



MARITAL VIOLENCE AND MEMORY: THE UNSAID IN RICH WOMEN'S SPEECH

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to problematize the relationship between silence and memory that involves the phenomenon of violence against women in marital relations. We choose as a research corpus, women belonging to social groups that are privileged intellectually and / or economically, this choice was motivated by questions about the reasons why the violence pattern in marital relations is maintained, even when it comes to women who have had greater access to education, financial autonomy, social status recognized as privileged and after great social achievements, especially those featured by feminism. Our intention was to stir buried memories to give visibility to the silent female experiences of marital violence, in which the body is the only witness of suffering and the only one that announces suffering through somatizations, illnesses and the mental health of many women.

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INTRODUCTION

It has become a cliché to talk about the social advancements conquered by women throughout history. These achievements are explicit when we look at the progress and the process of female professionalization experienced in the last 50 years. However, the data, news and research on gender violence highlight that the affective and domestic relations experienced by women in contemporary times did not keep up with the pace of women's social accomplishments noticed in our society. Therefore, it is relevant to question the results of these advances in the marital relations in our time. The historical heritage of the collective memory constructed around the feminine and biased by the logic of gender inequality, imposed by the patriarchal system, has determined and still influences the behavioral repertoires expected for the affectionate intimate relations that don't harmonize with the social places conquered by many women. Today, almost a century after the symbolic and bustling decade of the outbreak of the feminist movements, rescuing the memory of family institutions with a special look at the power and violence relations is a way to

understand this complex social phenomenon and to realize the feminism resonances, reverberated in the daily behaviors of contemporary women. This paper is the result of a scientific research about the violence that affects middle and upper class women and has as main goal to problematize the silence that surrounds the violence phenomenon against the woman in the marital relations. The choice of the research corpus is justified by the intent to understand the reasons why the marital relations violence are maintained, even when it comes to women who have had greater access to education, financial autonomy, recognized social status and after social achievements, especially those featured by feminism. The guests selected for this research were women who were "socially and financially successful" - many of them providers of their homes, that even with such traits as would in theory guarantee them the possibility of building more equal and healthy relationships in which they could be respected in their integrity condition, suffered and still suffer, violence by their partner. On average, these women have been subjected to submissive and violent relationships for 19 years until most of them decide to break the marital relationship. Among the women interviewed, few looked for a woman protection agency to report the violence they suffered or still suffer. It was only possible to access them through the personal relations of one of the researchers who requested to friends and

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acquaintances who indicated to them women who lived or still live at the time of the interviews, situations of marital violence. The vast majority of research on domestic violence against women do not contemplate social class markers and when they do it prioritize studies directed by the female experiences that suffer with other forms of social oppression. This way, the study aims to contribute with interpretation possibilities that haven't been explored yet for the data on marital violence against women, mainly by giving visibility to the experiences of women from the higher social layers, in which are found the primacy of the modern and traditional family, healer of chaste and modest bourgeois values, in which subjects such as sexuality and nuances of the marital violence are shielded in the silence and privacy of their experiences. For most of these women, the psychotherapeutic office and the law firm are considered as possible social spaces for help, opened to listening and welcoming these victims. The assumptions and theoretical premises of such authors as Saffioti, Gregory, Halbwachs, Pollak, Mazon, Cunha, among others, collaborate substantially in the data analysis, such as the fact of creating the memory underlying the power relations constituted in the complex matrimonial system, and among its shades and reliefs, the plots and strains related to the veiled violence, present in the conjugality.

Methodological Resources

The focus of this research was to discuss a complex social matter of subjective nature with very particular questions that embrace a set of human phenomena of diverse meanings, motives, beliefs, values, aspirations and attitudes. So that the choice of the qualitative method and the phenomenological approach would respond to the research expectations, since a material of this nature offers the opportunity to widening contradictions and allows the access to a polysemic speech, since it is a phenomenon that besides complex it is multiple.

This way, we use as a collection tool the semi-structured interview, with flexibility and freedom to explore aspects of the life experience not expected in the script and considered important by the women interviewed (Cunha, 2007), in line with Minayo's perspective (2012, p. 11) who says that "scientificity has to be thought of as a regulating idea of high abstraction, not as a synonym for models and norms to be followed." The selection of the interviewees was supported by nominations from friends and acquaintances of one of the authors of this paper. The criterion of selection is justified by the object that guides this research: the silence that involves violence in the marital relationship, especially from women from the upper layers of society. There were performed 17 interviews during the years 2002/3 with women between the ages of 33 and 72 who experienced heterosexual marital experiences and recognized themselves as domestic violence victims. Of these women, only two still lived at the time, with their partners. The only selection criterion previously defined was the socioeconomic. The age presentation of the interviewees during the exposition of the Results and Discussion has only the function of situating the reader. Categories such as age, schooling level and race / ethnicity were not considered as analysis object.

In order to achieve a comprehensive and panoramic perception of the interviewees, the research script was built based on six themes such as: personal data, relationship with the origin family, marital relationship, violence, current situation and corporate life. It must be noted that the name and identity of

the interviewees were protected and that they agreed to voluntarily participate in the research, according to the Informed Consent Form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Cunha (2007), domestic violence, more specifically marital violence against women of middle and upper class has as its main target women and indicates that the residence is an extremely threatening and dangerous place for women. It is in this space scope that the most terrible humiliations, physical and sexual aggressions occur, as consequence of the inferior position of women in relation to men. In this context, the core of our reflection is fundamentally in the social structures that encourage and perpetuate the men's domination over women and the silence that surrounds these unequal relationships. In this paper, we are interested in how memory, both as visibility and as forgetfulness is elaborated by women with violence experiences in their marital relationships. The Halbwachian's postulates about the collective memory say that it is built by the personal appropriation of history, modeled by a common cultural heritage, through the feeling of belonging, sharing of experiences and highlighted by gender symbolic differences. This way, the collective memory of the family in Western societies incorporate the stereotype of a healthy organism, whose gears work in perfect harmony and coadunate with the patriarchal system. When thinking about the historical unequal relations of power and authoritative domination, from a gender perspective, Silva (1992) clarifies that in this logic of thinking are embedded both the idea of male domination as the possibility of using violence as a security and control mechanism of gender social organization. This way of thinking models memories and structures subjectivities that, even without the apparent need to submit to this pattern of domination, many women have already unattached themselves from the ties of financial control, due to a subjective construction of social order, feed by the collective memory of gender roles, that are subdued to male domination, such as the psychological and affective manipulation, as is the case of Lélia:

The key word of my life is fear. And another thing, being afraid to lose him. I was not afraid of losing the financial situation, because for this I didn't need him. My dependence was affective (Lélia, 61 years old)

Pollak (1989) identifies memory as a field of dispute between an official elaboration and the so-called buried memories that emerge from the oral history of the excluded and silenced people, it occupies a place that allows reporting and exposing the dominant, unifying and oppressive character of the collective memory. The confessions related to the violence occurred in the sacred space of marriage were strongly suppressed because they were embarrassing and vexatious, and that is because women couldn't talk about the grievances of the relationship, kept within four walls, constituting themselves as subterranean memories, represented by the family secrets. For Mason (1995), the relationship between secrecy and embarrassment, bounded to the question of privacy, is difficult to distinguish because of the difficulty in measuring what belongs to the domain of the private and what is the secret, the last one is part of the family relationships and involves the collective and buried memories. In such relationships some episodes can not be explained, they must

remain hidden in deep silences full of meaning and not infrequently involving violence and suffering. The loyalty to the family is maintained by rules that link family members to maintain the official memory of the marriage and its gender roles. For that matter, Mason (1995) points out that the close relationship between silence in the face of manifestations of violence and the embarrassment of such occurrences lead many family groups to cultivate secrets and forbidden memories. The myth of family stability makes many families silenced, feeding the cycle of violence, embarrassment, and secrecy. The family bond also generates varying degrees of mutual dependence among its members. It is by their desire to keep the family's official memory that the couple join in a secret coalition. As revealed by the following reports:

To keep the appearance he respected me in front of other people, but when we arrived home it was something else. (Rose Marie, 59)

I scratched him, I scratched all his face to make him ashamed the other day. I knew it was going to be ugly for me, I thought, but I'm going to scratch him so he feels ashamed as to see if he fixes it. The other day he would feel so ashamed and would tell me: "For God's sake, you don't say that you did it to me. I'd rather have them think it was a woman on the street than you" (Rose Marie, 59)

I was not always talking. I was very quiet, because I was raised like that, I never saw any argument at home, and also because of the children. I thought it was very ugly to argue. (Conceição, age 72)

Giddens (1993) affirms that marital violence becomes present when the attempt of male domination is frustrated, it appears as a possibility to rescue the phallogocentric power. This reasoning leads us to imply that the increase in violence against women is related to the female resistance to the project of male domination. Therefore, silence, in many cases, is a defense mechanism used by many women to prevent the occurrence of violence. In order to survive the historic gender oppression and daily manifestations of violence, women have developed subtle and hidden strategies of resistance, such as the ability to conceal and negotiate, as in the following reports:

My revenge was with food, once I made a moqueca and he came into the house fighting, the moment I put the cover on the pan I didn't see that there was a cockroach in the lid and the cockroach came down and fell there in the food, I was so angry that instead of throwing the food away I served him. Another revenge was when he came drunk and I left him behind the toilet. (Cecília, 45 years old)

The only thing I used to do that maybe he didn't like was that I would go to the store and didn't come back home to have lunch. I also used to keep working until late. My revenge was this. (Luiza, 42 years old)

Resilience was another phenomenon present in the speech of the interviewees, especially to justify the secrecy that they maintained against the adversities faced in the marital relation. The concept of resilience is related to the adaptive and evolutionary capacity that some individuals or groups present when they experience moments of adversity and suffering, necessarily negotiating their survival.

All that came after I faced with peacefulness, difficult situations with the girls, difficulty in the professional field suddenly being in the middle of the road and neither being able to return nor to follow the trip because a barrier had fallen and had no way out of there, because of all of it I say he gave me the know-how to live, it might be a terrible thing, but I think the suffering made me strong. You are beaten, you are punched, but it's like a wave in the sea that gives you a broth and you come out eating sand, but it comes out stronger. (Margareth 62 years old)

I didn't have time to surrender myself, I had to survive, I had two children to raise, I had no time to cry, my attitude was to act, to work, to do things. (Maria, 36 years old)

Many of the interviewed women have public visibility both for the work they develop and for the social class to which they belong. These factors increase the fear of reporting violence. Many of them experience an unfair feeling of embarrassment in exposing their distress, deconstructing their public image inhibit them, favoring the recurrence of violence, because the absence of denunciation favors the repetition of aggression episodes.

When questioned about the effects of aggression, fear appears in all responses, converting it into a dictatorship that encloses these women in their pains and anguishes. Fear has often been the excuse for keeping silent about the violence suffered, preventing them from looking for help or breaking the abusive relationship. However, as Gregori (1993) emphasizes, it is the woman's body that suffers the greatest damage, both physical and psychological, consequences that leave physical and psychological marks arising from the paralysis promoted by the fear of threats, as evidenced in the following reports:

My last husband totally squandered my heritage. In six months he sold 2,600 units of cattle. I ended up giving him signed blank checks, and so he did. I ended up responding to a fraud process (...). Hence came my most serious spine problem due to my emotional state. (Simone, 62 years old)

All of it left me in conflict, so much so that with the marriage I acquired a phobia that manifested itself a few years later through fears, fears and fears. (Maria, 61 years old)

Fear, fear, just in speaking I'm already like this (crying). Today I suffer from panic disorder, and I take medicine for it. (Virginia, 61 years old)

I got crazy and sick, no one knew what it was, I couldn't talk to anyone, I had serious health problems, until today no one knows, only you, not even my lawyer knows. (Marcia, 43 years old). By accepting to describe their stories, women consent to break the isolation and immerse themselves in a process of reflection about their past and their present. This movement of rupture with the silence of domestic violence is one of the main barriers to denunciation, since as Saffioti (1995) affirms, it collaborates with the demystification of the traditional family myth by giving visibility to the real families that are wandering, shattered, places of affection and hatred, solidarity and violence.

Final Considerations

Even with all the history of the feminist social movements in changing the official memory, in an attempt to incorporate

variants, or even marginalized, silenced and minority social contradictions, through the constant and ostensible fight against female oppression, machismo, whose most extreme expression is the violence against women, it has such extensive roots in our culture that the aggressive pattern still stands out and leads the affective relations in Western societies. Thus, the reports and analyzes that compose this paper show that the tentacles of machismo and patriarchal oppression, keeping their specificities and intersectionalities, are present in all areas of society, independent of social markers, requiring a collective effort to make visible consequences. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the force field in which the memory of machismo is situated, in order to arise the buried memories of feminine emancipation and the promotion of a peace society.

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