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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FISHERWOMENS AND AUSTERITY PROGRAMS: REPEATED INEQUALITIES

¹Elenise Faria Scherer, ²Antonia Mara Raposo Diógenes, ³Christiane Pereira Rodrigues and ⁴Maria Ferreira de Oliveira Filha

¹Professor of the Post-Graduation Program of Society and Culture in the Amazon (Pós-Graduação em Sociedade e Cultura na Amazônia – PPGSCA) and the Post-Graduation Program of Environment Sciences and Sustainability in the Amazon (Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências do Ambiente e Sustentabilidade na Amazônia – PPGCASA), both from the Federal University of the Amazonas (Universidade Federal do Amazonas – UFAM) and CNPq researcher.

²Doctorant of the Post-Graduation Program of Environment Sciences and Sustainability in the Amazon – PPGCASA and Professor of the Federal University of the Amazonas - UFAM, campi Parintins - Amazon

³Professor of the Federal Institute of Amazonas – IFAM, Parintins – Amazon and researcher in the Group Public policies, work and environment in Amazon -Federal University of the Amazon – UFAM and CNPq.

⁴Doctorant of the Post-Graduation Program of Society and Culture in the Amazon – PPGSCA - Federal University of the Amazonas- UFAM and researcher in the Group Public policies, work and environment in Amazonia Federal University of the Amazon – UFAM and CNPq

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we comment that fiscal austerity programs adopted to reduce the public deficit according to neoliberal precepts in times of economic-financial crisis influence the way of life of the traditional populations particularly of the artisan fishermen and fisherwomen in Brazil. We take as empirical reference the Provisional Measures numbers 664 and 665 /2014 and the Decrees n° 8.424 and 8.425/2015 which, in the name of correcting distortions and shortening of public expenses, restructured the Policy of Unemployment Insurance of the Urban Workers and extended it to the Rural Workers, especially the fishers and artisan fishers who are contemplated with the Policy of the Unemployment Insurance to the Artisan Fishers – PSDPA, popularly known as the Protection Insurance (Seguro Defeso). This article describes the demands adopted to restrict expenses when transferring incoming only to *exclusive* fishers, in other words, those who live only by the fishing, excluding the fisherwomen who other than the capture, process the fish, as a result, gender inequalities are reiterated.

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INTRODUCTION

This article goes from the assumption that the austerity programs used in different countries to fight economic-financial crisis are not neutral; they have different impacts in social life. It is considered, also, that these programs cannot be seen in a unidimensional way, they must be comprehended to beyond their economic-financial aspects, like a group of ideas constructed by the denominated 'Chicago Boys' which belonged or not to multilateral agencies. The theoretical references available (FRASER, 2009, WALBY, 2009; DABROWISKI, 2018) show that the austerity programs affect the social lives of different human groups (restructures the job market, reset the familiar and work world, ethnicities, sex-gender social relations, the social protections and reinforce the social inequalities).

They have moral implications, particularly about women, who are triple affected especially in the segments socially vulnerable and different counties and global regions. (WALBY, 2009). In Latin-American it does not occurs differently. Lavinas (2016) show that the U.N report (2015)¹

¹The UN report, *UN WOMEN. Progress of the world's Women 2015-2016. Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* published in 2015 brings, without a doubt, meaningful contributions about the life of women in global terms, especially in what refers to education, insertion in the job market, emancipatory fights among others. The report was published in a context of economic global crisis, and perverse consequences in the social life, in particular the women, in the case of Brazil, in an economic conjecture which the government that starts adopts a macroeconomic plan which is going to have impact in the life of the working class, especially with the rural workers, among them artisan fishers.

points that there were some progress in relation to the gender inequalities and reduction of extreme poverty in the region, in the access to social protection and also the division of work in different sectors of social life, in particular, in Brazil. This trajectory of social and political gain, can be said, are tenuous facing the social processes occurred in the recent Brazilian reality. We refer to the parliamentary, media and legal *coup* from 2016 and the presidential elections from 2018, which elected an extreme right wing government with clear intentions of commodification of social life. The minimal gains being from the point of view of political recognition and those protected on the reduction of poverty programs, find themselves, in this national life moment, in serious risks of being interrupted and are suffering radical setbacks in regards of fights for the gender inequality and regress of social protections. Here, we report them, especially the rural women, forgotten by sociological analysis and politically invisible in their territories, especially the artisan fishing workers who regressed on their rights previously conquered, impacting the lives of millions of fishing workers who in the last years fight for the recognition and social protection.

We take as empirical support to exemplify the arguments above the policies of austerities with the objective of fiscal adjustments in the public accounts, on 2014 and 2015 by the Brazilian government. It is about the Provisional Measures MPs 664 and 665 /2014 and the Decrees nº 8.424 and 8.425/2015 which gave legitimacy to the governmental structures that, aiming to correct distortions and shortening of public expenses, restructured the Policy of Unemployment Insurance of the Urban Workers and extended it to the Rural Workers, especially the fishers and artisan fishers who are contemplated with the Policy of the Unemployment Insurance to the Artisan Fishers – PSDPA², popularly known as the Protection Insurance (Seguro Defeso)³.

This article is structured in three items. In the first one, we highlight the Policy of the Unemployment Insurance to the Artisan Fishers – PSDPA (1993) as an innovative policy, which contemplates at the same time a transferring of incoming to the artisan fishers and the protection of lake environments. We describe the assured rights with the Fishing Law of 2009 when it recognizes the fisherwoman not as the *helper* of the husband anymore, but as a worker of the fishing production process. On the second item, we analyze the policy of austerity adopted by the Brazilian government in 2015, on behalf of fiscal adjustment in the public accounts, which impacts in every way the life of the artisan fishers deconstructing their identities conquered in the fight and in the resistance for social rights and forging new identities. On the third one, we evidence these policies of austerity in the creation of new juridical ordaining: the *exclusive* fisher, that is, the one who is uniquely a fisher, leaving women out of this juridical ordaining. And more: it leaves fisherwomen with no other choice, once other than the fishing itself⁴, they are not

recognized in the process of fish treatment. Second, as a result, restricting the social rights of these women. It should be on the record that this article is the result of a research project realize in the rivers, the lakes of the Amazon, with the objective of identifying the insertion of artisan fisherwomen in the process of fishing production⁵. We end it with some conclusions reinforcing the arguments developed throughout the entirety of the text.

Correction of distortion or a setback on rights?: In 2009, the Fisheries Law was enacted (Law 11959/2009), a milestone for artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen. In spite of the inconsistencies, its legal and political assumptions have contributed to remove this segment of rural workers from the "social forgetfulness", especially the women who not only became recognized as fishing workers but also had their social rights ensured. In addition, it ended up changing the Special Superintendence of Aquaculture and Fisheries (SEAPs), into the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture (MPA)⁶, in a broad governmental agreement with the fishing industry, eventually responsible for planning the public policies for the sector.

A thorough examination of the legal ruling of 2009 allows us to identify no direct references to fisherwomen: there is nothing new there, since, as we know, the social policies of the Western Welfare State ignore the gender fact, an aspect that has raised criticisms from feminist organizations.⁷ However, the Fisheries Law accedes to them in the making and repairing of fishing gear, recovering small boats and the processing of the artisanal fishery products, where the presence of women is widespread all over the country. On the other hand, this ruling has been interpreted in several public spheres as recognition that women are no longer just helpers: they became fishing workers, with the right to the General Fisheries Register (RGP) and access to the Unemployment Benefit Policy for Artisanal Fishermen (PSDPA), created in the 1990s, in the wake of Eco-92, which aims to both the conservation of aquatic resources and the social reproduction of fishing families, also guaranteeing other rights included in the Brazilian social security. It should be emphasized that this recognition was a product of the struggle of the fisherwomen's movement through the Fishermen and Fisherwomen's Movement (MPP) and the National Fisherwomen's Association (ANP) (MANESCHY, 2010; ALENCAR, 2011; SCHERER, 2013). Certainly the Fisheries Law was decisive for the institutionalization and inclusion of fishermen and fisherwomen already engaged in fishing work. In addition, it helped to shape up the movement, lending visibility to it and definitely guaranteeing the voice of women throughout the national territory. Since 2003, 15 years have gone by under

Report, 2013; NEIS, Barbara; BINKLEY, Marion; GERRARD, Siri; MANESCHY, Christina. *Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization*. Hadifax, Canadá, Ferwood Publishing, 2015; AKTEA. Rede Europeia de Organização de Mulheres da Pesca; SAMUDRA, A sea of woman. 2005.

⁵ SCHERER, Elenise (org.) *Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras na pesca. Ambiente e Reconhecimento*. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond Universitária/FAPEAM, 2013; SCHERER, Elenise (org.) *Aqui Estamos: entre águas dos mares, águas dos rios, nas terras de trabalho na pesca artesanal*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Letra Capital / FAPEAM, 2015. And, currently, *Desigualdades Desmedidas na Amazônia, vozes das mulheres no trabalho e na resistência*. Projeto de Pesquisa, UFAM/CNPq, 2020-2023.

⁶With the "reform" of the government structure, the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture (MPA) was incorporated into the Ministry of Agriculture.

⁷ ORLOFF, A. S. *Gender and Welfare State*. Institute for Research on Poverty. Discussion Paper nº 1.082, 96, 1996.

² . It is a socio-environmental policy which has as simultaneous objective to propitiate monetary incoming to the artisan fishers during the period of four months (December to March) in which occurs the reproduction of the fishing species and they assume the commitment of not fishing during this time. PSDPA.

³ It has become popularly as the Protection Insurance (Seguro Defeso). The "Defeso" is the period of reproduction of different fishing species, which vary from region to region in Brazil. To assure the time of the reproduction of the species – which may last from three to four months, the value of the monetary incoming is four minimum wages during this time.

⁴ Cf. FAO. *Mainstreaming Gender in Fisheries and Aquaculture*. Rome. Final

Law no. 10779, and six years under the Fisheries Law (2009), a time of great changes for the fishing sector, especially for the artisanal fisher workers as there has been growing access to the Seguro Defeso (Fishing Prohibition Insurance, during prohibition periods). As we will see further on, the institutional managers of the fishing industry have raised constant accusations of irregularities and function deviation by the fishermen eligible to this social benefit. It also raised widespread criticism from different public spheres. The institutional technicians exposed the risks that accompanied the management of the Fishing Prohibition Insurance (Seguro Defeso) due to the rampant and progressive increase in the number of fishermen who acquired the RGP (General Fishing Registry) and so obtained this socio-environmental income. Coupled with the great number of annual registrations, it was found out that the RGP was being granted without due control: the transfer of income from the Seguro Defeso (Fishing Prohibition Insurance) to some applicants that were not, in fact, artisanal fishermen (or even fishermen). Definitely, the political-institutional course of events featured a myriad of irregularities, fraudulent attitudes of some fishermen and their respective communities, mainly related to the registration of men and women that did not fit in the criteria established by the fishery managers. (SCHERER, 2013).

In another instance I mentioned the Fishing Prohibition Insurance, the Seguro Defeso (2013, page 101) in the light of observations and empirical data: this social policy, despite distortions, caused significant changes in the lives of the fishing communities, especially in the Amazon. However, the Fishing Prohibition Insurance (Seguro Defeso) brought about new professional rearrangements and new doubts on competence and professional status, such as the fact that some rural workers also wanted to be considered artisanal fishermen. There was mistrust, constant accusations among those who were in fact fishermen and those occasional ones, or even those who simply pretended to be fishermen. As a result, numerous conflicts, fragmentation and individualism emerged, hindering even the political articulation for the organization of their representatives. The most serious discussion was on the categorization of fishing work to women. Distrust, ironies and doubts if, in fact, women were fishers and should therefore have access to the Fishing Prohibition Insurance, which, in my view, denoted the misunderstanding or misreading of the Fisheries Law. Questions were raised: are women really fishers whether or not they catch fish? Could they be considered fishers, even those who only process the fish or those who are just the fishermen's wives? The political environment was not peaceful among them, easily noticed in some fishing communities.

Another fact that stands out was the growing political representations of the fishermen conflicting and disputing among themselves the numbers of members, despite the numerous rulings of the authorities to find a political way to simplify the access of fishermen and fisherwomen to the RGP, proving their identities and also the payment of social security contributions; adding services that would fill up institutional voids in the fishing communities in order to contemplate the expansion of the communities, the splitting of these in unions and associations as ways to find the best form of political representation that could establish a link between the government and the fishermen (MARINHO, 2009). It is worth observing that the rush to join the communities was promptly motivated by the requirement of the Brazilian State to access

the Seguro Defeso (Fishing Prohibition Insurance); the RGP (General Fishing Register) could only be made by political representations, an unusual demand for the workers: they had never been required to be a member of a political representation to be an institutionally recognized worker. Actually, the growth and expansion of representative institutions that aimed to make the access to the RGP more transparent led to new conflicts, undue attitudes and unlawful acts. Moreover, some institutions revealed links to politicians and their political parties and their exclusive interests.

On the other hand, the difficulties the government structures faced to manage the program that, even after the creation of the MPA (Ministry of Fishing and Aquaculture) in 2009, continued to involve several ministries: Labor, Social Security and Environment, which, through the IBAMA (the institution that takes care of environmental issues), decreed the period of the Prohibition annually. The official discourse called it transversal management. In the midst of so many normative instructions aimed at finding and ensuring transparency in the identification of fishermen coupled with the demands on the excess of documents, the access to the insurance by fishermen enjoyed a citizenship (or sub-citizenship) regulated under the terms of Santos (1979).

In the context of so many institutional obstacles arising from the constant increases in the amounts destined to the payment of the Prohibition Insurance that demand annual re-applications of fishermen and artisanal fisherwomen, plus the odd technocratic language, some researchers argued that the fishermen themselves put at risk the existence of the Insurance, a right they had obtained by means of hard disputes. Since its inception in 1991, Seguro Defeso has gone through two different phases, as mentioned by the study prepared by IPEA technicians and researchers (SANTOS, 2014). The first phase covers the period after the promulgation of Law 8287/1991, including coastal fishermen, up to 2002, driven by the socio-environmental debates of Eco-92. This law was then replaced by a new ruling (Law no.10779 / 2003), which redefined the concept of fishing and artisanal fishers and extended the Seguro Defeso to fishermen of inland or continental waters⁸.

The second phase corresponds to the year 2003 to the present day including the 2009 Fisheries Law. Therefore, for over a decade there has been an exponential increase in the number of fishermen who hold the Worker's Identification Number (NIT) and the RGP, and have become, in the techno-burocratic language of the State, *beneficiaries* of the Seguro Defeso (CAMPOS, ANDRÉ G. and CHAVES, Jose Valente, 2014, p.56). Actually, they had never had access to the rights of the social security. The idea of *beneficiary* expresses, in my view, a state grant. IPEA (Research Institute in Applied Economics) data show that since 2011 the number of artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen has been growing steadily, from 92,000 in 2002 to 647,700 in 2011. In other words, 55,700 new beneficiaries joined the Seguro Defeso in less than a decade (an average of 61,700 yearly) (CAMPOS et al., 2014, p.56).

⁸Continental waters: rivers, basins, streams, lakes, lagoons, dams or any reservoirs away from the sea, natural or manmade and canals with no link with the sea. Provisional Measure 30.06.2009 – DO. Chapter II: definitions, p. 02.

Empirical data from long observation allow me to say that the transfer of income equal to a minimum wage during the four months of the piracema (when the fish move up river) was, in my view, a great attraction for the rampant race of fishermen and other professionals to their representative institutions to acquire the RGP (General Fishing Registry) and have access to Seguro Defeso (SCHERER, 2013). This attitude is justifiable: these people had been ignored by the Brazilian state for ages. Their precarious living conditions and the illiteracy rate amongst them reveal the public neglect they have been subjected to for decades. It should also be taken into account that the Seguro Defeso represents the only source of income for most of them and also their first regular income experience. Most of their earnings, especially for the subsistence fishermen, come from the sale of the surplus which in general is insignificant as they fish for their own subsistence. They hardly ever manage to sell the surplus due to the long distances they would have to cover to reach the consumers.

Usually their production is passed on to the middleman who is the one that, in fact, makes a profit out of a market ridden with unfair transactions. The life of these fishermen is a daily struggle to obtain means of survival. When they manage to sell the fish it is in the farther corners of the forests and rivers. They also trade with the people in their local communities and with the first consumer that might come by in sales that involve very small cash. The attraction exerted by the money from the Seguro Defeso is considerable. They spend it on food, consumer goods and new fishing gear. Due to their poor living conditions there is always an unrestrained pursuit of beneficiaries for the Seguro Defeso. Government authorities argue this has led to growing public expenditure through the usual argument that the fishermen are at fault: they are blamed for the irregularities and distortions in the insurance program. Government authorities have not recognized their lack of competence and the complexities of running a program like this and the social processes embedded in it. The artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen have facing a process of deconstruction of rights, based on accusations of illegality and criminalization over them.

These facts have aroused adverse reactions in the debate held in the public spheres: Seguro Defeso has come to be viewed with reservations though the purposes linked or associated with its social and environmental objectives are recognized. In almost all of the Brazilian states the number of *beneficiaries* is superior to those of fishermen (IPEA, 2014).⁹The constant misuses led to institutional filters and annual re-registrations to identify who were or were not fishermen. This gave ground to the dropping of the Program from the Fiscal Adjustment package through Provisional Measures in 664 and 665, at the end of 2014. There was a favorable environment for such measure due to both the high number of conflicts and the looming economic crisis intensified after the federal elections of 2014. On December 30th the government, without any consultation with society - especially the social movements, and union congresses - published a decree with new rules and

⁹ In the states of Pará, Maranhão, Bahia, Piauí, Amazonas and Santa Catarina, an expressive number of individuals accessed the benefits of SD throughout 2010, although they did not fit into the profile of the program defined in Law 10779 / 2003 and Resolution CODEFAT No. 468/2005. In such states, the program started to be aimed at individuals who, at least from the point of view of regulatory standards, should not be protected by it - consisting of non-artisanal fishers or even to other professionals. (IPEA, 2014).

propositions: the urban workers' unemployment benefit policy would be extended to the artisanal fishermen through the Unemployment Insurance Policy for the Artisanal Fisherman (PSDPA), the Seguro Defeso. For some it was an authoritarian measure and a loss of rights; for others, correction of distortions. For some others, the Provisional Measures, in making the corrections and establishing a set of rules of control and guardianship, jeopardized rights. Government action raised numerous criticisms that unified the pro-government and opposition unions and eventually brought up huge political corrosion to the ruling group. On the other hand, the government authorities tried to minimize the effects insisting that these measures would avoid fraud, correct distortions and, at most, equate Brazil's social coverage spending to international standards (SALVADOR, 2014). Therefore, strict rules were implemented within the public account adjustments for 2015 to achieve a primary surplus (when revenues exceed public spending) of 1.2% of GDP, arguing that this procedure would save \$18 billion reais in public expenditures (DIEESE, 2014.)¹⁰.

Moreover, this argument tries to justify the need to correct distortions, "to lend more transparency", and "ensure the sustainability of both the Workers' Assistance Fund (FAT) where the Seguro Defeso comes from, and also of social security" (SALVADOR, 2014). In fact, such measures affect the most vulnerable segment of the rural workers who were belatedly recognized within the alleged universality of Brazilian social security. Now, let us examine the changes brought about by these Provisional Measures.

Provisional measures and punishment of the poor: The Provisional Measures Nos. 664 and 665 of 2014, complement each other. The two decrees, nº 8824 and nº 8825 of 2015, endorsed by the Legislative Power, revise some regulations of the Law of the Fisheries of 2009. It is worth recalling that this defines the concept of fishing as *any operation, action or act tending to extract, harvest, catch, seize or capture fishing resources* (Item III, Art. 2). Article 4, section II states that *the fishing activity comprises all the processes of fishing, transportation, commercialization and researches on fishing resources, exploitation and exploration, cultivation, conservation, processing, transportation, commercialization and research on the fishing resources*. It rules out in a sole paragraph:

For the purposes of this Law, the activity of making and repairing of fishing gear, repairing of small vessels and processing of handicraft fishery products are considered fishing activities.

As one can see, this legal system does not specifically refer to women, as I have already observed, but it extends to them the possibility of recognition as workers in fishing. The women are the great majority in the division of labor in the fishing activities in the country. They carry out, besides the capture, the repair of the means of production (fishing gear) and the processing of the fish.

¹⁰Justifications presented in Provisional Measure MP 665. The government argued that the main reason for its implementation was the control over the expenses of the Workers' Assistance Fund (FAT), up from 0.54 of GDP in 2002 to 0.92 in 2013. DIEESE, 2014.

It should be remembered that some women had already been recognized as fisherwomen and several had already been included in the Fisherman's Portfolio since the 1930s, granted by the Merchant Navy (LEITÃO, 2010). Moreover, ethnographic studies since the 1990s have highlighted the invisibility of women in fishing environments (MOTTA-MAUÉS, 1999; ALENCAR, 2010; MANESCHY,(2010). Provisional Measure no. 664-2014 reproduces art. 01, Law 10779 (11/25/2003) and reclassifies the concept of artisanal fisherman:

The professional fisherman who exclusively and uninterruptedly carries out his activity, artisanally, individually or in a family economy, shall be entitled to the Seguro Defeso benefit comprising a fixed insurance, in the amount of a monthly minimum wage, during the period of prohibition of the fishing activity for the preservation of the species (my emphasis).

It creates, therefore, the category of *exclusive* fisherman, the one who works on fishing without interruption and in an artisan way, that is, that fisherman who lives solely from fishing. Only he is entitled to the Seguro Defeso. The purpose of the official argument is to clarify the framework for fishermen and grant the benefit by differentiating those who live exclusively from fishing from those who also carry out other professional activities or have another source of income for survival. This reclassification intends to leave out those fishermen who are simultaneously fishermen and small farmers who carry out economic practices and experience different cultures daily, that is, they fish, plant, harvest. In the Amazon their work environment comprises the forest, land and water as a means of social reproduction of existence at different times of the hydrological cycle. This new legal category of *exclusive* fisherman leaves out the vast majority of artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen.

The policy makers of the Provisional Measures have disregarded the way of life and the cultural diversity that characterize the fishing environments. These social groups with culturally distinct lives should be respected because they maintain traditional forms of fishing which respect and conserve the environment in spite of the pressure of the social dynamics. These rulings just ignore the peculiarities of the way of life and the needs and demands of these distinct social groups who must be bound to the territory for the material and cultural reproduction of their existences. The right to participate in the maintenance of traditional territories was also ignored. Definitely, these legal rulings have disrupted the lives and culture of those social beings. These segments of traditional peoples had previously been recognized and legitimized in the power structures of the Brazilian State. These legal rulings, by typifying them, impute to the individual fisherman and fisherwoman the whole responsibility. Worse even, at including and then excluding arbitrarily, these rulings legitimize the reduction of social protection policies and expand social domination. Decree 8425 (03.31.2015) which regulates the sole paragraph of articles 24 and 25 of the Fisheries Law (29/06/2009)¹¹, creates new rules for access to the RGP,

and defines in art. 2o, in item VIII of the same article the various types of fishermen, among many other categorizations, the male and the female worker who gives support to artisanal fishing.

(.....) an individual who, independently or in a family economy, with their own means of production or under a partnership contract, carries out work in the making and repair of fishing gear, repairs on small boats or works in the processing of artisanal fishery products. "

One can see that the law separated the category of artisanal fishermen and artisan fisherwomen into two segments: the *exclusive* ones and the *support* ones. It means that even in the productive process, the *support* workers will be considered only as a support and/or a complement to the fishery production. The women and the young people who carry out most of these activities of repairing and processing of the fish were severely hit. By reclassifying, this ruling reifies the exclusion and devalues the women's work, reinforcing that deep-rooted idea that they only give support. This not only brought down their hard won identity built up day after day but also reinforced gender and social class inequalities. Article 1 of MP 665, paragraph 5, defines who should or should not receive the Seguro Defeso:

The granting of the benefit (Seguro Defeso) shall not be extended to activities of support to the fishing or to the relatives of the professional fisherman who do not meet the requirements and conditions established in this Law. (My italics)

Once more the women who lend *support* to the activities are left out of the Seguro Defeso. The mandatory ruling that they must catch the fish denies the ruling of 2009, which, as I have already observed, recognized that women, by and large the ones responsible for the fish processing and recovery of the means of production, sell fillets in markets, shrimp in public places, in short, bring fishery products to circulation. The long time it took them to be recognized as fisherwomen themselves is ignored (LEITÃO, 2011). In addition, a large number of fishermen engaged in subsistence culture and, therefore, carry out multiple activities, are also left out. Worse even, in my opinion, Provisional Measure 665, in art. 2, paragraph 1, transfers responsibility for the management of Seguro Defeso to the National Institute of Social Security (INSS). Due to its institutional capillarity (receiving and processing the applications and enabling beneficiaries), it penalizes women even more.

To be eligible for the benefit, a fisherman must not be enjoying any benefits arising from an income transfer program with conditional ties or social security benefits or assistance of a continuing nature, except for death and accident-relief.

The fisherwomen included in the Bolsa Família Program are seriously hit. By redefining and making the rules more meticulous for the access to the Seguro Defeso, the women will be penalized temporarily (or ad infinitum?) in their poor living conditions as they are not entitled to accumulate two

¹¹ Art. 24. "Every person, whether physical or corporate who carries out fishing activities as well as the fishing vessel must be previously registered in the General Registry of Fishing Activity (RGP), as well as in the Federal Technical Registry (CTF) in accordance with the specific legislation." Sole Paragraph: "the criteria for the execution of the General Registry of the Fishing

Activity shall be established in the regulation of this Law". DOU. Law no. 11959 of June 29, 2009.

income transfer policies during the four months of the reproduction period of the species that, in the Amazon, begins annually on November 15 and ends on March 15 of the following year.

Options without choices and reordered iniquities: As the research developed, I observed that the fisherwomen have an active role in the social reproduction of themselves and of their domestic group. Far from victimizing them or emphasizing their social distress, it is well worth mentioning here that the legal system in force affects the most vulnerable segment of the female rural workers, both their work and way of life. Socially deprived due to the precarious public services, weakened by the spatial isolation of the rural communities in the Amazon region, especially those located in the depths of the forest and in the immensity of the rivers, they carry on with an enormous deficit of citizenship. Along the political and academic debates about the harsh legal measures implemented by the government, I realize that their impact on the women's daily lives is still unnoticed: these women have been doubly affected in their existence as social beings, especially the shellfish collectors. As the fisherwomen are not entitled to two simultaneous benefits, they will have, in the next piracema (when fish move up river) of 2015-2016, to choose between remaining with the small transfer of income of the Bolsa Família or opt for the Seguro Defeso in accordance to the official policy of avoiding double benefits as it, in their view, jeopardizes the balance in the public budget.

Besides being a socially unfair measure at the very moment they most need it, this benefit is the only source of income they have. I report again to the Amazon women: this is the period when the movement of the waters takes place, flooding the houses and, consequently, the time of scarcity of resources due to the piracema. There was both legal and political insensitivity in prohibiting these people from accumulating income transfers (except for death and sick pay). According to the executive secretary of the MPA (Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture), at the time:

The Seguro Defeso is a right and an option for the artisanal fisherman or fisherwoman. But, within the new rules, only the artisanal fishermen who have their exclusive activity in fishing have the right to apply for the Seguro Defeso.

And, moving further along the "option without choice", he stated:

The fisherwoman must choose.... Between one benefit and another. If she chooses the Seguro Defeso, the Bolsa Família is immediately suspended temporarily. Once the Defeso period ends, the Bolsa Família benefit is again available to the family. It immediately returns to the fisherman's family.

I ask, then, whether they are everyday choices or arbitrary choices. In actual fact, these women do not have any choices now and have never had any due to both their living conditions and class inequalities. In fact, an "option without choice" has been created. Administrative obstacles and bureaucratic procedures only discourage fisherwomen from applying for social rights. If this goes on, they will probably be left out of the benefit simply by the coercive devices of the legal-institutional norms. In Wacquant's terms, that is a punishment

of the poor (2002: 143). The Ministry of Social Development and Struggle Against Hunger (MDS) through the National Secretariat of Citizenship Income (SENARC), in report 459 (April 1, 2015), promptly stated that the families of artisanal fishermen enlisted in the Bolsa Família would have this benefit suspended while receiving the Seguro Defeso. "The actions to implement the new rules are being taken by the MDS, in partnership with the MTE and INSS."

It makes clear that "even if the benefit is dropped due to the receipt of the Seguro Defeso, families enlisted in the Bolsa Família must continue to fulfill their commitments in the areas of education and health." The conditionality remains even if the Bolsa Família is temporarily suspended. The disciplinary power acted fast amidst so many institutional rules, leaving the fisherwomen confused and without a choice. Commitments on conditionality in education and health are still required; the guardianship does not end with the suspension of the rights of the "option without choices". As a necessary counterpart, the State set up a disciplinary network: the monitoring and control instruments of the poor through the conditionality of access to social assistance and the adoption of certain standards of conduct, as well as the fulfillment of certain previously established obligations such as children's school attendance or the immunization card which must always be up-to-date.

In my view, the most serious aspect of the fiscal adjustment is the cessation of the modest Bolsa Família benefit as no one is entitled to two concurrent benefits in the name of the fiscal adjustment of the economy. Families enlisted in the Bolsa Família, as described by Fatorelli (2012), do not exceed R\$70 per person. The maximum amount that a family is entitled is R\$306. This ceiling, according to the author, is only paid out to families that fulfill all the requirements. The family must have "at least seven people, five of them being pregnant, breastfeeding, children or adolescents up to 15 years of age and the other two being 16 and 17 years old." The author adds that few families considered to be extremely poor are entitled to the maximum ceiling of R\$306; the majority gets much less (2012, 61).

Even so, there is blatant criticism of public "spending spree" from part of the mainstream media and conservative areas who argue the program is an exchange "benefit for ballot". They ignore this is as a right guaranteed in the Constitution which rules out that the Brazilian State has the duty to provide public policies to those who need them. The correct action would be to clarify the rules for the access to the RGP and the Seguro Defeso but this has just been avoided. Punishing the poor is not a solution to the problem of financing public spending nor is the confusing management of the program carried out by the Ministry of Labor, which pays the benefit and the Ministry of Fisheries, which chooses who should be entitled to it. Undoubtedly, the decisions taken by the authorities did not consider the natural and socio-cultural diversity of these rural workers, especially in the Amazon. Such policies should have taken into account the existential values of the populations, ethnic groups and identities of the different peoples from the Amazon (FURTADO, 2006). A thorough analysis of the provisional measures and decrees indicates that no matter how the government argues that there are no cutbacks on some of the workers' rights, by correcting distortions and adding new rules, these policies have limited the access of thousands of Brazilians to the Seguro Defeso.

By disregarding the fishing communities' ways of life and the particularities of the fishery production process, the government authorities revealed the "emptiness of thought", a concept put forward by Hannah Arendt (1993). If, according to Arendt's arguments, there was no malice in politics, there has certainly been a lack of care which, according to the author, is more frequent than evil in politics. And it revealed much more: the falsehood in politics and the lack of commitment to the subordinates that were subsumed into neoliberal precepts which run against social equality proclaimed by the Program Brazil without Poverty.

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