

What shout is this? Sounds of women – an argument for recognition

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Abstract

This article intends to address the weaknesses surrounding the existence of women for the simple fact that biologically they are female. The arguments used for exploring this theme are anchored in Amartya Sen's dialogues with other thinkers from different fields. It is worth noting that this essay uses distinct scenarios as its basis, from social movements, to situations exploited by the media, among others. It is also suggested that this field of discussion of gender relations is carried by positions of power, tensions, confrontations, accommodations and evictions that need to be problematized in relation to women, whether in contexts of education, health, social inclusion, work and housing.

Keywords: Women. Gender identity. Social movements.

Resumo

Que grito é esse? Sonoridades de mulheres: uma discussão por reconhecimento

Este artigo pretende discutir as fragilidades que circundam a existência das mulheres pelo simples fato biológico de serem fêmeas. Os argumentos utilizados para explorar essa temática estão ancorados na fala de Amartya Sen, em diálogo com outros pensadores de diferentes áreas. Cabe frisar que este ensaio trabalha com distintos cenários como alicerce, desde movimentos sociais até casos explorados pela mídia, entre outros. Sugere, também, que esse campo de discussão das relações de gênero está carregado de espaços de poder, tensões, enfrentamentos, acomodações e desalojamentos, que devem ser problematizados no tocante às mulheres, no contexto da educação, saúde, inserção social, do trabalho, da habitação.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres. Identidade de gênero. Movimentos sociais.

Resumen

¿Qué grito es ese? Sonoridades de mujeres: una discusión por el reconocimiento

Este artículo pretende abordar las fragilidades que rodean la existencia de las mujeres por el simple hecho biológico de ser hembras. Los argumentos utilizados para explorar esta temática se anclan en el discurso de Amartya Sen, en diálogo con otros pensadores de distintas áreas. Vale subrayar que este ensayo trabaja con diferentes escenarios para su exposición, desde movimientos sociales hasta situaciones ya muy discutidas por los medios de comunicación, entre otros. Sugiere, también, que el campo de discusión de las relaciones de género está cargado de espacios de poder, tensiones, enfrentamientos, resignaciones y desalojos, que deben ser problematizados con respeto a las mujeres, en el contexto de la educación, la salud, la inclusión social, el trabajo y la vivienda.

Palabras-clave: Mujeres. Identidad de género. Movimientos sociales.

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Declaram não haver conflito de interesse.

On that day of open skies, the unique blue of Brasília once again witnessed a cry, a march, single voice: revindicating, soliciting, laying bare the paradigms facing the feminine and the masculine. Certainly, on the 18th of June of 2011, the 2,000 people (men and women) who traveled to the central zone of the Federal Capital demonstrated their indignation at the speech and asymmetric opinions, coming from every social class, which diminished women.

Almost a year later, on the 26th of May of 2012, again, close to 3,000 people met together under the same blue sky of Brasília. The hot afternoon of that day witnessed the voice of thousands of demonstrators who stood up against the oppression, expressed by asymmetrical axes interposed in the trajectory of women and backed by patriarchal norms which permeate the social context. The two demonstrations referred to were the Slut Walk.

Thus, with the theme of rape as a motto, this march raises questions linked to the issue of gender, more specifically, feminine vulnerability in the face of legitimization and naturalization of roles established by the dominant system. As reported in the Red Portal:

*The Slut Walk was created in the year 2011, as a response to a lecture on rape prevention, held at the University of Toronto, in Canada. The policeman who administered the lecture asked women to “avoid dressing like sluts, in order to not be victims (of rape).” The college women, outraged by the comment, organized the first Slut Walk. The fight soon spread around the world, after all it is not only in Canada that women are blamed for the violence that they suffer*¹.

The movement, recognizing the limited space reserved for women in the social imagination, quickly took possession of the derogatory terms directed at them, who are the main victims of rape: “women who are easy”; “women who dress provocatively”; “women who appear to be available”. Obviously, the name of the movement – Slut Walk – was astonishing to many people. The women were not few who, feeling themselves insulted, condemned this designation due to not knowing the group’s history. However, receptivity was also verified, especially by the youngest and best informed women, who understood how the police observations that led to the march went against the human rights of women.

Faced with such disparate reactions, it became necessary to justify the name of the movement: *Ev-*

*ery woman already was or will be called a slut one day. For this, it is enough that she has a more assertive attitude in the face of oppressive behavior. Because of this, we will not constrain ourselves in facing up to this term. We will appropriate it*¹, one of the organizers of the march in Brasília stated, in a report about the movement. This response carries an underlying provocative tone, marked by gender issues that pervade the societal relations of the dominant hegemonic movement, which separates what is allowed from what is prohibited for men and women²⁻⁴.

Surely, the differentiated rules for each gender produce favoritism and subalternities and, as a result of these dissimilarities, regarded as legitimate, there are applied *rules and from both distinct attitudes are demaded*⁵. Thus, to better understand the issue, “gender” is taken, in this article, as a social condition which identifies its subjects as men and women in the varied dimensions of masculinity and femininity⁶.

From this line of reasoning, which refers to the arguments of disadvantage, inequality and, in consequence, the inability produced by the external environment, which sometimes brings the woman to remain totally or partially unable to obtain or achieve freedom, it is that this article emerges and dialogues with the concerns of the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen⁷. For the author, who works with the theme globally, these social conjunctures have been a constant subject of reflection. In discussing the problem, treating development as freedom and freedom as development, the thinker stresses the need to promote egalitarian opportunities for women and men, in the context of individual and social achievements.

Thinking of the asymmetries

Sen, in his work, *Development as Freedom*⁷, states that economic growth is not the only factor in the development of a nation, but there should also be consideration of the entire context which involves people’s lives. The author stresses that *development has to be related, above all, to the improvement of the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy*⁸. To expound his thinking more clearly, Sen uses the concept of “substantive freedoms”, whose absence results in the impossibility of access to several benefits: (...) *in global opulence, the contemporary world, denies elementary freedoms to vast numbers of people* (...). *The lack of substantive free-*

doms directly relates to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger; or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable diseases, the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities(...). [There is] a lack of public services and social assistance (...), effective institutions for the maintenance of peace and order (...). The violation of freedom results directly from denial of political and civil liberties (...) and from imposed restrictions on the freedom to participate in the social, political and economic life of the community⁹.

In emphasizing the problem of freedoms, the thinker highlights the issue of access and choice. In fact, he questions how it is possible that an individual can be free if he does not have access to health, education, quality housing, or sanitation; if he does not even have the right to physical integrity, as is the case with many women in the world and in Brazil.

Aimed at achieving access to political and civil liberties, the March of the Daisies (a movement formed by field, forest and water workers) took place on the 12th of August of 2015, in Brasília/DF. The motto of the movement this year was: Sustainable Development with Democracy, Justice, Autonomy, Equality and Freedom. Among the demands of the Daisies, delivered to the Federal Government, were the clamor for public policies for refuge for rural women, for providing tools to combat violence, for the end of rural femicide. According to the Minister of the Secretariat of Policies for Women of the Presidency of the Republic, Eleonora Menicucci, the demands represent the resistance of those who are facing the obstacles of life and, (...) of those who are working on the land. Women who resist machismo and all of its prejudiced acts daily¹⁰. Surely, these women, by engaging themselves in the march using speech and pacifism seek, irrefutably, to overcome the vulnerabilities that surround them.

Continuing the theme of freedom, Sen points out that *expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions, and interacting with – and influencing – the world in which we live*⁹.

In the economist's view, the deprivation of liberty is manifested in various ways, whether by the hunger spectrum, the malnutrition of the vulnerable, the numerous human beings deprived of access to substantive freedoms, or even by the asymmetry between women and men. As for this last aspect, Sen declares that *the inequality between men and*

*women afflicts – and sometimes prematurely ends – the lives of millions of women and, in different ways, severely restricts the substantive freedoms that women enjoy*⁹. The question of asymmetry thus exposes evidence of the existential reality for many women in the world, who, despite globalization, still manage to exhibit this problem as a priority for the planet.

Certainly, there are countries which treat this issue distinctly by promoting actions to minimize or extinguish oppressive processes. Still, it is worth noting that these measures are still timid before the reality of gender issues. In Brazil, President Dilma Rousseff gave a speech in September of 2011, during the High Level Colloquium on the Political Participation of Women, (Colóquio de Alto Nível sobre a Participação Política de Mulheres), a dialogue promoted by UN Women, in which it endorsed the importance of the issue. In her speech, published in the issue of Carta Capital magazine, the president asserted that, *despite some noteworthy advances, inequality remains in the XXI century. It is women who suffer most from extreme poverty, illiteracy, health system failures, conflicts and sexual violence. In general, women receive lower wages for the same occupation and have limited presence in key decision-making bodies*¹¹.

It should be noted that speeches (made by State representatives or by intellectuals) should be viewed with some reserve. According to Segundo Spivak¹², it is imperative to question the place from which they come, since the words are spoken by those who are dominant, and are not at all neutral. They carry within themselves the gene pool of the prestigious spaces in which they speak. In the preface to Spivak's work, "Can the subaltern speak?" ("Pode o subalterno falar?"), Almeida stresses that the author *acknowledges her complicity in the process, but makes of this recognition a productive space that allows her to question the very place from where she theorizes*¹³. According to Almeida, the Spivak critique is in the sense that the whole body is or has been institutionalized, *hence the it is impossible to articulate a discourse of resistance that is outside of the hegemonic discourses*¹⁴.

Spivak's contribution is crucial and, at the same time, painful for the intellectuals who work with the subject, insofar as it removes them from their comfort zone, launching them into the desolation of trying to produce, according to Almeida, alternatives for questioning *the subaltern subjects' forms of repression*¹⁴, assessing his own position. Thus, it is fitting for intellectuals or representatives

of these categories to examine the spaces where they met while speaking.

A study on violence against women, presented in 2011 by the UN's Special Rapporteur, Rashida Manjoo, to the UN General Assembly Committee for Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs, and cited in an article published on the UN website in Brazil, identified that *aggressions such as rape, sexual assault, traffic, forced prostitution, violence against migrant women, pornography, among other similar acts, practiced in the domestic and community spheres within the scope of governments and in the international arena. (...) certain groups of women presented an increased risk of violence. In the United States, for example, African-Americans suffered 35% more violence from their partners than white women. (...) Poor women and those with little education, widowed or separated were more vulnerable due to the lack of family or community support.* According to the Brazilian jurist Sílvia Pimentel, who was mentioned in the same article, *the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) records approximately 5,000 women murdered by family members, who claimed to have had their honor tainted*¹⁵.

Making use of Sen's line of reasoning as a vehicle for discussion of the state of asymmetry experienced by many women, it can be affirmed that the individuals only managed to positively meet their personal requirements and those of their social environment through *economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and by enabling conditions such as health, basic education and incentivization and improvement of the initiatives that are offered*¹⁶.

Paraphrasing Sen⁷, the question that arises is: how do women placed in a context of disadvantage find a way out in order to change such processes if they do not have access to the so-called "substantive liberties"? Even the women who, in some way, possess them still suffer from some degree of vulnerability by the simple fact of being women. The naturalization of roles, as much the feminine (subalternity) as the masculine (superiority), in the social imagination ensures that the oppressed person does not recognize her own oppression, whether through the process of socialization to which she was submitted, or through the process of scarcity that surrounds her.

This assertion is consistent with Cardoso's speech, quoted by Machado, by warning about the relationship between insult and pain: (...) *when the act of physical aggression is not culturally understood as an insult, it does not imply in (sic) vi-*

*olence*¹⁷. This affirmation allows us to conclude that these naturalizations are legitimized and adopted into everyday life, since *women themselves, in the name of their gender, are perceived and perceive themselves as placed in a situation of inferior hierarchical value and subjected to power and physical and symbolic violence*¹⁸.

It should be noted that it is not only men who commit violence against women; many times, they themselves assume the mastery of violence, symbolic or not, against other women. In this case, they end up naturalizing the disciplining of their own body, by virtue of their socialization.

This reflection can be analyzed on the basis of the perspective of Bourdieu and Wacquant¹⁹, for whom, depending on the way in which it is exercised upon a social agent, violence ends up depending, not infrequently, on the complicity of the agent itself. The repressive vector does not recognize this manifestation of connivance, and the person who is under the state of oppression may never have had access to different forms of freedom. Corroborating these affirmations, Sen states that *the political and civil freedoms are constitutive elements of human freedoms, their denial is a handicap in itself*²⁰.

Therefore, while running through social, political and economic denials, in what refers to decisions about their own bodies, these women face difficulties in being recognized as spokespersons in the decision-making process. Among examples of this condition, are the choice to continue or not continue with a pregnancy; the obtainment of economic income equivalent to a man who occupies a similar position; the practice of sex willingly, and not for mere convenience of the partner; the rejection of the imposition of any physical or psychological violence related to the gender issue.

A woman can go through a process of deprivation of her ego when the right to choose is taken away. At this juncture, there is an obstacle created to the *person having valuable results*²¹ for herself. This approach is recognized by Sen, in underlining that *the vision of freedom adopted here involves as much the processes which permit the freedom of actions and decisions as the real opportunities that people have, given their personal and social circumstances. The deprivation of freedom may arise (...) from inadequate opportunities which some people have to carry out the minimum of what they would like to do*²¹.

In this sense, when a woman finds herself locked out of the growth process or facing an asym-

metrical offer (as in the case of a wage differentiated by the criterion of gender), the subalternity of the woman is reinforced, becoming even more cemented. Even in this condition, the woman is not exempt from social burdens and existential demands, such as the payment of electricity, water, taxes, housing, health, and subsistence expenses. In this case, however, she would be embedded in a network of unjust social relations, full of asymmetrical meanings.

For Sen, this situation would fit into the issue of *deprivation of freedom*, arising from *inadequate processes or inadequate opportunities*²⁰. In other words, there would exist in this woman a type of failure caused by the dominant system, which offers men opportunities that are denied, limited or made difficult for women throughout their entire life trajectory. In the analysis of this issue and considering that the expansion of the “capabilities” of people leads to a “two-way relationship” between development and freedom, it is opportune to revisit Sen’s ideas: *Attention is thus paid particularly to the expansion of the “capabilities” of persons to lead the kind of lives they value - and have reason to value. These capabilities can be enhanced by public policy, but also, on the other side, the direction of public policy can be influenced by the effective use of participatory capabilities by the public.*²²

Based on Sen’s work⁷, the importance may be seen of the capacity to access or real advancement that the other exercises on the formation of their own opinions, self-empowerment, ability to manage their choices and to take ownership of these²³. According to Gonçalves:

[empowerment would be the] *individual’s ability [to] make choices free from political, economic and social constraints, that is, for the subject to make use of her freedom, without coercion mechanisms; in order for this to occur reliably, she should be “educated” for this purpose. To work the institutions (church, family, the State...), and not the person individually. To empower the subject to recognize her vulnerability, reinforcing self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-esteem, in the sense of seeking the best conditions for the expansion of her real needs, which include: education, housing, decision-making power, access to health care, social services, freedom of expression*²⁴.

The individual, upon reaching the stage of empowerment, would gain freedom, and it is only through this condition that she would be able to put herself in the position of freedom, understood as an

extremely complex and comprehensive skill. Surely, the Gonçalves study²³ as well as his work in collaboration with other authors²⁵, is in agreement with Sen’s thought⁷ on the essentiality of substantive individual freedoms.

The authors agree with the thought that a society would only be considered successful if the individuals living in it were endowed with the capability of reaching full choices. For Sen⁷, the one who can choose is in possession of the moral tool of choice: positive freedom. Whereas the person who cannot choose, because of some obstacle, has negative liberty. Applying this theory to the status of the woman in the world, it can be considered that today she still remains within the compass of injustice, especially with regard to the economic, social and political spheres and in access to basic goods, such as education and health.

This mapping of asymmetries shows the weaknesses which surround the existence of the woman, among which is the impossibility of achieving formal education to empower herself. Even when qualified, she is faced with the patriarchal structure of the companies and organizations that offer lower wages than that of men. Positioning themselves in the labor market with wages equivalent to men and climbing to the top of the career ladder are nearly unattainable goals for women, faced by the sexist design woven into employment structures. In a sweet and subtle way, these structures deny the existence of their structural perversity.

On this issue, Spivak’s speech, cited by Almeida, is perfectly adapted to women, since they make up *the bottom layers of society constituted by specific modes of exclusion from markets, political-legal representation, and the possibility of full membership in dominant social strata*²⁶.

In this line of reasoning, it can be pointed out that the woman finds herself put into a position of negative freedom, as Sen would say, and that this condition is often responsible for her lack of appropriate social rights, as well as for her belief, deduced from her own speeches, in the oppression forced on her body, impeding her from reaching a place of prestige. For Arendt²⁷, she lacks the ability to recognize her citizenship status; that is, in her view residing, also, in the understanding, already embedded in society, of not seeing herself with “the right to have rights”.

Eleonora Menicucci, Chief Minister of the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women of the Presidency of the Republic, while participating in

the Rio+20 Conference, signaled this problem and, subsequently, wrote an article for the *Jornal do Dia* newspaper, in which she manifests her concern: *Simultaneously, we cannot think of a sustainable world that accepts violence against women, and the sexual exploitation of children, adolescents and women, nor human trafficking. We cannot think of a sustainable world that accepts a discriminatory, sexist and racist education. Nor of a green economy which coexists with the existing wage gap between women and men* ²⁸.

To underpin such considerations, the theoretical framework of bioethics may be used, which concentrates its view on different moral tools in an attempt to find solutions able to minimize, or even extinguish the conditions that generate inequality and destitution of any order. In this sense the discipline relies on the moral instrument of equity – understood here as a tool productive of equal opportunity –, having seen that in this field, individual differences are permitted, and, in consequence, the specific needs of each person. Such a problem is debated by Diniz and Guilhem, for whom the difference cannot be translated nor confused with oppression and/or inequality: *[there should not be] confusion of vulnerability, oppression and inequality with difference. Difference is a moral value of modernity that deserves to be and should be preserved. (...) The presupposition of difference is, therefore, one of the components of the philosophical project of moral pluralism; (...) mutual co-existence in difference is possible. Thus, it is important to differentiate vulnerability from difference, even inequality from difference. And what makes inequality and difference two separate categories is the access to and the enjoyment of social power given to each person* ²⁹.

In an analogy to Sen's thought ⁷, it is possible to sustain that a woman, in this specific case, in which her right to substantive liberties is denied, neither will nor can feel herself included in the social picture, whose opportunities are distributed by different access channels. For the author, there is an urgent necessity to opt for the right to speak of those who find themselves in a state of destitution: *(...) it is necessary to keep in mind (...) that if we want a stronger voice in the world, whether be of poor countries, of women, of men, or of the poorest segment of the population in a country* ²².

Based on this reasoning, several questions arise, among these the question of the subalternity in which women of different levels are found, in the social, economic, political, educational, and health fields, among others. Thus, it is fitting to question:

to what extent can a woman suffering from poverty have her voice, her outcry heard? Would she be in the group of those who could be heard? What is the level of autonomy for her to gain mastery of the decision-making process of her own life trajectory?

Observing from a different angle, even the woman who has education, work and access to health care should not be taken as someone exercising full freedom on her journey, since she cannot decide on practices such as abortion, for example – in which, to terminate the pregnancy, she has to undergo evaluation. Although the profile of this work does not focus on the issue of abortion, this argument is used with the objective of anchoring to the reasoning which follows.

Based on what is shown, a question is fitting: if the situation were presented in inverse form, in which the man, for example, abandons a woman pregnant with his child, the moral judgment – considering the context of the social representations – would it be the same? Certainly not. Men are not morally judged in this circumstance. Only the woman is penalized, while the man remains free from any participation in the process. Thus, it can be affirmed that men and women are disciplined for different ends: the woman, to achieve the domestic sphere; and a man, to extend himself to the public sphere ³.

With the funds received by being awarded with the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998, Sen appointed two funds, one in India and another in Bangladesh, for the fight against illiteracy, against asymmetries between the sexes, as well as for the promotion of access to basic medical care. With this, the scholar intended to address one of his greatest concerns, manifested in a Brazilian TV interview: *One of the greatest concerns is the inequality between sexes and, therefore the issue of girls in schools is a central aspect* ³⁰.

It is known that education is a great differential in the lives of women. Promoting it should be a universal concern. It is necessary to recognize that a considerable number of women remain impoverished and without access to formal education. They are often prevented from making choices in situations involving their own bodies, their sexuality, their sexual behavior, their pregnancy process. This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges posed to humanity, because, in the face of the longing for a more just, more egalitarian world, the moral tool of acceptance is invoked. This path will require a stripping away of moral certainties which are closely linked to the organizational system of society, re-

sponsible for the production and maintenance of the patriarchal structure. Thus, it is believed that the human advancement of women can remove them from their subordinate condition and from exploitation of their bodies.

Women condemned to extreme poverty, to lacking formal education, to the sphere of submission and even to submission by the socialization process tend to find it difficult to produce their own moral grammar. They occupy, thus, the space of the unheard, as believed by Gonçalves³ and Gonçalves and Varandas⁴ – this thought is confluent with Spivak's line of reasoning, for whom, according to Almeida, *the subaltern, in this particular case, the woman as subaltern, cannot speak and when she tries to, she does not find the means by which she can make herself heard*³¹.

Thus, women surrounded by situations of greater vulnerability are subjected to the place of the invisible and inaudible. Almeida stresses that, for the Indian theory, *it is not possible to speak for the subaltern, but it is possible to work "against" subalternity, creating spaces in which the subaltern can articulate themselves and, as a consequence, can also be heard*³². Empowering them and prompting them to draw up a new moral grammar, which removes them from the position of subalternity that they occupy – often unconsciously – could be one possible path, as shown by Gonçalves²³.

In agreement with Almeida, Spivak believes that, *if the speech of the subaltern is obliterated, the subalternwoman finds herself in an even more peripheral position due to the problems underlying gender*³². In the words of the author, cited by Almeida, *if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even deeper in shadow*³¹.

To change this situation, Spivak¹² suggests to intellectuals or the representatives of these categories – and even to the intellectual woman who questions the position from which she is speaking – that they do not reproduce a discourse invested in the dominant structure. This fear is also manifested by Sen³³, when he states that, in order to awaken the "potential" of an individual, it is necessary to create a network of cooperation, subsistence and subsidy and survey of individual needs, thus avoiding possible mismatches. In another work³⁴, he stresses that this measure would enable the development of a fundamental characteristic of the human being: the capability to not be indifferent to the pain of others.

Spivak¹², in turn, calls on the intellectual woman to be responsible for this process in a more compelling way, according to the words of Almeida: *(...) it is up to her to create spaces and conditions for self-representation and for questioning representational limits, as well as her own place of enunciation and her participation in intellectual work*³¹.

Sen and Spivak equally direct their concern to the field of individual spans, bearing in mind those who are found placed in a position of vulnerability and, at the same time, those who wish to extend the right to speak to those who still do not possess it.

From delivered speech

Whether it is in the social movements, or in the speech of women, there is an effort for the sound of the word to mean more than the word. In this sense, echoing the feminist movement, Rangel proposes that *the solution for the problem (would be) in a broad political reform, capable of reaching and altering discrimination factors*³⁵. Thus, it is believed that there is a need for incessant vigilance, in order to ensure that the sound of the word emitted is neither lost nor becomes a dialect that few or very few are capable of articulating. The sound cannot remain restricted to small groups.

A confrontation is proposed so that an increasing number of people can understand and empower themselves in the struggle against violence and the countless complexities in which this subject is submerged. There is also proposed an objective in which the social actor (weakened or not, intellectualized or not) would not be a distant participant but a multiplying agent of the expression delivered: no to violence! Paraphrasing Spivak¹², it can be said that the confrontation fought has been continued, so that the subaltern subject is not a mere repeater of the dominant discourse, but, indeed, someone capable of inventing and (re)inventing their own moral grammar, as Gonçalves would say³.

The decision of the women's movement to appropriate the term "sluts": represented, above all, a form of boldness, without taking into consideration the moral judgment of those who were outside of the protest situation. The purpose of the march was not only to request gender equality, but also to call for women's freedom of choice to be respected, as much in relation to their partners, as to the right to exercise their sexuality as they prefer and to dress the way that is most comfortable for them, among others. According to material published by the Agên-

cia Brasil newspaper in May of 2012, the goal of the Slut Walk was also to call society's attention to the fact that violence and sexual abuse is not the fault of the victim. "It is of the abuser and of the rapist", Daniela [Daniela Montper, organizer of the event] stresses. "When society is judging the victim, looking for any reason to say that she deserved (the violence), it is taking the fault, from the rapist, from the abuser, and heaping it on the victim", she added ³⁶.

Another flag raised by the movement, according to the article, was the challenge of "Medida Provisória" (Provisional Measure) 557, written in December 2011, which established the National System for Registry, Surveillance and Monitoring of Pregnant and Postpartum Women (woman who recently gave birth) for the Prevention of Maternal Mortality within the scope of the SUS (Sistema Único de Saúde). The organizers of the Slut Walk consider that the MP 557 is discriminatory and offensive and has the character of criminalizing women who choose not to continue with the pregnancy, besides controlling these women ³⁶.

In other words, the MP 557/2011 ³⁷ had been drafted containing a veiled precaution to prevent the possible eventuality of a pregnant woman to opting for the termination of pregnancy. It is also worth noting that in no part of the text, is mention made of the maternal deaths caused by abortion. In this sense, the MP would be disrespecting the privacy and reproductive autonomy of women. This problem is addressed by the march, since another goal of the movement is to draw attention to the need for women to assume the control of their own lives.

In this way, the movement also seeks to embrace the issue of decriminalizing abortion and, at the same time, to emphasize topics related to groups taken as "minorities", whether women or girls. The march also advocates acceptance of sexual diversity, rejecting all discrimination relative to the sexual orientation or identity of any individual ³⁶. The intent is to give voices to those who live in a state of silence, whether due to individual or group vulnerability.

Through calling attention to the ethical aspects embedded in the cause, it also intends that this struggle should be plural, independent of segments. From this perspective, the slogans of the movement, taken from the manifesto letter "Why do we march?" and cited in the Slut Walk blog, plead for everyone's understanding: *The right to a life free from violence is one of the most basic rights of every woman, and it is by the guarantee of this fundamen-*

tal right that we march today and we will march until we are all free ³⁸.

This struggle is considered arduous and requires courage and determination, above all to be made known, as noted by Sen ⁷ and Spivak ¹². A significant example of this fearlessness was epitomized by television presenter Xuxa Meneghel, who publically exposed her weakness in being a woman, reporting that she had been a victim of sexual abuse during adolescence, according to an article in *Veja* magazine from May 2012 ³⁹. To make this matter explicit is too painful, since the abused person feels dirty, impure and even promiscuous. Such a feeling arises from the social imagination in which the abused subject participates ³. Until recently, social belief took as a guiding path the assumption that the person who was raped had provoked her own rape, either by her dress, gestures, behavior, or even way of looking. This misconception exempted the abuser from any responsibility.

To touch upon this issue, besides being something that bothers people, since in any civilization there will always be someone forbidden to someone, means *breaking a cultural barrier, which preached that what went on inside the house was only of interest to those involved* ⁴⁰. Thus, it legitimized silence around the issue, demonstrating the pseudo-idea of freedom and respect for another's body.

In Brazil, images broadcast by television and print media show the discrepancy between the apparent sexual liberty instituted and exhibited in the Carnival and the actual behavioral situation experienced by society. Respect for the naked body or the few garments of the people who "sell" the image of Brazilian Carnival are merely a deceptive social arrangement. Culturally, it tries to pass off the idea of a normality that does not reflect the harsh reality lived by women and children in the country. Dalka Ferrari, coordinator at the Reference Center for the Victims of Violence of the Sedes Sapientiae Institute, and data from the Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology Program at the University of São Paulo, published in the same issue of *Veja* magazine, noted that *97% of the perpetrators are known to the family, 38% the own father, 29% the stepfather, and those remaining, the brother, grandfather, uncle, cousin, teacher or family friend* ⁴¹.

Based on the elements explained above, it can be affirmed that sexual abuse is often committed by those who should protect women and children. In this sense, any move to bring the issue of abuse to the agenda of discussions is beneficial to the advancement of women.

Final Considerations

It is believed that the role of the academic intellectual is to scrutinize the situation presented here. To smooth over such an issue neither can nor should be understood as a minimalist proposal in the current situation, or as an elaboration of thoughts turned to their “own navel”, but rather as the route to be travelled in order to achieve social justice between women and men.

Not to be raped is a woman’s right, as it is the State’s duty to promote tools capable of supporting them in the maintenance of their physical and moral integrity. A secure path to follow is the systematic adoption of deconstruction of the discourses which, in themselves, contain gender asymmetries. The inclusion of all these issues in the primary school

curriculum is a possible alternative for the development of a youth less violent and more caring in relation to women.

Certainly, such measures have reduced the number of rapes and physical and moral aggressions that have been committed against women. Thus, human rights and citizenship would be guaranteed to women, independent of race, social class, religion and education. Decisions are necessary, therefore, from the public power, civil society, legislators and from the intellectuals themselves as much on the discussion about the subalternity of women – especially concerning their rights – as on the combat against this malady. The question is urged: what shout is this? We should take this cry of loneliness from one segment and make it audible throughout society.

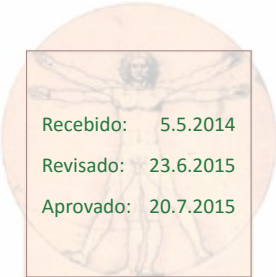
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Participation of the authors

Erlí Helena Gonçalves is responsible for the intellectual production and research for this article and Adriano Bastos Gentil is responsible for the intellectual production and for formatting the text.



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