or architectural doctrine; to create friendly relations among them, of understanding and esteem; to allow the confrontation of ideas and concepts, benefiting from multiple experiences, expanding knowledge, and enriching differences (Zubovich, 2006). In the early 1960s, this ideal clearly was not realized, whether in the composition of members, in its hierarchy, distribution of resources, or the geography of its events – which was perceived and criticized by many.

In any case, the UIA did not remain inert in relation to the agenda of gender inequality in the profession and within the institution. A letter from Sonia Van Peborgh to the IAB, in November 1963, suggested that, to the contrary, the formation of the UIFA and its first congress forced the UIA, until then averse to any debate about the issue, to take a new position in the debate. This appeared to have been inevitable given the intensity of the intra- and extra-disciplinary demands. Peborgh reported that she had been named to represent UIA in relation to the women architects. This English woman living in Paris is one more example of someone whose professional trajectory is absent in the historiography, although she apparently occupied important posts within the institution for a long time (Peborgh, 1963).

To begin her work, Van Peborgh sent a questionnaire, which the IAB responded to in less than one month (which demonstrated that the absence of interlocution of the Brazilian institute with the UIFA was intentional). The responses, in any case, were brief, revealing that the Institute was not very open to the issue. In them, the entity affirmed that, according to the national constitution, women architects in Brazil had the same rights as their male colleagues and that it was not possible to precisely determine the number of women who exercise the profession in the country, only that the Institute had 164 women members (IAB, 1963). The response was so concise, that in January 1965, the meeting of the Superior Council of the IAB registered the UIA's request that the report be reformulated with the participation of a woman, and named the Rio de Janeiro resident Rizza Conde to do so (IAB, 1965).

That year, at the 8th UIA Congress, for the first time, a period of work was reserved to debate the issue of representation of women architects in the institution. It was not very much, and not very inclusionary, but substantially different from the previous meetings at which the program included parallel activities for the female companions of architects. On the eve of the event, emphasizing the UIA as an association common to men and women, Peborgh called on women architects – many of whom formed part of a network constructed through trips realized since 1963 – to support, assist and provide solidarity to the institution. She said that the meeting at the Congress was an opportunity for them to express themselves (Peborgh, 1964).

Once again the IAB responded to the UIA's appeals, and promoted in its newsletter the morning of work exclusive to women architects, and even indicated an address to which professionals could write if they wanted to include issues on the meeting agenda (IAB, 1964a). In May 1965, Peborgh, with a certain tone of impatience, lamented the few responses received. By emphasizing the difficulty of organizing the meeting without the collaboration of the participants, she declared that “it was a shame that women architects were not sufficiently interested in the problems of their profession and for their situation to be willing to write a few lines”. Soon afterwards, however, she warned that only a few participants would have the right to speak, considering the short time dedicated to the debate (Peborgh, 1965). It is possible that it was a tumultuous session. In September, a new circular from Peborgh reached the IAB:

It is sad to find that some of you have caused such a bad impression among our foreign colleagues who came to Paris. (...). Some tried by all means to prevent the meeting from taking place in the foreseen climate. Rumors that were completely false were spread among those present and I received many depreciating comments. It is painful to see there is not more camaraderie among women architects (...). Anyone who thinks about it could ever believe that the General Secretariat of the UIA would agree to encourage the meeting of a group of women architects that expressed an intention to separate from the ranks of the UIA (Peborgh, 1965).

In an article dedicated to the session, published in the *Revue de L'UIA*, the perspective of the institution was that these misunderstandings revealed the existence of three “lines of thought”. The first was composed of women architects who understood that they had access to the same rights and responsibilities as their colleagues, that the problems of the profession were common to all, and that the separate meeting was “useless and detrimental”. The second group understood that, in their countries, despite an equality in discourse, there was not effective equality and that they were subject to unfair treatment. In this case, strength came from union, and thus they intended to continue the struggle at an international level through an independent entity (in this case the UIFA). Finally, a third group, seen in the article as the “most moderate”, thought that perhaps through mediation by the UIA

that women architects could struggle more effectively to eliminate discrimination against their practice. They affirmed that a small international association of women architects could not attain the expected results (UIA, 1965).

Image 3: Photos in the special issue of the *Revue de L'UIA* about its 8th Congress, accompanied by the caption: “While women are actively interested in fashion...women architects very actively accompany the work at the congress”.



Source: *Revue de L'UIA*, n.35, set.1965, p.28.

Thus, to confront the dissatisfaction and the possibility it may strengthen an alternative entity, the UIA's executive committee declared at the end of the congress that it was “ready to listen to the point of view of women in the profession” (UIA, 1965). In fact, at this meeting, the Cold War was no longer a central focus on the agenda and in the atmosphere of the UIA. The focus of the controversy returned with emphasis to the reorganization of its structure, as indicated by the conclusion of the same article:

The discussions revealed that there are countries where there is no discrimination whatever against women architects and yet, even there, very rarely is an important position, such as president of an association, etc. occupied by a woman. The women colleagues present at the meeting were of the opinion that it would be desirable for the first step in this direction to be taken within the framework of the UIA (UIA, 1965).

In 1967, to “encourage more active participation” from women professionals in the work of the Union, the executive committee decided to designate a certain minimum number of women architects to the various working commissions (UIA, 1967a). The tensions within the institution continued to revolve around another issue, that of more equal national representation. In the 9th Congress, conducted in the same year in Prague, the tumultuous General Assembly had great repercussion by

manifesting the high degree of conflict, with long and heated debates and severe criticisms of the activities of the Union. The Assembly was impatient for an effective reform and demanded more vigorous actions, opening a path for a reorganization of procedures, objectives and of the organizational structure in the following years. This restructuring included gender issues, although not as a priority.

The *Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil* (IAB)

It is true that logistical and financial obstacles often prevented active and regular participation of the IAB in activities of the UIA, almost all of which took place outside of Brazil. But there was always an effort, and intention, to create ties. Among the short notes and brief responses, the only more specific position taken by the IAB in relation to UIFA was a motion, at the 1967 UIA congress, which proposed that the assembly determine that the existence of a “discriminatory and restrictive” entity to be inappropriate and requested the complete integration of women architects into the UIA’s work (UIA, 1967b). Thus, the IAB aligned itself to how the UIA confronted the issue at the time. Moreover, it is possible to affirm the establishment of a Brazilian institutional silence about the issue in the 1960s, whether domestically or internationally. It is possible to offer a few hypotheses to justify this position.

Until this time, the IAB was a male space, as was the UIA, and was not very open to discussing gender hierarchy. Even if we do not have historic data, we know that in 1962 the IAB had some 3,100 members and that in 1965 it still had only 164 women architects registered as members, given that at least 548 women had graduated from architecture schools since the 1940s, without counting immigrants who worked professionally in the country. It is true that some of these women graduates in architecture never worked in the field, but many sought an opportunity for insertion in the profession, which was mostly male, precisely through actions that escaped the realm of small private firms specialized in building design. They sought other realms, such as planning, landscaping, industrial and graphic design, or furniture or decoration, for example, and other modes of work, as in the public sector, salaried work or teaching (Tamari, 2021).

In this sense, it was only in the late 1960s that the IAB incorporated to its agenda these other fields of action and other architectural practices, without, however, undoing its intimate link with the agenda of independent professionals focused on building design that it historically focused on. Thus, it is possible that Brazilian women architects did not see the Institute as a space of representation and sociability – a hypothesis corroborated by the number of women members. It should also be indicated that until 1972 only two women occupied managerial posts in the national administration: Giuseppina Pirro (who was on the fiscal board between 1951 and 1952 and on the board of directors from 1952 to 1954) and Lygia Fernandes (who was on the board of directors from 1954 to 1956).

Moreover, as mentioned, the IAB had another dispute within the UIA, it concerned the occupation of leadership roles and the redistribution of national forces in its administrative and decision-making structure. In the 1960s, when the institution was most intensely dedicated to international issues, since its founding, the IAB assumed, along with Chilean and Mexican entities, a certain rising position in relation to other similar Latin American organizations, particularly when in dialog with entities of global representation. In the Brazilian case, an evident priority was given to the UIA over other nodes of the international network of professional dialog.

Thus, we cannot ignore the fact that it was precisely at the assembly that preceded the UIA congress of 1965, and therefore the session dedicated to women architects, that the Brazilian Flavio Leo Azeredo da Silveira was elected vice president of the entity, after an intense campaign by the IAB. It was the highest post occupied by Brazil until then. At the next congress, in 1967 the same as which Brazil approved the motion to repudiate the UIFA, Silveira was chosen to report on the discussion related to changes in the by-laws and internal regulations of the UIA, representing a group that severely criticized the Union’s activities, as we saw. In fact, since 1962, the IAB began a period of sharp criticism of the UIA’s hierarchical and Eurocentric form of operation, and to insist on including the issue of underdevelopment in its main periods of debate.

It is also important to consider that the attention dedicated to the issue of gender hierarchies had been limited, before the military coup, by the strong adhesion of IAB members to leftist issues of national development, and after the 1964 coup, by the mobilization of resistance to the regime and

by the weakening of the institute. It is true that this growing international institutional representation of the first half of the 1960s took place at a unique time in the IAB's involvement with the public political debates in Brazil, which were discussed amid intense politicalization of the profession and the conviction by some that a radical transformation was underway, accompanying the revolutionary trends that would mark the decade in politics and culture (Ridenti, 2010). It was a conflict over the social scope of the profession that triggered a new cohesion around the IAB, even if amid the many disagreements inside and outside the profession. Thus, this solid and regular international interlocution coincided with a moment in which autonomous professional regulation, a self-criticism of Brazilian architectural production, and of the social function of architects, and urban and agrarian reforms were intrinsically related questions that drove the IAB, especially during the administration of Brazilian President João Goulart, as an agglutinating element for confronting housing and urban planning issues (Serran, 1976).

This was not something restricted to the entity for architects. Federici identified how a limited concern for issues like family, reproductive issues, and gender hierarchies were linked, in the case of the left, to overestimating the power of industrialization to create the material base needed for a more egalitarian society. In the name of this cause, issues and interests that, in Federici's vision, were not directly related to the confrontation between labor and capital were sacrificed, such as the desire that women had to be free from social and economic dependency on men (particularly in the case of white feminism). More than this, similarly, there was an inability among Marxists in the 1960s and 1970s to recognize the importance of the women's movement, which was accused of dividing the working class (Federici, 2021).

The coup of 1964, at the IAB, ended a period of great politicalization, in which the institution would conquer an influential place as the voice of a professional category that would attain unprecedented social recognition. The second half of the decade would see its institutional reaccommodation, both due to the deterioration of its high goals to make a substantial intervention in the Brazilian built environment (aligned to the country's Base Reforms and to growing politicalization with a leftist perspective of the professional agenda related to planning, urban reform, and housing) as well as the emergence of new internal problems of representation, which become increasingly divisive. As took place in the UIA, the centrality assumed by the residents of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the administrative bodies came to be targets of intense questioning. They are criticisms that coincided with the expressive reduction of activities of the IAB in the final years of the decade, with laments about its fragmentation, and about the social devalorization of architects and the lack of available positions. If the Institute was weakening, it was nevertheless engaged, particularly, with the militant civil resistance to the increased repression. Thus, it did not seem to be a situation favorable to the incorporation of a discussion about gender inequality.

Moreover, the situation of the feminist movement in Brazil and the opposition to the regime by the part of women, are elements that must be considered for us to understand the absence of Brazilian interlocution with UIFA. If the 1960s were the initial moments of Brazilian feminism, as a movement, it gained intensity above all in the 1970s, when there was strategic recognition of the condition of women and their debates, which included domestic, political, and professional issues. But, while in Europe and the United States feminism was supported by "dreams of liberty and transformation", in Brazil, militant women expressed themselves in a broad front of urgent opposition to the regime, whose priority was established in detriment to the specificities of feminist struggles. That is, the organization of the Brazilian feminist movement, as well as its progressive visibility, took place precisely during the regime of political exception. Thus, perhaps Solange D'Herbez de La Tour's letters arrived in Brazil a few years before their author found a consolidated network of possible interlocutors available for that specific engagement in the professional sphere (Hollandia, 2019)⁶.

⁶ This article sought to understand the interlocutions from an institutional perspective. We have, specifically, news of two women architects who were interlocutors in the 1960s, who appear to have at least exchanged some correspondence with UIFA: Elsa Wothers de Wit and Esther Figuer Sisson.

Final Considerations

It is very interesting to perceive the similarity between the French and Brazilian professional environments in terms of gender hierarchies, inside and outside the institutions, in the forms of action of women architects, and the opportunities that they envisioned for occupying spaces of professional interlocution. Yet it is essential to recognize that the two countries had completely different contexts, whose specificities are fundamental to understanding the reasons for which, in certain locations, there was a collective engagement to UIFA, but not in Brazil. While in France women united against sexual discrimination and for equality of rights, in Brazil the feminist movement had distinct marks, because the historic conjuncture led these women architects to take a position against the military dictatorship and censorship, for redemocratization of the country, amnesty and better living conditions (Duarte, 2019). In the city of Rio de Janeiro, in 1968, a cordon of women marched against censorship in the “March of the 100,000”. In Paris at this time, UIFA was preparing its 2nd Congress, held in Monte Carlo, in 1969, under a fraternal climate, around the theme “New Cities, the contributions of women architects” and with the honorary presidency of Princess Grace of Monaco. Like the UIA, at the time, UIFA’s board of directors was composed solely of European, Israeli, Canadian, and Japanese architects (La Tour, 1969).

Image 4: Frames from the news-film “Grace Kelly en visite au congrès des femmes architectes” (assembled by the author).



Source: Magazine féminin, 28/07/1969 [<http://www.ina.fr/video/I12221756> - accessed: 2 March 2022].

A transnational perspective allowed this article to juxtapose two geographically distinct professional environments (which also had specific modes of functioning). The juxtaposition revealed similarities, yet especially differences, in the effort to examine the routes taken by the collective debate of gender in the profession and the various models of architectural practices and lives. The impact of feminism in the twentieth century, and its demands for women’s rights in the architectural field certainly deserve greater historic attention, an effort that fortunately has been undertaken in the past decade. This article contributed by using a transnational perspective to expose different interlinking histories of activism for women’s rights, as well as rejections of it, whether deliberate or not, for political and strategic reasons. An attempt was made to place contexts in the foreground and to map complex relations associated to the issue that were established beyond borders.

Finally, recognizing the peculiarities of each professional field and each biography, it is interesting to relate the intentions of this article with other perspectives that have sought to consider the various careers of women in the most diverse professions in the light of the issue of gender – their respective situations, and the many readings that their male interlocutors made of their presence, often related to the conditions of action of their female contemporaries in other parts of the world (Corrêa, 2003; Lopes; De Souza; De Oliveira Sombrio, 2004; De Leôn; Figares, 2009). Although there were differences, the similarities resulted from an external factor, specific to the late nineteenth century and

the first half of the twentieth century: these professional women lived in a period when most higher level professions had a male identity (Corrêa, 2003).

In this period, women faced various reactions to their work, by breaking domestic frontiers placed before them and invading the public sphere, which was male, at times bringing other logics to their professional conduct, at times adapting themselves to the logic inherent to the profession that they exercised, the circumstances in which they lived, and to their interlocutors. Even if they are different from each other, it is precisely when they are considered next to their male colleagues, that the split becomes visible in the supposed gender neutrality of their practices and in the construction of their disciplinary knowledge. This relation allows grasping the emergence of definitions of female and of male that are made explicit in symbolic violence, in disputes for power and privilege, and in the attribution to them of an ambiguous status. They are, according to Mariza Corrêa (2003), complex and subtle schemes of gender construction that are culturally, historically, and politically determined, and in which we are still entangled.

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