

# Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis in Republican Brazil (1889-1989): Historiographical Debates, Interpretive Tensions and Critical Perspectives

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## Abstract

This report offers a critical and reflexive assessment of the application of gender as a category of historical analysis in Brazilian historiography, focusing on the Republican period from 1889 to 1989. Rather than providing a factual chronicle of the "female condition", the study maps the principal historiographical debates, tensions between interpretive currents, and the evolution of the field itself. The analysis demonstrates how gender analysis has enabled innovative reinterpretations of key processes in Brazilian history. The theoretical-methodological perspective emphasises debates, the reception of international paradigms, and original contributions from Brazilian academic production, which has developed critical dialogue with Anglo-Saxon and French formulations whilst articulating them to the specificities of a society profoundly marked by the legacy of slavery, regional inequalities, and the persistence of patriarchal structures. The study examines four distinct historical periods: the First Republic (1889-1930), with its exclusionary citizenship and emergent women's movements; the Vargas Era (1930-1945), characterised by regulated citizenship and civic motherhood ideology; the Democratic Experience (1945-1964), marked by hegemonic domesticity and its fissures; and the Military Regime (1964-1985) through to redemocratisation, featuring gendered repression and the emergence of second-wave feminism. The analysis incorporates critical perspectives on masculinities and intersectionality, demonstrating that gender analysis constitutes a heuristic tool of extraordinary potency for understanding the construction of the republican nation. The report concludes that citizenship definition, labour organisation, authoritarian projects, and struggles for democracy have been profoundly gendered processes, traversed and constituted by hierarchical notions of masculinity and femininity.

**Keywords:** Gender history; republican Brazil; historiography; feminism; intersectionality; patriarchy; citizenship

## 1. Introduction: The Emergence of Gender as a Historiographical Problem

The incorporation of "gender" as a category into the theoretical-methodological apparatus of historiography represented one of the most significant epistemological transformations in the human sciences during the second half of the twentieth century. Far from constituting a mere thematic addition — the inclusion of "women" in previously masculinised narratives — gender analysis proposed a fundamental reconfiguration of the presuppositions that oriented historical investigation. By shifting the focus from recovering invisibilised subjects to denaturalising the power relations that constitute and hierarchise sexed identities, the concept of gender inaugurated analytical possibilities that transcend the universe traditionally associated with the "feminine" — family, sexuality, domestic life — interrogating the totality of historical processes: from the formation of nation-states to revolutions, from labour relations to social movements.

This report proposes a critical and reflexive assessment of the application of the gender category in the historiography of Republican Brazil, encompassing the period from 1889 to 1989, that is, from the proclamation of the Republic to the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution. The periodisation is not arbitrary: it corresponds to a century of structural transformations in Brazilian political, economic and social organisation, during which gender relations were simultaneously reproduced and contested, naturalised and politicised. The central objective is not to trace a factual chronicle of the "female condition", but to map the principal historiographical confrontations, the tensions between interpretive currents, and the evolution of the field of study itself, demonstrating how gender analysis has enabled innovative reinterpretations of key processes in Brazilian history.

The adopted perspective privileges theoretical-methodological debate, the reception of international paradigms, and the original contributions of Brazilian academic production, which has developed critical dialogue with Anglo-Saxon and French formulations, articulating them to the specificities of a society profoundly marked by the legacy of slavery, regional inequalities, and the persistence of patriarchal structures in the spheres of family, labour, and politics. Gender, in this report, is understood not as synonymous with "woman" or as a descriptive category, but as an analytical tool that interrogates the historical construction of sexed differences and their articulation with other matrices of social hierarchisation, notably race and class.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations: From Essentialism to Constructivism

### 2.1 Simone de Beauvoir and the Denaturalisation of the Feminine

The intellectual genealogy of the gender category traces back, inevitably, to the philosophical work of Simone de Beauvoir. Published in 1949, *The Second Sex* constitutes a founding landmark by postulating that "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" — a formulation that destabilised the essentialist presuppositions that anchored female subordination in supposed

biological determinations. Beauvoir, grounded in Sartrean existentialism, argued that "femininity" is not a natural or transcendental given, but a cultural construction imposed upon women from childhood, through processes of socialisation that constitute them as the "Other" in relation to the universal masculine subject.

The Beauvoirian contribution was decisive in introducing the implicit distinction between sex (anatomical given) and gender (social construction), a distinction that would be subsequently systematised by the anthropologist Gayle Rubin in her seminal essay "The Traffic in Women" (1975). Rubin coined the expression "sex/gender system" to designate the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, establishing that gender is a socially imposed division between the sexes, a cultural construction that varies historically and serves specific interests of domination.

## 2.2 Joan Scott and the Consecration of Gender as an Analytical Category

Whilst Beauvoir and Rubin laid the conceptual foundations, it was Joan Wallach Scott who consolidated gender as an operative category for historiography. In her 1986 article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", published in the *American Historical Review* and translated into Portuguese in 1990, Scott presented a theoretical formulation that would become an obligatory reference. The historian defined gender through two articulated propositions: "gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes" and "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott, 1995, p. 86).

The first proposition unfolds into four analytical dimensions: the culturally available symbols that evoke multiple representations (Eve and Mary, for example, as antagonistic symbols of femininity); the normative concepts that express interpretations of the meanings of symbols and limit their metaphorical possibilities (religious, educational, scientific, juridical doctrines); the institutions and social organisations (family, labour market, educational system, politics); and subjective identity. The second proposition is equally crucial: gender does not merely describe differences, but legitimates and constructs hierarchies. The binary oppositions masculine/feminine are mobilised to naturalise relations of domination that extend far beyond relations between men and women, organising fields as diverse as international politics and economic theories.

The post-structuralist influence on Scott, particularly from Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, is evident. From Foucault, she incorporated the notion that power is not merely repressive, but productive — it produces subjectivities, knowledges, truths. From Derrida, she appropriated the critique of binary metaphysics and the deconstructive strategy. For Scott, the task of the gender historian is not simply to document women's "experience", but to analyse the discursive processes through which the very categories of "man" and "woman" are constituted and the ways in which these categories structure the understanding of the social world.

## 2.3 Judith Butler and the Performativity of Gender

The radicalisation of constructivism came with Judith Butler, whose work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) destabilised presuppositions still present in earlier formulations. Butler questioned the very distinction between sex and gender, arguing that "sex" is not a pre-discursive surface upon which gender is culturally inscribed. Sex, she argued, is itself a gendered category, produced by the same discourses that purport to describe it. Anatomy does not pre-exist its cultural signification; it is always already interpreted through grids of intelligibility that are themselves gendered.

The concept of *performativity* is central to Butlerian theorisation. Gender is not an internal essence that expresses itself in behaviours; it is the effect of reiterated practices, of stylised acts that, through their repetition, produce the appearance of a substance, of a sexed "I" anterior to discourse. Gender identity is not, therefore, the origin of performance, but its result. This formulation had profound implications for historiography, suggesting that historians should investigate not the history of stable identities, but the processes through which identities are performatively constituted, contested and transformed over time.

## 2.4 The Essentialism versus Constructivism Debate

The confrontation between essentialism and constructivism constitutes a foundational tension in the field. Essentialist positions, although rarely explicitly articulated as such in contemporary historiography, inform approaches that presume a trans-historical "feminine nature" or that treat categories such as "woman" as self-explanatory. Constructivism, in its multiple variants — from moderate social constructivism to radical post-structuralism — insists on the historicity of categories and the necessity of investigating the processes of their production.

Post-structuralist critique, however, has not remained immune to contestations. Historians such as Louise Tilly have argued that the emphasis on language and discourse could obscure the material conditions of existence of real women and dilute the political efficacy of feminism by deconstructing the very category "woman" in whose name struggles were organised. The debate remains alive and productive, with positions that seek to articulate discursive analysis with the investigation of material practices and social structures.

## 2.5 From Women's History to Gender History

The distinction between "women's history" and "gender history" expresses a paradigmatic transformation. Women's history, which flourished in the 1970s in the context of second-wave feminism, had as its primary objective to make female experience visible, recovering historical subjects systematically ignored by traditional historiography. It was, to a large extent, a "compensatory" or "contributory" history, which sought to demonstrate that women were also present in major historical processes — revolutions, social movements, economic transformations.

Gender history, without denying the importance of this recovery project, proposed an epistemological displacement. It would not suffice to add women to existing narratives; it would be necessary to reconfigure the analytical categories themselves. The passage from the term "women" to "gender" signalled, as Scott observed, "the rejection of biological determinism implicit in the use of terms such as 'sex' or 'sexual difference'" and the affirmation of the "fundamentally social character of distinctions based on sex" (Scott, 1995, p. 72). Moreover, it implied recognising that constructions of femininity are relational and can only be understood in articulation with constructions of masculinity.

## 3. Reception in Brazilian Historiography: Trajectories and Original Contributions

### 3.1 Antecedents: Social History of Women in the 1970s

Brazilian historiography on women and gender developed through critical dialogue with international formulations, but from its own dynamics, linked to the political and intellectual debates of the national context. The pioneering production of the 1970s was strongly marked by social history of Marxist inspiration, which framed female oppression within class structures. The work of Heleith Saffiotti, *Women in Class Society: Myth and Reality* (1969), is representative of this current: it analysed female subordination as a by-product of capitalist exploitation, arguing that women's emancipation would depend on overcoming the capitalist mode of production.

This approach, whilst having had the merit of politicising the "woman question" and linking it to broader struggles against the military dictatorship, presented significant analytical limitations. The emphasis on economic determination tended to subordinate gender oppression to class oppression, treating it as a "secondary contradiction". Moreover, the predominant image was of woman as passive victim of structures of domination, with little space for analysis of her agency, resistance or capacity for negotiation.

### 3.2 The Turn of the 1980s: Everyday Life, Agency and Resistance

The 1980s represented a decisive turning point. Influenced by French New History, English social history (especially E.P. Thompson) and feminism, a new generation of historians proposed significant theoretical displacements. The work of Maria Odila Leite da Silva Dias, *Everyday Life and Power in São Paulo in the Nineteenth Century* (1984), was a fundamental landmark. By investigating the survival strategies of poor women — market vendors, washerwomen, seamstresses, prostitutes — Dias revealed a universe of agency, everyday resistance and informal power that challenged the image of woman as mere victim.

Dias's methodology was innovative: she combined the analysis of juridical and police sources with an anthropological perspective attentive to micropowers and survival tactics. Her approach demonstrated that everyday life was not the space of alienation or passive reproduction of structures of domination, but a field of disputes where women from the popular classes exercised forms of power and resistance that escaped formal institutional frameworks. The emphasis on "declassed women" — those who did not fit into the normative roles of wife and mother — also represented an implicit critique of historiography that privileged the experience of white, middle-class women.

Margareth Rago, in *From Cabaret to Home: The Utopia of the Disciplinary City* (1985) and subsequently in *The Pleasures of the Night: Prostitution and Codes of Female Sexuality in São Paulo* (1991), introduced a Foucauldian framework into Brazilian historiography to analyse the construction of female identity. Her work investigated the medical-hygienist, juridical and urbanistic discourses that, in the First Republic, aimed to discipline the female body and sexuality, constructing the figure of the "honest woman" in opposition to the prostitute. Rago's analysis demonstrated how the normalisation of gender roles operated through power-knowledge devices that classified, hierarchised and regulated female behaviours.

Rachel Soihet, in *Female Condition and Forms of Violence: Poor Women and Urban Order (1890-1920)* (1989), investigated the criminalisation and violence against poor women in Rio de Janeiro during the First Republic. Her work demonstrated how the juridical-police system operated based on gender conceptions that distinguished between "honest" and "dishonest" women, legitimating different forms of treatment and punishment. Soihet's analysis articulated gender and class, demonstrating that the "female condition" was traversed by social markers that produced radically distinct experiences.

### 3.3 Consolidation of the Field: Collections and Syntheses

The 1990s witnessed the institutional consolidation of the field, with the creation of research centres, postgraduate programmes and specialised journals (notably *Revista Estudos Feministas*, founded in 1992). The collection organised by Mary Del Priore, *History of Women in Brazil* (1997), constituted a landmark by bringing together contributions from various specialists and offering a comprehensive panorama of female experience from the colonial period. The volume became an obligatory reference, being widely used in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

Joana Maria Pedro contributed decisively to the regionalisation and complexification of the field, investigating the history of women in southern Brazil and the history of the feminist movement itself. Her works on the female and feminist press in Brazil and on the relations between feminism and the Left in the 1970s and 1980s are important references for understanding the dynamics of the women's movement during the redemocratisation period.

More recently, the collection organised by Carla Bassanezi Pinsky, *New History of Women in Brazil* (2012), updated the mapping of the field, incorporating new themes (body, sexuality, maternity, violence) and theoretical perspectives (intersectionality, queer studies). The work evidences the vitality and diversification of Brazilian historiographical production on gender, which today encompasses practically all periods and themes of national history.

## 4. First Republic (1889-1930): Exclusionary Citizenship, Labour and Resistances

### 4.1 Political Exclusion and Gendered Citizenship

The proclamation of the Republic and the promulgation of the 1891 Constitution represented a moment of redefinition of citizenship that, notwithstanding liberal and egalitarian rhetoric, reiterated and deepened female exclusion from the formal political space. The constitutional text, by establishing as voter the "citizen over 21 years of age" who enrolled according to law, deliberately remained silent on the question of gender. This silence, interpreted by conservative juridical tradition as implicit exclusion of women, expresses what gender historiography has termed "gendered citizenship": the construction of a model of citizen identified with masculine attributes — rationality, autonomy, capacity for abstraction from particular interests in the name of the common good.

Gender analysis allows us to understand that female exclusion was not merely a "backwardness" to be overcome by the progress of enlightenment, but a constitutive element of the oligarchic republican arrangement itself. Active citizenship was associated with an ideal of bourgeois masculinity: the public man, property owner, head of family, capable of representing domestic interests in the political sphere. Woman, confined to the private space, was represented by father or husband; her direct political participation was seen as a threat to family order and, by extension, to social order.

### 4.2 Female Labour: Factory, Home and Street

The incipient industrialisation of the first republican decades significantly transformed labour relations and, with them, gender relations. Historiography has demonstrated that women — and children — constituted the majority of the labour force in the textile factories of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The massive presence of women in industry, however, did not translate into salary or conditions equality: female wages were systematically lower than male wages for equivalent functions, and working conditions were frequently degrading.

Gender analysis has enabled understanding of how the sexual division of industrial labour was anchored in representations that associated women with certain "natural" characteristics — manual dexterity, docility, patience — supposedly adequate for certain functions, but which also justified their lower remuneration. Female labour in the factory was frequently represented as complementary or transitory, exercised until marriage, which legitimised its devaluation.

Remunerated domestic labour constituted another fundamental sphere of female insertion, particularly for Black and poor women. Gender historiography, in dialogue with studies on racial relations, has demonstrated the structural continuity between domestic slavery and the labour of domestic servants in the Republic. The "servants", many of them former enslaved persons or descendants of the enslaved, worked in conditions of extreme precarity, with unlimited working hours, very low remuneration and subjection to forms of physical and sexual violence.

Prostitution, in turn, constituted a privileged object of gender historiography on the period. The works of Rago and other researchers demonstrated how medical-hygienist and urbanistic discourses constructed the figure of the prostitute as a threat to public order, health and morality, justifying policies of control, spatial segregation and police surveillance. The debate between regulationism (which defended the legalisation and sanitary control of prostitution) and abolitionism (which proposed its eradication) evidences the tensions and contradictions of republican elites before female sexuality.

### 4.3 Education and the Feminisation of Teaching

The expansion of public education in the First Republic was accompanied by a process of feminisation of primary teaching. The Normal Schools, intended for teacher training, became a privileged space for female education, offering women from the middle classes a socially accepted possibility of professionalisation. Historiography has analysed this process ambivalently: on the one hand, it represented an expansion of educational and professional opportunities for women; on the other, it was anchored in gender representations that associated teaching with an extension of the maternal function — care, patience, abnegation — contributing to the social and economic devaluation of the teaching profession.

### 4.4 The Suffrage Movement: Strategies and Limits

The Brazilian suffrage movement, led by the biologist Bertha Lutz, constitutes a central theme of gender historiography on the First Republic. Lutz founded, in 1919, the League for Women's Intellectual Emancipation, transformed in 1922 into the Brazilian Federation for Female Progress (FBPF). The FBPF's strategy privileged articulation with sectors of the political elites and emphasis on the "orderly" and "civilised" character of female demands, in contrast with the more radical suffrage movements of England.

Historiographical debate on Brazilian suffragism has concentrated on evaluating its reaches and limits. Célio Regina Pinto, in *A History of Feminism in Brazil* (2003), characterised the action of Bertha Lutz as a "well-behaved feminism", which did not radically question structures of class and race and which limited itself to the demand for formal political rights for educated women. This interpretation has been nuanced by other studies that highlighted the possible strategies in the political context of the time and the advances actually conquered.

In counterpoint to liberal suffragist feminism, there existed an anarchist and working-class based feminism, with figures such as Maria Lacerda de Moura. This intellectual and militant developed a radical critique not only of the political exclusion of women, but of the State itself, bourgeois marriage and the dominant sexual morality. The anarchist and working-class press of the period reveals an intense female participation and debates on free love, birth control and sexual emancipation that extrapolated the liberal-reformist agenda of suffragism.

## 5. Vargas Era (1930-1945): Regulated Citizenship, Labour and Civic Motherhood

### 5.1 The Conquest of the Vote and Incomplete Citizenship

The 1930 Revolution and the institutional reorganisation process that followed opened space for the concretisation of the old suffragist demand. The 1932 Electoral Code established female suffrage, albeit with initial restrictions (it was optional and conditioned on proof of own income for married women). The 1934 Constitution consolidated the right, and Carlota Pereira de Queiroz, a São Paulo physician, was elected the first federal deputy of Brazil.

Gender historiography has analysed this conquest in a nuanced manner. On the one hand, it represented significant advance in terms of formal political rights; on the other, it did not translate into effective participation of women in power instances. Female representation remained minuscule, and the model of citizenship continued strongly marked by gender conceptions that associated woman primarily with the domestic sphere. The concept of "regulated citizenship", proposed by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos to characterise the selective extension of social rights linked to insertion in the formal labour market, can be articulated with gender analysis to understand how women — mostly excluded from formal labour or inserted in unregulated sectors — remained on the margins of labour and social security rights.

### 5.2 Labour Legislation and the Construction of the Mother-Worker

The Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) of 1943 instituted a set of norms relating to female labour that historiography has analysed from a gender perspective. The legislation established maternity leave, prohibited night work for women (with exceptions), determined the installation of nurseries in establishments with more than thirty female employees, and prohibited dismissal on grounds of pregnancy. These measures, presented as "protective", were anchored in representations that associated woman with the reproductive function and naturalised maternity as female destiny.

Gender analysis allows understanding of the ambiguity of this legislation: whilst guaranteeing important rights, it reinforced the association between femininity and maternity, contributing to the construction of a model of "mother-worker" who should reconcile — not without tensions — insertion in the labour market with domestic and maternal responsibilities. The legislation, moreover, excluded from its benefits the vast majority of female workers — domestic servants, rural workers, autonomous workers — evidencing the limits of gender, class and race of Vargas labour citizenship.

### 5.3 Estado Novo and the Ideology of Civic Motherhood

During the Estado Novo (1937-1945), official ideology exalted the figure of woman as "queen of the home" and pillar of the family, associating maternity with a civic and patriotic duty. The Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) produced and disseminated representations that linked the virtuous woman to domesticity, abnegation and support for the provider husband. Vargas nationalism incorporated a natalist component, encouraging procreation as a contribution to national grandeur.

Gender historiography has demonstrated how this familialist ideology articulated with eugenic and hygienist projects that aimed to "improve" the Brazilian population. Maternity was not only exalted, but normalised: the "good mother" should follow the scientific precepts of childcare, submit to medical guidance and dedicate herself entirely to raising children. The woman who worked outside, especially if a mother, was frequently represented as a threat to family integrity and children's development.

## 6. Democratic Experience (1945-1964): Hegemonic Domesticity and its Fissures

### 6.1 The "Feminine Mystique" à la Brasileira

The period between the end of the Estado Novo and the 1964 coup was marked by the consolidation, in the social imaginary of urban middle classes, of an ideal of femininity centred on domesticity. Influenced by the post-war North American model, disseminated by Hollywood cinema and large-circulation women's magazines (*O Cruzeiro*, *Claudia*), this ideal prescribed female happiness as the result of exclusive dedication to husband, children and home, equipped with the domestic appliances that symbolised the modernisation of private life.

The work of Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which critically analysed this model in the United States, offers a useful parallel for understanding the Brazilian context. The "mystique" consisted precisely in presenting domesticity not as imposition, but as full realisation of femininity, concealing the frustrations, isolation and economic dependence that characterised the experience of many middle-class housewives.

Gender historiography on the period has dedicated itself to analysing both the hegemony of this model and its fissures and contradictions. Women's magazines, far from constituting vehicles of mere ideological reproduction, presented ambiguous messages, oscillating between the exaltation of domesticity and the recognition of new female aspirations — professional, intellectual, sexual. Carla Bassanezi, in studies on the women's press of the period, demonstrated this constitutive ambivalence.

### 6.2 Female Labour: Expansion and Tensions

Despite hegemonic domestic ideology, female participation in the labour market expanded continuously throughout the period. Accelerated urbanisation, expansion of the service sector and civil service, and transformations in consumption patterns propelled the entry of women into occupations outside the home. This expansion, however, occurred in a context of persistent wage inequality, occupational segregation and double working day.

The tension between the domestic ideal and the reality of female labour constituted a central element of gender experience in the period. Women who worked outside frequently faced guilt and social censure, being blamed for any "problems" of children or marriage. Female labour was frequently represented as complementary or emergency, exercised out of economic "necessity" and not for personal fulfilment.

### 6.3 Political Participation: Limits and Breaches

Female representation in formal power instances remained extremely limited throughout the democratic period. Women voted, but were rarely elected; they participated in public life, but in subordinate or "feminine" positions (social assistance, education). Brazilian political culture continued strongly marked by gender conceptions that naturalised the masculinity of public space.

Nevertheless, historiography has identified forms of female political participation that extrapolated institutional channels. The Peasant Leagues of the Northeast, a movement of rural workers that gained force in the 1950s and 1960s, counted on significant participation of women, such as Elizabeth Teixeira, widow of peasant leader João Pedro Teixeira. Elizabeth's action doubly challenged power structures: as a poor peasant fighting against the latifundio and as a woman assuming a leadership role in a strongly patriarchal context.

## 7. Military Regime (1964-1985): Gendered Repression and Emergence of the Second Wave

### 7.1 Women in Resistance: Double Transgression

The 1964 coup and the instauration of the military regime represented a turning point in the history of gender relations in Brazil. Women who participated in resistance to the dictatorship — whether in student movements, clandestine left-wing organisations or armed struggle — were viewed by the repressive apparatus as "doubly transgressive": they violated the political order by

opposing the regime and violated the gender order by abandoning the roles of wife and mother to assume functions of militancy, including armed functions.

Historiography has documented the significant presence of women in left-wing organisations and guerrilla groups — VPR, ALN, MR-8, amongst others. Figures such as Dilma Rousseff, Iara Iavelberg, Vera Silvia Magalhães, amongst so many others, challenged gender stereotypes by assuming functions of command, planning and action. Gender analysis allows understanding not only female participation, but the internal tensions of left-wing organisations themselves, frequently marked by gender hierarchies and the reproduction of sexual divisions of militant labour.

## 7.2 Repression and Gender Violence

The violence of the dictatorial State against female militants presented gender specificities that historiography has documented and analysed with increasing attention. The reports of the National Truth Commission and the testimonies of survivors reveal that torture against women systematically included forms of sexual violence: rape, introduction of objects into the genitals, electric shocks to the breasts and vagina, threats of violence against children and family members.

This violence was not random or incidental; it constituted a specific form of punishment directed at women who had transgressed expected gender roles. Torture aimed not only to extract information, but to humiliate, degrade and "correct" women who had dared to occupy spaces and functions considered masculine. Gender analysis of repression thus reveals a dimension frequently obscured by narratives centred exclusively on political violence.

## 7.3 The Women's Movement for Amnesty and the Protagonism of Mothers

The struggle for amnesty for political prisoners and exiles had in women — especially mothers and wives of persecuted persons — fundamental protagonists. The Women's Movement for Amnesty, founded in 1975 by Therezinha Zerbini, mobilised thousands of women around the banner of "broad, general and unrestricted" amnesty. The choice of the term "women's" (and not "feminist") was not casual: it was about mobilising the social legitimacy of the figure of the mother and wife, less threatening to the regime than explicit feminist militancy.

Historiography has debated the ambiguities of this strategy. On the one hand, it demonstrated the political efficacy of women's mobilisation and their capacity to occupy public spaces in a context of political closure. On the other, it reproduced and instrumentalised traditional gender roles, anchoring the legitimacy of female participation in maternity and family suffering, more than in full political citizenship.

## 7.4 The Second-Wave Feminist: Autonomy and Conflicts

The International Women's Year, declared by the UN in 1975, constituted a symbolic landmark for the emergence of second-wave feminism in Brazil. Autonomous feminist groups were created in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other capitals; a combative feminist press emerged with newspapers such as *Brasil Mulher* (1975-1980) and *Nós Mulheres* (1976-1978); themes such as sexuality, contraception, abortion and domestic violence gained public visibility.

The Brazilian second wave developed in a context of dictatorship and strong presence of left-wing organisations, which generated specific tensions. The relation between feminism and the Left was marked by conflicts: many left-wing organisations considered feminism a "bourgeois agenda" that divided the working class and diverted energies from the main struggle against the dictatorship and capitalism. Feminists, in turn, claimed the autonomy of the movement and denounced the machismo present in left-wing organisations themselves.

Célio Pinto analysed this tension in terms of a "well-behaved feminism" that avoided direct confrontation with the Left and a more radical feminism that affirmed the specificity of gender oppression. Other historians have nuanced this dichotomy, demonstrating the complexity of individual and collective trajectories and the multiple strategies of articulation between feminism and democratic struggle.

## 7.5 Women's Movements: Mothers' Clubs and CEBs

Parallel to middle-class feminism, articulated around groups and publications, a broad movement of women from the popular classes developed, frequently linked to the Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEBs) of the Catholic Church and to mothers' clubs in urban peripheries. These women mobilised around concrete demands — nurseries, transport, health, cost of living — that articulated gender condition (responsibility for domestic care and children) with class condition.

Historiography has debated the relation between this "women's movement" and "feminism" *stricto sensu*. Some analyses emphasise the distance between the agendas and the social base of the two movements; others highlight the articulations and mutual influences. What seems consensual is that both movements contributed to the politicisation of gender relations and to female presence in public spaces during the redemocratisation process.

## 8. Redemocratisation (1985-1989): Institutionalisation, Constituent Assembly and Achievements

### 8.1 The Institutionalisation of Feminist Demands

The redemocratisation process opened space for the institutionalisation of demands historically raised by the feminist movement. The creation of the National Council for Women's Rights (CNDM) in 1985, linked to the Ministry of Justice, represented state recognition of the legitimacy of feminist demands. The CNDM, initially directed by historic feminists, played a crucial role in articulation between social movement and State.

In the same year, the first Women's Defence Station (DDM or DEAM) was created in São Paulo, an institution that rapidly spread throughout the country. The specialised police stations responded to a central demand of the feminist movement: the recognition of domestic violence as a public problem and not as a "private matter". The creation of these police stations represented a significant symbolic and institutional rupture, although their effectiveness has been the object of debates and criticisms.

Historiography has analysed the institutionalisation of feminism from diverse perspectives. Some analyses celebrate the conquest of institutional spaces as evidence of movement efficacy; others warn of the risks of co-optation, bureaucratisation and loss of radicalism associated with approximation to the State. The debate remains current and relevant.

### 8.2 The Constituent Assembly and the "Lipstick Lobby"

The National Constituent Assembly (1987-1988) represented the apex of feminist participation in the redemocratisation process. Of the 559 seats, only 26 were occupied by women — a minuscule minority, but extremely active. Articulated in what became known as the "Lipstick Lobby", the constituent female deputies, regardless of party affiliation, coordinated efforts to ensure the inclusion of women's rights in the new constitutional text.

The CNDM played a fundamental role in this articulation, organising the "Letter from Brazilian Women to the Constituents", a document that synthesised a broad range of demands elaborated in consultations with women's movements from throughout the country. The mobilisation was successful: approximately 80% of the demands presented were incorporated into the constitutional text.

### 8.3 The 1988 Constitution: Achievements and Limits

The 1988 Constitution represented historic advances in terms of women's rights. Article 5, Section I, established equality of rights and obligations between men and women before the law, ending the marital authority that the 1916 Civil Code attributed to the man over the person and goods of the wife. Maternity leave was extended to 120 days; paternity leave of five days was instituted; stable union was recognised as a family entity; family planning was established as a free decision of the couple; and the State was entrusted with creating mechanisms to curb violence within family relations.

The Citizens' Constitution was, to a significant extent, the fruit of the articulation capacity of the women's movement. Nevertheless, historiography has also pointed to its limits: the criminalisation of abortion was maintained; reproductive rights remained ambiguous; formal equality did not automatically translate into substantive equality. The constitutional text opened possibilities, but the effectuation of rights would depend on complementary legislation, public policies and long-term cultural transformations.

## 9. Masculinities: The Denaturalisation of the Masculine

A rigorous gender history cannot be limited to analysis of female experience; it requires that masculinity also be historicised and denaturalised. Studies on masculinities, which emerged later — from the 1990s onwards — propose to investigate how models of "being a man" were constructed, disputed and transformed over time.

The fundamental theoretical reference is the work of Raewyn Connell, particularly her concept of "hegemonic masculinity". For Connell, hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practices that, in a given context, legitimises the dominant position of men and the subordination of women, in addition to hierarchising men themselves (subordinating non-hegemonic masculinities, such as homosexual masculinity). It is a normative model, a cultural ideal that few men fully realise, but which functions as a reference from which all are evaluated.

In Brazilian historiography, studies on masculinities have investigated the historical construction of models of virility, honour and patriarchal authority. Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, in works on the invention of the Northeast and on gender relations in the sertão, analysed how certain representations of masculinity — the cangaceiro, the colonel, the "macho man" — were constructed in articulation with processes of regionalisation and social hierarchisation.

The analysis of masculinities allows more complete understanding of gender dynamics. Female subordination is sustained not only by mechanisms of exclusion and direct oppression; it is correlative to the construction of models of masculinity that demand from men certain behaviours — strength, aggressiveness, emotional control, obligatory heterosexuality — and that sanction

deviations. The crisis of traditional models of masculinity, frequently invoked in contemporary analyses, can be historicised as a result of transformations in gender relations impelled, to a large extent, by feminist struggles.

## 10. Intersectionality and Black Feminism: Critique of Universalisms

### 10.1 The Critique of Hegemonic Feminism

One of the most important — and most belated — contributions to gender historiography in Brazil was the critique of feminism and women's history that, at times, universalised the experience of white, middle-class women. Brazilian Black feminism, with intellectuals and activists such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, demonstrated the insufficiency of analyses that treated women as a homogeneous category, ignoring the structural differences produced by the articulation between gender, race and class.

Lélia Gonzalez (1935-1994), anthropologist and activist, formulated a trenchant critique both of the "racism by omission" of part of white feminism and of the sexism present in the Black movement. In seminal essays such as "Racism and Sexism in Brazilian Culture" (1984), Gonzalez analysed how racial and sexual stereotypes — the "mulatta", the "domestic servant", the "black mother" — constructed the Black woman as available sexual object or as abnegated servant, denying her the status of full subject.

With concepts such as "Amefricanity" and "Pretuguese", Gonzalez sought to valorise the protagonism of the Black population — and particularly of Black women — in Brazilian cultural formation, whilst denouncing the "cultural neurosis" of the myth of racial democracy. Her work anticipated, in many aspects, later formulations on intersectionality.

### 10.2 Sueli Carneiro and the "Blackening" of Feminism

Sueli Carneiro, philosopher and founder of Geledés — Black Women's Institute (1988), developed the notion of "blackening feminism" to designate the necessity of incorporating the racial dimension as a central — and not peripheral — element of feminist struggle. Carneiro argued that the experience of Black women could not be subsumed either to the category "woman" (which tended to universalise white experience) or to the category "Black" (which tended to universalise male experience).

The contribution of Carneiro and Brazilian Black feminism was fundamental for the incorporation of the intersectional perspective in historiography. Intersectionality — a term coined by North American jurist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 — designates the imbrication of multiple systems of oppression that produce specific experiences not reducible to the sum of their parts. For historiography, this implies recognising that the gender experience of a Black woman, heir to a legacy of slavery, hypersexualisation and precarisation in domestic labour, is qualitatively distinct from that of a white middle-class woman.

## 11. Historiographical Assessment and Contemporary Horizons

Gender historiography on Republican Brazil has traversed, in few decades, a remarkable trajectory. From an initial phase of "recovery" and "denunciation", linked to social history and frequently marked by the image of woman as victim, it transitioned to sophisticated approaches, informed by post-structuralism and cultural studies, which privilege the analysis of representations, discourses, practices and power relations. The field has consolidated institutionally, gained academic legitimacy and demonstrated its capacity to renew the understanding of practically all major themes of Brazilian history.

Contemporary horizons point to deepening and unfolding. Intersectionality has consolidated itself as an unavoidable paradigm, requiring analyses that articulate gender with race, class, sexuality and other markers of difference. The history of masculinities is expanding, enriching the understanding of relational gender dynamics. New subjects — the LGBTQIA+ population — gain increasing historiographical visibility, propelling the development of a queer history in Brazil.

The critique of Eurocentrism and the search for "decolonial" epistemologies also challenge the field to rethink its theoretical references, frequently imported from the academic centres of the Global North, and to valorise historically marginalised knowledges and experiences. The articulation between academic production and social movements — characteristic of gender history since its origins — remains alive, nourished by the vitality of public debate on feminism today.

## 12. Final Considerations

Gender analysis, applied to the history of Republican Brazil between 1889 and 1989, reveals itself to be an analytical tool of extraordinary heuristic potency. It has not only brought to light the trajectory of half the population, historically silenced or relegated to supporting roles, but, fundamentally, has enabled reinterpretation of the very construction of the republican nation. It demonstrated that the definition of citizenship, the organisation of labour, authoritarian projects, struggles for democracy and the very categories with which we think the political were — and are — profoundly gendered processes, traversed and constituted by hierarchical notions of masculinity and femininity.

The historiographical trajectory delineated here evidences a field in constant dialogue with the dilemmas of its time, which has known how to critically absorb international theoretical debates — from Beauvoir to Scott, from Butler to Crenshaw — and, simultaneously, produce original knowledge rooted in the specificities of Brazilian social formation. The articulation between gender, race and class, elaborated by intellectuals such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, constitutes a distinctive contribution of Brazilian reflection to the international field.

By denaturalising what seemed obvious and interrogating the bases of power, gender history fulfils a function that is, at the same time, scientific and political: offering a more complex, critical and plural understanding of the past, indispensable for reflection on the impasses and possibilities of the present. The construction of an effectively democratic and egalitarian society passes, necessarily, through the deconstruction of gender hierarchies that, throughout a century of the Republic, were reproduced, contested and partially transformed — but never entirely overcome.

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