



# Political Violence against Women and Its Reverberations—A Perspective

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## Abstract

This text is a suggestion for defining the term political violence against women from the perspective of political philosophy. Naming this phenomenon and conceptualizing it from this perspective seems fundamental in order to give visibility to this form of manifestation of violence and to elucidate it as a device from which legal and political systems should be instigated to move towards the creation of new structures. We propose to think of political violence against women as the manifestation of an anthropology of women and as a process resulting from the language and structure of male domination in current models of public spaces. This is descriptive and exploratory research, the aim of which is to describe the characteristics of a particular phenomenon: political gender violence, and aims to explain it. To this end, it uses the deductive method and bibliographical research with the reading and analysis of already published materials, such as books, articles, papers, periodicals, texts on the internet, interviews, among others. The results indicate that political violence against women is a form of violence perpetuated by social structure and historical gender stereotypes.

## Subject Areas

Law

## Keywords

Violence, Politics, Women, Anthropology and Public Spaces

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, feminist movements have been emphasizing the need to raise awareness about what appears to be a new political category: political violence against women. This is a new term for a phenomenon that has always existed,

which refers to conduct that prevents, impairs, or restricts the political rights of women, including discrimination, exclusion, restriction, or depreciation based on gender stereotypes. Naming and conceiving this phenomenon in terms of political philosophy or political theory, the main objective of this paper, is paramount to give visibility and to explain its functioning as a tool from which new political and legal structures can be forged.

Political violence against women is one of the manifestations of violence and as such must be recognized, because violence, as Judith Butler reminds us in her work *The Force of Non-Violence*, is always interpreted [1]. It is not merely a subjective and arbitrary interpretation. Rather, violence is interpreted because it is always associated with a frame of reference. In the *Dictionnaire de la Violencia*, organized by Michela Marzano, these frames of reference are categorized on the basis of entries so that we are able to comprehend violence in situations such as abandonment, male dominance, apartheid, self-mutilation, barbarism, colonialism, dictatorship, genocide, inquisition, perversion, pedophilia, racism, terrorism, torture, tyranny, etc. [2].

Based on the semantics of these entries, it can be concluded that in order to understand violence, we must consider the nature of each specific manifestation. It is necessary to consider what violence is, who is violent, and what its purposes are. There is no indication that this approach represents a direct appropriation of the phenomenon. Rather, it is necessary to examine the conceptual schemes that guide the use of the term and analyze their functioning, as Butler argues. It is from this assumption that we will build a conceptualization of the term political violence against women.

This is merely an initial suggestion of definition—which will be discussed briefly here—because there must be more in-depth reflections on the formulation of the constitution of a political concept that is alive today and which requires a semantic composition that is dialectical, collective, and observational in nature.

This suggestion is based on a choice, since political violence against women involves several variables, and this work does not attempt to address them all. There will be no emphasis on variables such as criminal law, women's suffrage, or even state violence against women. In spite of its importance, it will not be the primary focus. It is the purpose of this paper to examine a number of points that are less obvious, but whose importance is crucial to establishing the conceptual schemes and frames of reference that underlie the nature of violence in which sexuality emerges as the determining factor.

The reference framework for evaluating political violence against women will be developed on the basis of two perspectives, namely that this violence is a reflection of both the ambiguity and violence inherent to being a woman, as well as an expression of the current public space model. The first refers to an anthropological perspective on women that draws attention to what appears to be a variable that is not so evident in the discourse on political violence against women. This presentation follows the path suggested by Marilena Chauí in the paper “*Participando*

*do Debate sobre Mulher e Violência*” (Taking part in the debate on violence against women), although from a slightly different conceptual perspective [3].

An anthropological perspective emphasizes that, in addition to violence resulting from underrepresentation, harassment, aggression, and even the absence of effective social policies to protect women, structured violence does exist. In society, women are still viewed as objects rather than as effective political actors or legal subjects. Consequently, a woman is the Other, the negative side of the object/subject binary of history, constituting itself as a group that lives within the force field of violence. Historically, a woman’s social position was built on violence, and that is how it is constituted.

Violence is also rooted in ambiguity or, from Claude Lefort’s perspective, in the paradoxes of the process of forming one’s identity as a woman. Women mirror, as we will see, the asymmetry of their social and political histories and their individuation, which results in them existing in the world yet living outside of it at the same time. It entails living in a world of male dominance while simultaneously challenging it on an ontological level. This paradox provides a theoretical framework for examining the violent and ambiguous nature of being a woman, analogous to the complex and ambiguous nature of political violence.

A second perspective is derived from Seyla Benhabib’s critique of public space models in *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* [4]. It sees women’s political rights are permanently denied, neglected, or infringed upon by subtle actions (or not so subtle) that are hostile against their right to participate in politics. This violent conduct is rooted in the very procedures and principles that operate in the public and political spheres, which are based on discourses of justice rather than good living, and on rigid distinctions between the public and private spheres. As a result, public space itself becomes hostile and violent towards women. Due to time constraints, this second perspective will not be discussed in this paper. The work was cited in order to illustrate the general direction in which research is headed.

This is only a suggestion regarding how political violence against women might be conceptualized. The purpose of the paper is to critically analyze the complexities of this type of political violence so that it can become the subject of studies and the basis for the creation of new rights and policies. Hence the quest for understanding this concept that already sparks a great deal of reverberations.

## 2. Results and Discussions

### 2.1. Violence as a Manifestation of Being a Woman

One of the key questions driving this study is why so many women are engaged in politics on a daily basis, within their communities and groups, but do not hold positions of authority or public office. In many cases, women do not even consider running for office; others are candidates, but do not have enough votes to be elected. In addition, it is also based on the observation that women who get elected find it very challenging to be in the public space as an authority. In response to

the excessive vulnerability that this place creates, some give up, others become ill, and many cannot endure the aggressive nature of the current political system.

Our hypothesis suggests that women's political rights are hindered by structured daily violence that tends to be less obvious. The phenomenon manifests itself not only through illegal acts as defined by the legal system, especially the electoral and penal codes, but also through behaviors that are commonplace and considered normal. Essentially, it refers to any act or conduct that violates, reduces or abolishes the rights of women to vote or be voted, their political rights of participation and political action in the public sphere, as well as hindering or restricting questions regarding female experiences in the public sphere.

Hereafter, we will refer to this violence as political violence against women. We are concerned that it often occurs in a subtle or unspoken manner and does not always appear to be so obvious. The book "*Sempre Foi Sobre Nós: Relatos da Violência Política de Gênero no Brasil*" [5] (It was Always about Us: Reports of Gender Political Violence in Brazil) by Manuela D'Ávila presents real-life examples of women engaging in political activity who share the common characteristic of being surrounded by a force field of violence. There is something striking about the subtlety with which these women tell their stories, and about an inability to grasp that this violence happens at different times, that it is deliberate but not explicitly perceived.

In response to the invitation to contribute to the book, federal deputy Áurea Carolina stated that:

Suddenly, it hit me. Even though I often discussed the subject in public debates and media interviews, I had never taken the time to reflect in depth upon the violence I experienced since I became a public official. It is as if I've been repeating on autopilot that I have been through, and continue to go through, situations of violence. However, this has not triggered an internal alarm to alert me to their seriousness. It was quite a scare! (...) I feel that I have developed a form of emotional armor [...].

Áurea Carolina is a social scientist, popular educator, engaged in the struggle for rights and, in her daily life, is vulnerable to the explicit manifestation of political violence against women. It is important to note that this form of violence is not always recognized, as illustrated in her account, since it is the result of a more structural issue in our society. It is a device, says Manuela D'Ávila, "*mercilessly used against us all. Violence can take our faces and appear to be about our lives, but it is not just directed at one person, but is designed to discourage us all.*" [6] It is a type of violence that must be observed through an anthropological perspective of women.

It is important to note that political violence against women is a reflection of how the woman figure is constructed over the course of our historical-social process and how they are constituted in the course of their development. It explains how women have been marginalized, oppressed, and silenced throughout the history of humanity, as well as manifested as the Other in their individuation

experiences. A brief overview of women's experiences over time will be helpful in understanding this phenomenon.

Women's history can be traced back to the time of the Great Goddess. From the artistic expressions of those times, we observe a primitive, peaceful culture living in communal settings and observing natural cycles based on prehistoric knowledge. Moreover, there are artifacts related to the cults of great goddesses, cults of pregnant women, or cults of fertility. Women have traditionally been regarded as sacred and associated with fertility and the earth.

In the Neolithic period, around 10,000 B.C., there are records of agrarian societies, which is why a great deal of importance was placed on the earth, natural cycles, the seasons, demonstrating agriculture's circularity, the natural life cycle, and the circular relationship between human development and the natural world (childhood, youth, maturity, and old age). Natural space was integrated into the organization of these societies. Everything was symbolized as an organic cosmos. As Engels explained in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* [7], there were no class institutions in them, and women occupied a relevant position, enjoying a great deal of freedom and independence, in stark contrast to the subordinate and degrading role they were assigned by class society. These societies were established in cities without walls, conflict and war were not expected, and no military culture existed [8].

Another relationship with women developed in Greek Antiquity, when a distinct social and political organization was being established. It is pertinent to define who the Greeks are in this context. Greek culture represents the ideal of man, and its identity is built on differentiation from barbarians and foreigners. They divided society into Greeks/non-Greeks, and Greeks/*barbarum* [9]. In Greek society, men were regarded as the perfect, positive side of society and were at its center. Having knowledge of the Greek language allowed them to access art, science, and politics, thus embodying the ideal of an educated individual. They were regarded as intelligent, strong, and cultured individuals. In contrast, the barbarians or the negative aspects of society, lay on the periphery of society and were perceived negatively. A non-man, a symbol of barbarism and animality, a rude individual. Furthermore, barbarians were our primitive ancestors who were very attached to the *physis*, or the natural world. The Greeks, regarded as logos, was the present day men.

Given the purpose of this study, consideration of the role of women is warranted. Women are on the negative side, the non-Greek, the non-man. As women, they were closer to barbarism, animality, the slavery of reproduction, and the connection with *physis* (animals, plants, and gods). Women's wisdom was not always associated with rational reasoning. As a result, they do not represent the positive aspects of culture, science, and politics. In general, there are no texts by female philosophers, with some exceptions, such as those by Hypatia, an astronomer and mathematician, and Sappho of Lesbos, a poet who discusses love and philosophy.

Greek civilization saw women within three paradigms, according to Professor

Raquel Gazolla from Universidade de São Paulo [10]: as housewives and reproducers of the Greek race, such as Xantipa, wife of Socrates; as companions or courtesans or prostitutes, such as Trinéia, a beautiful and wealthy courtesan and Aspacia; or as slaves. A number of texts illustrate how Greek men perceive women, such as satires by Semonides of Amorgos (7<sup>th</sup> century BC) about how women resemble “pigs, foxes, dogs, sea animals, donkeys, otters, seas, horses, monkeys, bees, etc.” As the professor explains, the appreciation of women in Greek mythology during this time period is limited to an abstract concept of femininity, rather than a recognition of the inherent greatness of women themselves. This civilization places women on the sidelines, marginalized, and in situations that can be described as barbaric.

Differentiation between Greeks and barbarians was followed by expansionism [9], but with a different paradigm. Greeks are no longer represented by their citizens in the Greek polis, and the positive side is now represented by the Romans [9]. This side becomes *humanitas* and it emphasizes the dignity of human beings, which distinguishes them from other species.

*Humanitas* is a certain totality that represents Roman civilization, while the other side, which is non-human and negatively oriented, is represented by the *barbarum*. During this time period, barbarians were regarded as lazy and rude individuals who had no understanding of Roman culture. This condition was, however, capable of being transformed, which represents a significant change from the Greek perspective. There was a belief that human improvement would result in a shift from the negative side to the positive side of the *humanitas/barbarum* asymmetry. Accordingly, it opens up the possibility of improving the personality of women in order to enable them to be treated as human beings. It was during the Middle Ages that the treatment of women began to change, even if only for a specific group of women.

*Humanitas* and *barbarum* were then differentiated according to the context in which they occurred. The *humanitas* concept encompassed symbolic representations, such as positive and negative aspects of the Roman Empire, as well as the *divinitas* side formed by a mystical body with spiritual and political self-foundation. In the High Middle Ages, *humanitas* was the community of the faithful that had been baptized [9]. The *barbarum* side, the negative, represented barbarians, foreigners, criminals, magicians, heretics, etc. Excluded from human status, they did not have their rights protected by law because they were not considered to be human.

Once again, it can be asked where and how women participated in these operations during the Middle Ages. The beginning of the period was marked by a movement towards women’s equality, as a result of their development and ability to become closer to *divinitas*. At the end of that period, they reclaimed their human status as individuals who occupied a positive position in society’s social asymmetry. Men, however, were defined as being closer to God and more open to perfection than women. Women had little space and were viewed as less honorable

individuals [11].

Additionally, the medieval period saw the Christianization of fairy tales, which became linguistic resources used to assert women's rights. Unlike myths, tales can be read and understood by anyone. Tales provide us with internal resources and messages that present and invade both societal contexts and the female unconscious, enabling transformation and the possibility of fantasizing about being a woman. Chimamanda Ngozi describes how her social and political perspective as well as her desires have been limited by the influence of fanciful stories that were part of her training process in *The danger of a single story* [12]. Tales have the social effect of attributing moral subordination to women. They have multiple meanings, and with all of these meanings comes a vision of the characters' role in society. Consequently, they reveal a worldview in which women are characterized in particular ways and make use of a resource that places them in a position of redeemer and savior of men.

"*Fairies are created, and witches are created*", says Martha Robles, about the late medieval period when the witch hunt took place [13]. Special consideration should be given to the elaboration of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (or the well-known Hammer of the Witches) by the Catholic Church, the same institution responsible for Christianizing the representation of women in fairy tales. In those days, as the political and spiritual heart of society, the Church served as a source of cultural, social, and legal foundations. In addition, it enacted a standardizing code of conduct defining witchcraft as a crime [14].

According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, women are viewed as objects of state intervention. The intervention, I repeat, was guided by the Catholic Church and defined as being connected to nature, flesh, sex, and pleasure. For the purpose of controlling women, there is an arrangement between legal, medical, and theological discourses. As will be seen, that will be repeated in the modern clinical setting. Furthermore, it appears that it criminalized situations pertaining to women's sexuality in particular, contributing to both a negative discourse about women's relationships with pleasure and to the concept of behaviors that have become accepted as standards of femininity in modernity such as being reserved, disciplined, and restrained (BEAVOIR, 2019: p. 82).

Witch hunts, guided by the *Malleus Maleficarum*, reflect multiple and horrific attacks on female sexuality. The vagina was the subject of searches for the devil's mark, also referred to as the witches' mark. There are also various instruments of sexual silencing that reflect this practice, including chastity belts. Invented in the Middle Ages, it was a body lock made of metal to lock a woman's vagina. In times of war or when husbands embarked on trips, they locked it and took their keys with them. While the belt prevented sexual activity, it also made hygiene difficult, thus resulting in a number of health issues. In fact, it resembled a domestic torture device.

Efforts to silence the vagina and repress women's sexuality are intended to have a profound effect on women's psychology and impede their development as

desirable individuals. Historically, women have continued to be seen as objects of desire rather than prone to desire. In her book *Vagina: A New Biography*, Naomi Wolf explores the relationship between this situation and women's difficulty speaking in public, rebelling, and even asserting themselves as individuals [15]. According to her, female genital mutilation and sexual assault during war are methods used to keep women silent and inert, preventing the emergence of strong female counter-attack groups.

Moreover, gender-based offenses occur simultaneously with the creation of the rules of femininity that have already been mentioned. Women are socially portrayed as "good", virgins, pure, demure, disciplined, restrained, etc., in contrast to the bad or unmanageable, sexualized women who lead resistance movements and speak loudly and forcefully. This is one of the strong paradoxes or ambiguities that characterize women during their formation process.

In the modern era, the Christianized discourse of the Middle Ages continues, particularly in the way doctors and psychoanalysts perceive and portray women's representation in their offices. According to Simone de Beauvoir, discussing psychoanalysis is like discussing religion, since both are based on rigid concepts and definitions about the female body and sexuality. The philosopher believes that women are seen as the Other in a clinical discourse, a sex that should be analyzed in relation to the main sex. Women are members of the second sex. Similarly, Simone Beauvoir performs a scathing critique of psychoanalysis, which, roughly speaking, attributes female inferiority to penis envy. As she perceives it, the issue is not envy of the penis, but rather envy of the entire situation, of being seen as inferior, of the privilege granted to boys. "The phallus only takes on such importance because it symbolizes a sovereignty that is realized in other areas." (BEAVOIR, 2019: p. 328) [16] She believes that psychoanalysis cannot provide a basis for a discourse on womanhood since it does not effectively study or seek to understand women's sexuality and gender roles.

Nonetheless, despite the criticisms made, the clinical discourse has contributed to strengthening the dialogue regarding the control of female bodies in the modern world. By using a discourse about sexuality as a way to define women, the clinical setting seeks to discuss the regulation of the body, visibility regimes, alliances, and circles of affection and desire, in addition to institutions, hierarchies, social norms, and submissions. There appears to be a convergence of medicine and morality in the clinical discourse about women, an extension of religion in a different form. Consequently, it produces classifications, categories, pathologies, and perpetuates the shadow of theological morality upon our bodies and creates normative images of our desires.

It is a modality dictated by the economy, contributing to the capitalist discourse on work, discipline, and linear production, well regulated by the medicalization of the vagina, decreasing women's connection to their cyclical nature, libido, and enjoyment of life. Moreover, it is dictated by politics, in that it reinforces the hierarchies of patriarchal subjection, keeping women in a lower status or immersed

in male-oriented sexuality.

In *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, philosopher Luce Irigaray argues that female sexuality has always been conceived based on male parameters [17]. Women and women's pleasure are not discussed, according to Irigaray. Women are doomed to a life of absence, sexual atrophy and penis envy. Absence in the sense of the only valid sex. They attempt to take ownership of it through the love of a father-husband, the desire to have children, and access to cultural values that are rightfully reserved for men. Women will only experience their desire as an expectation that they will eventually be able to possess something that is equivalent to what is available to men.

This woman, according to Irigaray, loses her ontology, essence, determination, or definition. Their sex, other than a sex, is considered non-sex. Negative, reverse, the opposite of the only visible and morphologically assignable sex: male. Furthermore, this point seems crucial, since to perceive a woman as a non-sex is to perceive her, again, as a non-man, as the Other, as the negative side that can be ruled, tamed, raped, destroyed, or socialized as a commodity, and which is waiting for the consent and validation of man.

For Simone de Beauvoir, this historical context explains the inferiority and submission of women in society. The first part of *Second Sex* contains a series of lectures on the facts and myths related to being a woman, presenting perspectives from areas such as economics, biology and psychology. It demonstrates the prejudices of those who wrote the material, as well as the forced conclusions based on the facts. She concludes that all of these theories are inadequate and that there is no science that can prove the inferiority of women. It is a historical fact that was created primarily by masculine discourse.

According to her, men have always held real power and found it beneficial to keep women dependent on them. They created myths, taboos associated with menstruation, and justified female actions solely in nature and in mystery, while saying nothing about eroticism and female sexuality. As a result of the codes established against them, women became concretely constituted as the Other over time. It was of fundamental significance to men in terms of their ontological and moral pretensions. She says that "*What is certain is that today it is very difficult for women to assume both their status as an autonomous individual and their feminine destiny. (...) And without doubt it is more comfortable to endure blind bondage than to work for one's liberation.*"

This passage illustrates Beauvoir's hypotheses about slavery and women's freedom since for her, being a woman is an existence marked by choice and the making of one's own life. Nevertheless, this degree of freedom of making is rooted in its relationship to the other, to the body and to its historical context. In this discussion, it is not appropriate to discuss this idea in more detail, but to bolster the theoretical debate, I repeat, about the historical construction of inferiority, submission, oppression, and silencing, which prevents women from automatically establishing themselves as political actors.

A woman's position or that of the feminine is not inalterable, but it is further reinforced by the "common ground from which all singular feminine existence stems". This common ground will be described in *The Second Sex, Volume 2*, where Beauvoir explores the ambiguities that characterize women during their formation processes. She explores the processes involved in each phase of life, including childhood, youth, sexual initiation, marriage, motherhood, social life, and old age.

She says that during childhood, until the age of three or four, there is no difference between man and woman, but then things begin to change. Girls learn about their bodies, learn to be ashamed of their desires. They are afraid, they perceive differences, experience repression in their sexual lives, and are often the victims of abuse. To address this problem, Beauvoir suggests that girls work towards accepting themselves with complacency and a sense of shamelessness.

The adolescent realizes that her femininity limits her in some ways compared to boys, she recognizes her inferiority, feels restless, and feels ashamed. As Beauvoir continues, the young woman begins the process of waiting for a man, aware of her physical weaknesses and her menstrual impurity. Additionally, she is aware that there are differences between boys, who are encouraged to invest and create the future, and girls. She thus undergoes a process of anguish of the feminine after uncovering, according to the philosopher, the greatest inferiority complexes, suppressions, and normativity regarding good behavior and the social positivity of passiveness and docility. Women "need to be feminine", as though this were a natural condition of their existence.

Based on this perspective, Simone de Beauvoir maintains that women experience marriage, motherhood, social life, and old age as synthetic and repetitive manifestations of their economic, social, and historical conditioning pertaining to what is perceived to be the "female world". This is a great paradox since women "belong to both the world of men and a sphere in which the world of men is being contested". Women are in and out since they are constantly confronted with the paradox of belonging to an asymmetrical relationship between individuals and social objects, in which they are more of an object than an individual who effectively controls their own individual, social, and political processes.

In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, the combination of all these factors results in women being heirs to a heavy past, striving to forge a new future. Women's current situation, however, remains ambiguous and violent. Women remain trapped in a paradoxical existence filled with uncertainty and indeterminacy as individuals who are, in most situations, objects. They perceive themselves as the negative side of the dominant political and legal discourse, a non-man, which is the concept of a second sex, or a sex that is not a sex. The side that establishes the social status of women is the same side that subjects them permanently to violence.

The essay "*On Violence*" by Hannah Arendt illustrates the negative side of violence, which contributes to thinking about political violence against women, a vulnerable group that shares the status of being the Other [18]. Violence is argued

to require an instrument in order to manifest itself, but a fascinating perspective on violence as a political phenomenon contributes to the understanding of this research by conceptualizing violence as the manifestation of a woman's social and anthropological structure.

According to Arendt, violence has a negative value and should be viewed in opposition to power [19]. In the second part of the essay, the author says that questions about violence remain unclear in the field of politics. Political theorists have traditionally viewed politics, power, and violence as complementary rather than as opposites. Arendt, however, proposes that power should be separated from the notion of dominance and command in order to distinguish it from the notion of force and violence.

Power, say Arendt "is a person's ability not only to act, but also to act in agreement with others". That is, power is a positive device associated with the possibility of making collective decisions regarding the existence of a collective. The ability to exercise and recognize rights and act in a political manner is one of the attributes of a group. On the other hand, violence is a negative device since it represents the lack of power to bring something together. It is the remnant of a powerful group that exercises authority over interpersonal relationships and class relations.

Therefore, Arendt asserts that "where power disintegrates, revolutions are possible but not mandatory". Revolution, war and violence are manifestations of the absence of power, the recognition of rights, and the openness to collective political processes. In the long run, power cannot be sustained if it is based solely on violence. Therefore, power has a relation to the essence of government, but not to violence. Power and violence are distinct phenomena and violence can always destroy power.

When we examine the tensions, obstacles, and resistance to women's participation in politics, we see that violence seems to be interwoven into the political body. This body rejects the asymmetry between men and women as a relationship of equality, converting this difference into hierarchy and inequality for the purpose of oppression, exploitation, and dominance. As we have seen, this is a historical process that is at the heart of what it means to be a woman in society. The political body converts difference into inequality and inequality into a relationship of superiority and inferiority.

This is the fundamental process behind political violence against women. It manifests itself as an act in which a human being is not treated as an individual but rather as an object, marked by inertia, passivity, and silence, to the extent that her speech and activity are prevented, annulled, invalidated, or not reestablished. This violence is a consequence of the modern social structure based on patriarchy, or rather on the male dominance [20].

Structured male dominance reflects the collective expectation of women's subordination and patriarchy's oppression mediated by men and women. Perfect violence, says Marilene Chauí, happens when the will and action of others are internalized by the will and action of the dominant party. An unnoticed and

unrecognized loss of autonomy occurs, and the Other identifies their will with that of the dominant party.

This seems to be a natural occurrence among women in the political and social fields and is justified by the brief anthropological and historical account provided in this text. It reflects the daily perfect violence experienced in public spaces on a regular basis, which reveals that political violence against women occurs regularly in this space. Being a woman in politics has become increasingly challenging as a result of negative connotations, a sense of inferiority, all the silencing, and the repetition of male speeches about women that may be considered normal.

This first step toward conceptualizing political violence against women must be followed by reflections on public spaces and the processes of male dominance experienced in them. While this perspective is on this research's radar, it cannot be considered at this time.

## 2.2. Manifest Violence in the Public Space

Some of the concepts that guide political violence against women have been presented above and it is now time to think, albeit briefly, about how these guidelines operate. This work does not aim to cover all social operations, but it does attempt to build a frame of reference for this violence, which we propose to do based on the assumption that political violence against women is also a manifestation of the current models of public spaces. In other words, it proposes to enter into a structural debate in order to demonstrate how the spaces intended for the exercise of political rights paradoxically reinforce the obstacles to women's recognition and enjoyment of these rights.

I would stress that this will not be an exposé of the distinction per se between men and women in political life, although I understand that there are discrepancies in fact and in value between them. This difference is both ingrained and made invisible, as we have tried to demonstrate, but this work chooses to look at political violence against women from the point of view of the debate on how the daily life of the public space is operationalized, seeing it as an aspect of what we present as a non-obvious criterion of this violence.

Seyla Benhabib contributes to this proposal, as in situating the Self: gender, community and postmodernism in contemporary ethics she puts forward important theoretical hypotheses about the presence of vulnerable groups, elucidated as the other, in public spaces. Benhabib is a Turkish philosopher who belongs to the tradition of critical theory and wants to denounce hidden forms of social oppression. Her proposal is to radicalize democracy or democratize democracy through an ethical discourse. In a very simple way, one could say that she articulates feminism and critical theory based on a model of democracy in which there is a connection between universalism and particularism, or, more specifically, one could say that it is an effort to make a connection between the universalist philosophy of rights and the presence of concrete particularities [4]—cultural, ethnic, gender, etc.....

Benhabib seems to shed light on what we have elucidated as issues that are not so obvious, because she understands that the proposal to include man in the universality of rights is about a side that is considered human, a subject of rights, and paradoxically, it is also about a negative, non-human side, made up of various concrete particularities. The attempt at universal inclusion on one side results in exclusion on the other, and it is necessary to look at this paradox, maintaining the universal tradition and, at the same time, recognizing the concrete singularities of the Other.

She tackles this issue by critiquing philosophy from a gender perspective. For her, philosophy or modern moral and political theory has made women's space invisible throughout history, pushing them into the private space of nature. Women would be on the margins of the history of philosophy, which focuses its discourse on the male, rational subject. The philosopher proposes bringing the gender marker into philosophy, investigating how it can be posed as a political-philosophical question and how its demands can be effectively recognized in public spaces.

Seyla Benhabib seeks to build and expand the public space, proposing that it be opened up as a space for diverse voices, for a universalism that is more sensitive to context and more inclusive. To this end, she builds a model of democracy based on what she calls interactive universalism. What she calls "situating the self" is the philosophical path she takes in order to critique philosophy based on reason and simultaneously build an operation to rescue universalism by constructing a proposal for interactive universalism.

This work, however, does not aim to present the theory of interactive universalism. The aim is to move forward with Benhabib specifically on his critical path, which underpins his propositions. The aim is to explain the philosopher's discussions on models of public space. This debate leads Benhabib to develop theories and propositional theses that will not be explored in this work. However, it is the critical discussions that help us to think about how male domination moves in the spaces that constitute the recognition of the common good and rights.

The main aspects of the discussion lie in challenging the foundations of models of public spaces that do not reflect or make room for the female experience, because they are marked by a masculine political grammar and the recognition of male subjects. It will focus on some of the aspects pointed out by Benhabib, namely the criticism that these spaces are justified by discourses of justice rather than the good life, as well as rigid distinctions between public and private, and principles of neutrality.

Despite following Habermas' thinking on several points, for the philosopher, discourse ethics based on the procedural model is insufficient. She formulates a series of objections to it, but reaffirms that these objections are not capable of rejecting it as an important theory for democracy. Benhabib says that Habermas presupposes that the subject of action is not an isolated moral agent who establishes universal maxims, which could not justify intersubjective validation.

Habermasian communicative ethics demands the reformulation of universal maxims based on intersubjective argumentation procedures in order to reach a communicative agreement. “Universalization is like a test of communicative agreement” which begins with the question: ‘what principles of action can we all recognize or agree upon as being valid when we undertake a practical discourse or a mutual search for justification?’ (BENHABIB, 2021: p. 80) [4]

Communicative action is a shared discourse and, for the philosopher, it requires an openness to principles such as universal respect. Respect is a behavior and feeling acquired during the process of communication. It requires “the development of a sense of self-worth and appreciation of others. (BENHABIB, 2021: p. 88) [4]” However, this is a principle of the good life that is not considered to be of fundamental importance in communicative ethics.

The neutrality defended, especially by liberal models, in the consensus-seeking procedures in public spaces requires a separation between the just and the good life, considering the principle of justice as the foundation of this space. The just would be universal interests such as equality and freedom, while the good life would be individual choices about the good life, choices and structures of private life. For her, this neutrality is not possible, and this proposed separation is a fiction, as they are complementary and non-exclusive perspectives.

To exclude the principle of the good life from public spaces, for Benhabib, is to limit the debate to a rational male discourse that excludes the demands and voices of certain groups. As a result, the real perspective of pluralities of values and experiences of ways of being in the world is lost. The very fact of seeking consensus maxims is limiting and reproduces a discursive logic. “Consensus in itself can never be a criterion of anything, be it truth or moral validity; rather, it is always the rationality of the procedure for reaching agreement that is of philosophical interest (BENHABIB, 2021: p. 103)” [4]. In other words, the important thing is that there is consensus on the procedure, but not that this consensus is solely the expected result.

Seyla Benhabib suggests that consensus as a result removes concern for the inclusion of diverse voices in the process and that this can generate paradoxes, uncertainties and risks. It forces a perspective of law or the common good that does not effectively reflect the diversity of values of the good life that exist in a society, and is a pattern of a society marked by male domination. For her, “universalization is not just a formal procedure, but also involves the utopian projection of a way of life in which respect and reciprocity reign” (BENHABIB, 2021: p. 105) [4]. It involves the ability to consider the point of view of others involved in the demands and to reason from their point of view.

Seyla Benhabib puts this capacity as something that is not the standard, because the guidelines of the procedures follow the normativity of a moral reasoning that mirrors a certain discourse. At this point, Benhabib presents the controversy generated by Carol Gilligan’s work, which reframes paradigm standards presented by Thomas Kuhn and contributes to the construction of a new perspective on this

normativity.

Without going into all the controversies raised by Benhabib, the fact is that Carol Gilligan in “*A Different Voice*” presents her empirical research on how moral judgments are constructed and defends the thesis that “women’s moral judgment is more contextual, more immersed in the details of relationships and narratives. This shows a greater propensity to assume the point of view of the ‘particular other’, and that women would be more adept at revealing the feelings of empathy and sympathy required to do so.” (BENHABIB, 2021: p. 303) [4].

This hypothesis stems from Gilligan’s scheme, which refutes Lawrence Kohlberg’s experiment by reworking its assumptions, since this experiment excludes samples of women’s speeches and does not take into account concrete examples of situations. Kohlberg argues that there is no cognitive moral difference when it comes to reasoning about justice, for example. Gilligan challenges this argument, questioning the validity of Kohlberg’s database and the orientations of her theoretical frameworks in the field of psychology.

For her, there are cognitive differences arising from the formation process of men and women. Men pursue a more egoic process of individuation, while women, constituted as the Other, individuate in a process in which the presence and care of the other is fundamental. Despite the demands of this process for the constitution of women as subjects, it provides for the construction of women from a contextual and relational perspective. Says Benhabib:

The contextuality, narrativity and specificity of women’s moral judgment is not a sign of weakness or deficiency, but the manifestation of a vision of moral maturity that considers the self as a being immersed in a network of relationships with others. According to this conception, respect for each other’s needs and the mutuality of efforts to satisfy them support moral development and growth.

The philosopher argues, based on the research of Carol Gilligan, that there are different devices in the normative judgments of men and women, and that the consideration of the male perspective is insufficient and limiting for the experience of a more inclusive public space. The very lack of understanding of this distinction in theories of justice and in theories of political consensus-building procedures leads to the silencing of voices, demands and behaviors that manifest political violence against women because their perspectives are considered inferior or marginal to the dominant discourses.

Seyla Benhabib follows this direction by proposing a new democratic model of public space in which principles of justice and the good life complement each other, in which women’s moral judgments are taken into account and in which paths of political imagination of the Other are followed, based on a methodology inspired by the category of expanded mentality presented by Hannah Arendt. Again, it is important to point out that this is not the place to delve into Benhabib’s propositions, but the philosopher begins her approach to Arendt’s thinking by

making a critique that seems important for understanding that a model of public space that is based solely on male domination is, in itself and whether explicitly or not, a space of political violence against women.

Women may be in the public or political space, but that doesn't mean that there is effective deliberation and participation. For mere participation is not enough, they need to hear and be heard, establish proposals, participate in intersubjective projects and not just remain in the fiction of their participation. We need democratic spaces that can be spaces of emancipation, open to an intersubjective and inclusive rationality, based on the plurality of values, conflicts of values and interests in social life.

But, says Benhabib, current models of public space delineate strict political domains and distinguish issues between what is "public" and what is "private". She claims that, in conceptualizing "public space", Hannah Arendt mistakenly proposes that it is a space of public and social demands in which man acts concretely, which makes certain activities and issues that are important to the minority unfeasible because they are absorbed by what she considers to be the private domain. For Seyla Benhabib, this is one of the points in Arendt's thinking that results in the exclusion of the "women's question" and her inability to relate the exclusion of women from politics to this conception of public space, which is agonistic and dominated by men" (BENHABIB, 2021: p. 197) [4]. Arendt would be approaching here a liberal model that conceives political relations in a similar way to legal relations, excluding what has already been presented as judgments of a good life and thus reinforcing discourses of male domination.

The criticisms presented above seem to contribute to the hypothesis that public spaces in which the enjoyment of political rights is exercised are, in effect, spheres of male domination and political violence against women. Note that this sphere must be considered broadly, encompassing: all branches of direct and indirect public administration; formulation and execution of public policies; electoral campaigns; parliamentary houses and precincts for the exercise of democratically won mandates; also to be considered are the spaces that make up civil society, such as: trade unions; political parties; professional associations; community organizations; non-governmental organizations.

But even within this range, what we have are spaces that continue the logic of the public space models criticized by Seyla Benhabib. These are spaces that operate on the basis of male domination and political violence against women. The philosopher believes that this operational logic can be altered, and that it is essential for this change that we move women today from being objects of desire to desiring subjects, subjects of their social and individual historical processes. But this is only possible if we open up the debate on new structures of foundation and justification for politics and law.

### 3. Brief Concluding Thoughts

This text is a provocation to think about what political violence against women

actually is. It seeks to suggest a conceptualization of this political category of violence from two perspectives: political violence against women is the manifestation, on the one hand, of an anthropology of women and, on the other, of the male domination that predominates in the structures of current models of public spaces. Without hierarchizing other important variables for understanding this concept, political violence against women has been presented as something that is subtle, something that is always expressly unsaid, but which is structural. It is a reflection of the social place of women throughout history and the way in which public spaces have been constructed, as well as the theories of justice and politics that underpin and justify them.

Women are not subject to violence for biological, economic or psychological reasons. It is a construction of man over time and this can be circumvented and remedied. We need to keep repeating and repeating this point to the Other and to Us. All structural forms of violence, oppression and suppression of women must be made visible. We need to name, talk about and appropriate the possibilities of historical change in order to give women their effective place as political subjects. In fact, nothing is given to women, everything must be conquered, and this was the attempt of this short text: to fight to give visibility to political violence against women.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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