

## Between public and private environment: genders in dispute

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**ABSTRACT:** *The statements about the feminine permeate the times and regulate a memory about the woman in the social bosom, having as some of its effects the institution of social practices, frequently associated with the place that the woman can (and should) occupy in the social sphere. Taking as a theoretical-analytical basis the assumptions of Discourse Analysis (Pêcheux), we propose a brief reflection on the intertwining between history and memory in (and for) the regularization of an imaginary about the feminine today. In this path, we take a historical-analytical path about the feminist movement led in its first moment by suffragettes, taking into account the antifeminist discourses then in force. In this perspective, we seek to better understand the way in which ideology works in these senses in order to (re)signify certain social practices.*

**KEYWORDS-** *Woman, Antifeminist movement. Discourse Analysis. Memory; Contemporaneity.*

**RESUMO:** *Os dizeres sobre o feminino perpassam os tempos e regularizam uma memória sobre a mulher no seio social, tendo como alguns dos seus efeitos a instituição de práticas sociais, frequentemente associadas ao lugar que a mulher pode (e deve) ocupar na esfera social. Tomando como aporte teórico-analítico os pressupostos da Análise do discurso (Pêcheux), propomos uma breve reflexão do entrelaçamento entre história e memória na (e para a) regularização de um imaginário sobre o feminino na atualidade. Nesse percurso, tomamos um percurso histórico-analítico acerca do movimento feminista liderado em seu primeiro momento pelas sufragistas, tomando em atenção os discursos antifeministas então vigentes. Nessa perspectiva, buscamos melhor compreendermos o modo de funcionamento da ideologia nesses dizeres a fim de uma (res)significação de determinadas práticas sociais.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE -** *Mulher. Movimento (anti)feminista. Análise do discurso. Memória. Atualidade.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Since ancient times, an imaginary of women has been signified in the social bosom, often under a masculine approach, often based on religious issues. In this perspective, the discussions about the feminine theme were, to a large extent, guided by a biology that culminated in a sexist division, implying in them a hierarchical relationship of the sexes and, consequently, the place of women in the social sphere.

According to Judeo-Christian literature, the constitution of the first woman in the world, Eve, took place from a piece of Adam, meaning as the first man (Bíblia, Genesis 2:22). Adam being made in the image and likeness of God, the woman would then be the human imperfection, created for the complementarity of man. However, these biblical accounts are not the first to mean the woman who is inferior to the aegis of the male gaze.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the height of classical antiquity, Aristotle (2006) conceived the woman as a future, the power that is realized as an act, that is, in its concreteness, in its relationship with man. This is because, according to the Greek philosopher, the distinction of bodies - organs and functions - in the animal genus would be the basis of this relationship based on presence and absence. Although the female is the breeder, the ability to multiply the species is constitutively given to the male, with the woman being responsible for receiving the reproductive mucus and generating the species, while the male is given the exercise of investing in this reproduction. Man, in turn, would be socially given the right and the duty to transcend his animality through the cultural in order to ascend to his nature.

Encouraged by a rationalist thought arising from the Century of Lights, questions about sexual difference, understood in a hierarchical way, were still permeated by the binomial nature *versus* society. The man, a rational being, supposedly a natural quality of that being, was endowed with the capacity to know and understand the set of actions necessary for his social development (Marcondes, 2001), while the woman was conceived as a non-adult being and, therefore, this, unable to position itself politically in society. Under this bias, then, the delimitation of spaces - public and private - and their dismemberment in the distinction between the sexes would fit.

These speeches were also legitimized by biology in the 19th century - especially from 1840, when Biology became a science - reaffirming this hierarchy of the sexes. For Auguste Comte (1851), women were conceived in a state of radical childhood, residing in them the social feeling, represented by affective sex. Thus, they were not considered equal to the male sex, but their complementarity, that is, their companies.

Current scientific speeches also fostered Darwinian theory and, with it, the hierarchical relationship between man and woman. For Darwin (1871), natural selection, as well as sexual selection, gives the man precedence over the woman, enabling him to produce, while it is up to the woman only the reproduction, including the human species. As one of the effects of this feminine imaginary, there was the prohibition of directing or exercising any role in public life, accessible only through indirect participation, leaving the woman, the private environment and the seclusion of the home. Only man was granted the prerogative to move between the family and the city, between the universality of citizens and the singularity of desire, where freedom and self-recognition are found; inaccessible to women.

From this perspective, the hierarchy of the relationship between man and woman occurs through the game of recognizing oneself in the other, producing an effect of unity in the duality of / in bodies, possible only for man. This relationship emerges in the framework of the discussions of the 19th century, with the motto of the reflection between the division of spaces demarcated for men and women, legitimized by the animal distinction between male and female. Discourses that corroborate the supposed feminine fragility and, therefore, her lack of appetite to occupy public spaces and the exercise of citizenship, which is denied.

The complexity of women's issues, in addition to the statements about women mostly from a male perspective, contributed to the regularization of an imaginary about the feminine. In this work, we propose a reflection on the place of memory in the constitution of that imaginary that runs through time, producing its effects on social practices. Affiliated to the discursive approach (Pêcheux), we take, in our analytical gesture, some significant materialities that materialize in the reactions contrary to feminist movements, especially in its first phase. In an intrinsic relationship between history and memory, we present a brief reflection on the feminist movement led by suffragettes and, next, an analysis of two anti-feminist pamphlets of the time. Although we go through this historical movement in favor of women in its first stage, we will not dwell on their dismemberment, nor specificities, as they are not the object of our reflection. We are interested here to expose the ideological character that materializes in the statements about women, since it is constitutive of a tense relationship that is established between the subjects, having implications in the current social practices.

## **II. IN ANTIFEMINIST CURRENTS: THE FEMININE THAT (R)EXISTS**

The Feminist movements appear as a counter-discourse to the current order, an act of resistance that seeks to (re)signify the woman's place in society, aiming to regulate a memory about women, the positions that she must occupy in society. In the midst of a network of discourse about women, conceived mostly under the

male eye, movements for women emerge that, under a historically transformative character, inaugurate a new way of saying about (and) women, as opposed to the patriarchal discourse and female invisibility.

In its first moment, the movement that earned workers' rights - political participation, the right to suffrage (female vote) as well as work for women - as a condition for the exercise of citizenship and recognition of women as a thinking person was gaining body and voice, promoting intersectionality in the other movements in favor of their demands<sup>1</sup> that have followed since then. Thus, feminism, more than a struggle for singular rights, brings up a worldview in different spheres: philosophical, sociological and economic; aiming to stimulate the exercise of citizenship, guided by social dialogue between subjects and institutions as a support in order to (re)configure new practices.

In addition to the street movements, in which countless women lost their lives, mobilizations also emerged that fostered new thoughts on the theme of women, with a view to the (re)configuration of new practices. Among the precursors of this movement, we highlight Simone de Beauvoir, especially her work *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1970), bringing up questions about the myths of marriage and female fragility from a new perspective.

According to Beauvoir (1970), it is through the myth about the female body and marriage that inequalities between genders and sexes are legitimized, based on an apparently evident structural model, since it has been systematically reiterated over time. When questioning this discourse about women through a macho look, Beauvoir brings to mind the girl's differentiated formation in relation to the boy, from the early childhood prepared to serve, a duty ensured since the father and which lasts in marriage, an undisputed destiny for its existence.

Destiny that conditioned - and, we think, still conditions to a certain extent - their practices in the intimate sphere, in their subjectivity as alienation from themselves in favor of the other - be it father, husband or children - with implications in the public sphere, due to their dependence economical. For the author, it is precisely because of economic (in)dependence that women would have autonomy to be, rather than to have, thus establishing the possibility of deeper social changes through a leveling of social relations (Beauvoir, 1970).

As we can see, it is through language and discourse, therefore, that the constitutive tensions of social relations materialize. Amid a web of discursivities that the senses are (re)establishing themselves in the social sphere and becoming regularized in the practices of the subjects.

Despite all the women's struggle, and for the benefit of women, feminism was meant as individually, as a singular opinion, disorder, hysteria, to the detriment of a collective and rational movement in the political space. And, thus, concurrent with this discursive network about the (in)equality of the sexes, the opposition to these struggles also emerges, through an anti-feminist discourse, in order to stabilize the practices that were hitherto legitimate, guided by a hierarchy between the sexes.

The anti-feminist speeches, legitimized by the science for which the woman was conceived as a being naturally inferior to the man, had their peak in the 19th century, gaining great contours with effects in the times to come. Among the authors with notoriety at the time, we highlight Proudhon (1875), for whom the woman is the complement of the man. In *La pornocratie ou les femmes dans les temps modernes*, the author (Proudhon, 1875) states that,

[...] The difference between the sexes allows a separation between the animals. Far from applauding what is now called women's emancipation, I would prefer to lean over, if it were necessary to reach that extreme, to put women in seclusion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although we do not dwell on the other movements from there, as it is not our object of study in this work, it is worth mentioning that having their first victory in the suffrage, these movements had their breakdowns around the world, whose plurality of demands, in keeping with their time, they denounce the diversity of women's / women's struggles and raise issues and practices in the search for a space in which women can express themselves in their needs.

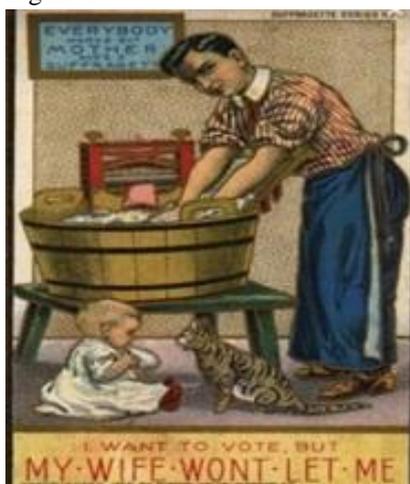
<sup>2</sup> In the original language [...] La différence des sexes élève entre eux une séparation entre les animaux. Aussi, bien loin d'applaudir à ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui émancipation de la femme, inclinerais-je bien plutôt, s'il fallait en venir à cette extrémité, à mettre la femme en réclusion.

Since the title of his work, *Pornocracy or women in modern times*, the author has alluded to the regularization of an imaginary about women in line with new ways of thinking that emerged in the following century; women considered as modern, or as discursivized by Proudhon (1875), the courtesans.

For the author, the woman is the complement of the man, adding his beauty to the masculine strength; a matter which, according to the Aristotelian thesis, calls form (man), a middle ground between man and animal, a variant of the binomial nature and society. Reiterating the difference between the sexes as constitutive of the human species, that is, women have the function of reproduction and consumption - meaning services linked to the home, consumption and domestic economy - and men, the function of fertilizing, producing and providing - being the woman, therefore, a naturally inferior being -, the author defends the seclusion of women as a form of resistance to women's emancipation movements.

Taking into account that it is through discourse that the struggles of (and for) power are fought, we highlight, as one of the consequences of Proudhon's theory (1875), the emergence of anti-feminist movements, concomitant with feminist demands in the 20th century. This is because, according to Pêcheux (1988 [1975]), there is dispute for the regularization of which meanings will be stabilized in the social sphere, or, otherwise, which will be silenced or even erased. It is the ideology that operates not only in the reproduction of the senses, but also in their naturalization in order to lead the subjects to respond to the demands of the current order, and it is also through self-explanatory pamphlets that anti-feminist sayings proliferated, such as we can see in figure 1.

Figure 1



Source: <https://www.hypeness.com.br/2016/07/essas-propagandas-do-inicio-do-seculo-20-nos-ajudam-a-entender-como-o-machismo-foi-disseminado/> Retrieved 25 jun 2020.

In the image, sayings about work - “Everyone works, but the mother is a suffragette” - and the right to vote - “I want to vote, but my wife will not allow me” (free translation by the author) - demands of feminists who, in the first phase of the movement, were meant as suffragettes.

Established on the basis of liberalism, the right to vote and the participation of women in public life meant, above all, the recognition of their intellectual capacity and the right to opportunities, including work, until then granted only to men.

Until the end of the 19th century, approximately, the woman was meant as a person, since she had duties, but of intelligence inferior to that of the man. This principle was supposedly justified by the constitution of the female body, and legitimized by the biology of the time. In *The Right of Women*, Secrétan (2018) states that “L’infériorité cérébrale n’autorise donc pas plus que l’infériorité musculaire à séparer la juridique de la

personnalité morale [...]”<sup>3</sup>. In defending the legal personality as a right for women, since he has duties, Secrétan, however, reiterates the supposed intellectual and physical inferiority of women in relation to men.

As we can observe, the struggle for the equalization of women's rights was permeated by a relationship of forces, based on polarity based on the difference of the biologically thought-out sexes. Concerning this current thought, Beauvoir (1970) states that this supposed physical inferiority of women occurs to the extent that she is, from an early age, prepared for the seclusion of the home and the service to the other - from which, according to the author, it follows the erasure of the Self in function of the Other - whereas man is encouraged to play commanding roles, to develop intellect and strength, as a benefit to his physical vigor.

According to Althusser (1967), ideology has the function of ordering subjects in order to direct them to occupy their predetermined positions in the social sphere. From the meanings that are inscribed in the pamphlets, we observe that the emancipation of women was signified as a risk to the ideologically overdetermined function of men, relegating them to inferior, domestic work, to the servitude of an inferior being, the woman. And so, following the thought of Proudhon (1875), the basis of anti-feminist movements, the pamphlets had the function not only of alerting to the possible damage to the husband and family, caused by the emancipation of the woman, but also for the punishment of women who fought for their rights.

In *The Punitive Society*, Foucault (2015) points to punishment as a form of coercion, one of the ends of which is social control to support the dominant ideology. Often guided by physical violence, control and punishment were, therefore, a strategy of the ruling classes, in order to subjugate citizens to the elites of economic power. From this perspective, the denial of these rights to women meant their alienation from society and, therefore, their complete submission to men. For this, the naturalization of certain senses, via reproduction, produces the effect of obvious necessary senses.

Among the most effective ways of naturalizing the senses in order to exercise control is persuasion, made possible by an apparent evidence of the senses to be regularized in the social bosom, as we can see in figure 2.

Figure 2 - Anti-feminism and family



Source: <https://www.hypeness.com.br/2016/07/essas-propagandas-do-inicio-do-seculo-20-nos-ajudam-a-entender-como-o-machismo-foi-disseminado/> Retrieved 25 jun 2020.

<sup>3</sup> G. DUBY; M. PERROT, *Histoire des femmes en Occident: l'Antiquité* (Paris: Perrin, 2002).

For Davallon, “the image is used as a complement to the linguistic statement to make the qualities present and lead the reader not only to remember, but to position himself among the social group of consumers” (Davallon, 2010, p.28). The image, materialized in the pamphlets, constitutes an object of persuasion, producing in the discursive subjects, unconsciously, an effect of evidence of the meanings inscribed there.

In the image (Figure 2), we see that women's emancipation constitutes a threat to domestic peace and happiness, with the husband as the first victim. According to Beauvoir (1970), the myth of marriage as a place of welcome and happiness promotes an erasure of the tension relations inherent there, founded on a hierarchy between the sexes, in which the woman is signified as the other, or the non-self, in this relationship that denies subjectivity. The denial of the right to act in the public space is one of the forms of objectification of women, legitimized by marriage.

A thought that, in a certain way, resonates today, producing its effects on the practices of the subjects. Juteau & Laurin (1988) observe that, from the end of the 19th century to the present day, female work is socially meant as complementary to family income, having as one of the allegations the position of the man of the breadwinner and, therefore, the professionalization of women is not necessary for the family. Through this discourse, marriage is still, in some homes today, one of the forms of appropriation of women, in a private environment, which alienates women and impels them to occupy their ideologically predetermined places in the social sphere.

### III. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Among the innumerable sayings about women that go through the times, there are the myths related to fragility, intellectual disability and, therefore, their supposedly natural aptitude for domestic life, with marriage and seclusion of the home being their only forms of fulfillment, that is, the service to the other. In this way, the woman was signified as the other in the relationship, inferior and docile for modesty, an attribute that her predetermined position was her responsibility.

Based on our reflections and analyzes, we observed that the speeches are not randomly stabilized in the social sphere, but are the result of a tense struggle that is established in and by language, in speech, therefore. Thus, inscribed in socio-historical-ideological conditions specific to each time, the senses are always liable to become others, depending on the subject's relation to the dominant ideology, with a view to taking the subject's position in the discourse.

In the wake of social transformations, feminist movements, which reached their peak at the beginning of the 20th century with the struggle for suffrage and equal rights, constituted themselves as a counter-discourse to the current order, a possibility of transforming male practices in favor of a egalitarian society. However, following the prevailing thinking in the 19th century, equality was not a possibility in the 20th century, and anti-feminist discourses proliferated, in the form of pamphlets, even to warn citizens of the dangers that freedom and equality offered to domestic peace. A thought that, in a way, still resonates today, especially in our society.

Although marriage is (still) commonly meant as the key to happiness, cases of abusive relationships, victimizing through physical and symbolic violence, are not uncommon to countless women in our social sphere.

As we can see, the statements about the feminine analyzed here are circulated on the world wide web. Considering that the internet currently exercises great power of persuasion over its users, we think that the resumption of this hegemonic sexist discourse on the network enables an effect of evidence of meanings on the feminine that contribute to the reiteration of this hierarchically inferior feminine imaginary and, therefore, submissive to man.

There were many struggles to win some rights for women. When instituting Discourse Analysis, Pêcheux paid attention to the relationship between history and memory, in order to denaturalize the senses as a primary step for the transformation of social practices. We take here the Discourse Analysis as a theoretical contribution in order to give us more subsidies to understand the way in which subjects and meanings are constituted, understanding that memory occupies a primary role in this process.

In this work, we bring to mind, as a structuring element of the speeches, the tense struggle that was established in the (anti)feminist movement in its first phase, to understand the mode of operation of the dominant ideology in the statements about women today that, many times, permeate an idealization of the feminine in favor of a culture that legitimizes a sexist practice in our society.

In this gesture, we seek a reflection on the hegemonic sayings that victimize women even today, in view of the (re) meaning of these meanings about the feminine, relatively stabilized in the social sphere with a view to the institution of more just and egalitarian social practices.

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