

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION UNDER THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY DICTATORSHIP (1964-1985): LAW, GENDER, AND AUTHORITARIANISM

*A PARTICIPAÇÃO POLÍTICA FEMININA SOB A DITADURA MILITAR (1964-1985):
DIREITO, GÊNERO E AUTORITARISMO*

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Abstract:

This study questions how the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (1964-1985) articulated its structures around violations of women's political liberties, considering the relations between hierarchies of gender and military regimes' authoritarianism. The main goal is to investigate in what forms this specific repression occurred while demonstrating its distinctive elements. To this end, legal-historical research was conducted, based on both bibliography and documental sources. Through the research carried out, records of events and testimonies related to women's political performance during the period were analyzed. Initially, we discuss the institutionalization process of repression through institutional acts and its effects on women's political participation. Then, we approach the ways found by women to act in this scenario politically. Finally, in the last section, we work on the materialization of dictatorial violence against political activists and its specific features. It was possible to understand that the repression of women's political participation was expressed in meeting opponents' persecution with gendered violence and potentialized through this connection.

Keywords: Political participation. Military Dictatorship. Gender relations. Law. Women's memory.

Resumo:

Dentre as relações que podem ser estabelecidas entre as hierarquias de gênero e o autoritarismo de regimes militares, este estudo questionou como a Ditadura Militar brasileira (1964-1985) articulou suas estruturas em torno de violações às liberdades políticas femininas. O objetivo central foi investigar em que tons essa repressão específica se exteriorizou, demonstrando os seus elementos distintivos. Para tanto, efetuou-se uma pesquisa jurídico-histórica, de base em fontes bibliográficas e documentais. Através da pesquisa realizada, foram analisados registros de acontecimentos e depoimentos relativos à atuação política de mulheres durante o período. Inicialmente, foi discutido

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o processo de institucionalização da repressão através dos atos institucionais e os seus efeitos sobre a participação política feminina. Em seguida, foram abordadas as formas encontradas pelas mulheres para atuar politicamente nesse cenário. Na última seção, trabalhou-se com a materialização da violência ditatorial contra militantes políticas e as feições particulares que ela assumiu. Ao final, foi possível constatar que a repressão à participação política feminina se expressou na reunião da perseguição a opositores com a violência de gênero, sendo, a partir dessa conexão, potencializada.

Palavras-chave: Participação política; Ditadura Militar; relações de gênero; Direito; memória feminina.

1. INTRODUCTION

As of 1964, with the success of a military coup d'état, Brazil has gone through successive and complex human rights mitigation and suppression stages. Describing this historical moment is difficult, and we do not intend to put together a complete puzzle. However, we aim to discuss the consequences of the regime's actions on women's political participation.

We propose to question, above all, how the military regime (1964-1985) articulated its structures around violations of women's political freedoms. We seek to correlate the inequalities structured around the gender aspect and the violence that covered up repression acts against somewhat politically involved women.

Therefore, the main goal is to investigate how repression of women's political expressions during the military dictatorship took place. There are three axes of this analysis: first, it investigates how political repression was formalized by the regime, especially concerning women; second, it discusses the diversity of manifestations of women's political participation at the time; finally, it highlights the particular character of violations of rights that came as a reaction to those manifestations.

The hypothesis is that the military regime's gears, when reprimanding women's political action, potentialized the regime's violence against its "enemies" since it mixed the political persecution to opponents with gendered violence, thus shaping dictatorial repression of specific features for women.

As for the methodological structure, historical-legal research is carried out, addressing the phenomenon investigated by matching transdisciplinarity to the variety of circumstances that delineates it, as well as its contradictions and ambiguities. The sources are, on a larger scale, bibliographic. However, there is also an analysis of the final report of the National Truth Commission (CNV, in Portuguese), published in 2014, from which testimonies of female political

activists victimized by the dictatorship and other pertinent information were extracted and examined.

This historical approach is put together through an understanding of gender as a category of analysis. This assessment guides the comprehension of the phenomenon considering how power relations between men and women are founded and the repercussions that the differentiation between the sexes built by these relations have on the most diverse fields (SCOTT, 1995). Gender is also understood as an element that cannot avoid recognizing the different layers of oppression that fall on women from the intersections with race and social class (CRENSHAW, 2002).

With this understanding, the study focuses on the process of formalizing the exceptionality in the dictatorial legal order through institutional acts, particularly in the political dimension. They turned into unfeasible (in various degrees) rights such as voting, passive electoral capacity, and free manifestation in that space. The second section discusses the numerous types of political action forged by women, both in the fight against dictatorship and in the pursuit of their own demands.

In the final section, the state's response to women's political participation is perceived through then-imprisoned activists' reports. It demonstrates how gender-based violence was an amplifying mechanism of repression against the regime's opponents. It also discusses how the memory of these violations is embedded in an incomplete frame that is sometimes gender-neutral and weak, even when it recognizes gendered aspects, because it does not contemplate the diversity of identities present in the conflict.

2. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL REPRESSION AND THE FEMALE CONDITION

Between March 31 and April 1 of 1964, a coup d'état took place in Brazil, leading the country to a military dictatorship that spanned two decades and was marked by authoritarianism and constant human rights violations. However, the coup was not carried out in one single act. An entire strategy of institutionalizing repression acts was shaped within modern constitutionalism's lexicon to affirm and reaffirm its necessity.

Beginning with the coup's discourse, which was the concept that the fight against communism shaped democracy, those behind it spread the idea that this ideology was impregnated on the left side of the Brazilian political spectrum. Therefore, action was to be taken against union and labor organizations aligned to the left, as well as against non-Christian thoughts (as communism was perceived) and possibilities of destabilizing the business sector, such as basic reforms, all based on the imperatives of order and progress (REZENDE, 2013).

Along with this narrative justifying the coup and establishing the regime, one of the new institutional power group's main concerns was to create a guise to legally validate the unconstitutional actions that began to be carried out during the dictatorship. Hence, when they first came to power, the military sought to build a plausible justification to legitimize the arbitrary break from the previous democratic regime. They built it by using categories typical of democratic constitutionalism, such as constituent power, freedom, and, as indicated, democracy itself (PAIXÃO, 2014).

From the theoretical perspective of Francisco Campos, the regime's jurist, the goal was to give the military coup a revolutionary aspect. By making such a correlation, the original constituent power narrative would be built around it, as was done. In this sense, due to coming from revolutionary forces, the coup represented a power not dependent on validation by previous legal structures (CHUERI; CÂMARA, 2015).

The institutional acts were especially useful in building this narrative. The first Institutional Act (later named AI-1, as the Portuguese abbreviation of *Ato Institucional*) concerned the constituent power's origin's affirmation. Its text emphatically referred to the normative force emanating from the revolution, which legitimated the constituent power it represented and supported it (PAIXÃO, 2014).

The regime's own epistemology was formulated through this distorted sense attributed to the term democracy, which was present in speeches evoked to substantiate human rights violations, covered up by the defense of the nation's alleged moral and ethical principles.

The very term "democracy" was written in the text of Institutional Act No. 2 (AI-2) in a paradoxical imposition. While freedom was the precondition for the exercise of democracy, it was limited by "responsibility" and should not be in opposition to "the political vocation of the nation itself" (PAIXÃO, 2014, p. 433). In other words, freedom was limited to what was considered correct by dictatorial civic morality.

There was a real institutionalization of repression in the Brazilian legal system with institutional acts seeking to attribute some legality to the regime's actions. Within this portrait of the formalization of repression practices, we seek to locate the condition of women's political subjects at that time.

In the field of popular demands, women's movements, like so many others in civil society, were initially disbanded by the military coup. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to emphasize that, from another perspective, middle-class women's groups were alongside the conservative movements used to support the coup (COSTA, 2007).

The "Family's March for Freedom with God" movement, for example, brought together masses of women from this strata as part of a strategy to support the initiative to establish a regime of exception in the country (TELES, 2015a). It aimed to show how "mothers," "wives," and "daughters" were preoccupied to alert society about the need to restore order.

As for the formal guarantee of rights, until 1967, the 1946 Constitution was still in force. In it, the right to women's suffrage, conquered in 1932 and constitutionalized in 1934, was reassured. However, as we have seen, in practice, the institutional acts were put forward as the conductors of a new constitutional order based on a revolutionary constituent power discourse.

It should be kept in mind as well that, even with the formalization of these basic guarantees, a series of obstacles kept on defining the effectiveness of women's political rights. Vogel (2019), discussing how gender inequalities are appropriated by law and politics, mentions three factors that have undermined women's suffrage's greater concreteness. First, the non-occurrence of elections during the former dictatorship, the Estado Novo ("New State"). Second, the difficulty of poorer people in receiving their voter's permits due to the absence of identification documents. And third, low literacy rates at times when literacy was a requirement for voting.

Another element explored by Vogel (2019) is observed until the beginning of the dictatorial period in 1964 – the elective right to vote for women who did not exercise a paid profession. Restrictions of this type had been reproduced in rules, in different ways, since 1932 and were only definitively removed by the then-current Electoral Code (Law No. 4,737/1965). However, despite assured equality for women and men in the obligation to enlist and vote, the establishment of indirect elections for most representative positions relativized the law (VOGEL, 2019).

In the institutional sphere, six women were elected to the Brazilian Congress' Chamber of Deputies in 1966: Ivette Vargas (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro - PTB)⁴, Júlia Vaena Steinbruch (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro - MDB)⁵, Maria Lúcia Araújo (MDB), Lígia Doutel de Andrade (MDB), Nysia Carone (MDB) and Nely Novaes (Aliança Nacional Renovadora-ARENA)⁶. However, only the latter finished her term. The others had their terms revoked based on Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5), to be commented on later (AZEVEDO; RABAT, 2012).

During this period, women who joined parliament followed a particular pattern, considering that they belonged to the middle and upper classes and already had family members with longstanding political careers. These factors contributed to the electoral victory of most of them (VOGEL, 2012).

⁴ Brazilian Labor Party (PTB).

⁵ Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB).

⁶ National Renewing Alliance (ARENA).

Still, the 1966 elections had the largest number of women elected in History until then. However, in addition to the fact that most had their political rights revoked in the following years, Institutional Act No. 2 (AI-2), as early as 1965, had eliminated the multiparty system and instituted bipartisanship, limiting political representation to two parties: MDB, which operated as an opposition to the regime, and the ARENA, a military party representing the government (SCHUMAHER; CEVA, 2015).

In 1967, the granting of a new Constitution would contemplate the new "democratic" ideology. The new text's preamble announced the constitutionalization of the repressions perpetrated by the regime, alluding to the loss of effectiveness of the 1946 Constitution in the face of a new social context and the need for a new Constitution to enshrine the principles and values brought on by the "Revolution" (DIAS; SAMPAIO, 2011). As for political rights, the written law maintained the mandatory, direct, and universal vote and, in what explicitly concerns women, the guarantee of voting for Brazilians of both sexes was also kept under constitutional protection, as provided by art. 142 of the 1967 Constitution.

Despite the existence of these constitutional commands, on the path of authoritarian legality imposed by institutional acts and considering following events, political rights were the targets of severe attacks. Through these attacks and reforms brought by the 1967 text, including the Constitutional Amendment no. 01/1969, which largely modified the original text, such prerogatives could not be effectively exercised under the dictatorship.

The 1967 Constitution had short duration and effectiveness. The National Security Law (Decree-Law no. 314/1967) overlapped with it, and AI-5 overcame several of its commands. Demonstrations of indifference to this Constitution could also be exemplified in actions such as when the military junta took power after President Costa e Silva's disability. They explicitly circumvented the vice-president's constitutional provision for taking office and drafted Constitutional Amendment no. 01/1969 (ROCHA, 2018).

As the military regime legally qualified its repression by institutionalizing measures that validated its abuses, these became increasingly common. The state needed to emphasize that there was no room for manifestations opposing the established values. From this need was born the most severe of the Institutional Acts implemented by the regime: AI-5.

Through AI-5, decreed during President Costa e Silva's administration, a "policy of terror" was established, legally validating, once and for all, the practices of repression and torture, although continued to insist on the thesis that such measures reinforced the principles of democracy, as it was seen and disseminated by the Executive Branch (REZENDE, 2013).

Under the pretext of curbing subversive acts and antirevolutionary groups or people, as it stated in its preamble, the text of AI-5 was assertive in its Article 5, III, suspending political rights beyond the deprivation of the right to vote and to run for election, imposing even the prohibition of political manifestation (BRAZIL, 1968).

Based on AI-5, the congressional terms of most of the women who had been elected in 1966 were revoked. The National Congress, which had been closed based on a presidential decree of recess provided for in the Act, was only reopened on October 22, 1969, with 95 fewer parliament members and only one woman among them, Nely Novais (ARENA). She was the only one who did not have her term revoked (AZEVEDO; RABAT, 2012).

On October 17, 1969, Constitutional Amendment No. 01/1969 came to constitutionalize the measures of exception imposed by AI-5. Moreover, on October 30, 1969, General Emílio Garrastazu Médici came to power, initiating the dictatorship's phase of greater repression (MERLINO; OJEDA, 2010) – a period that came to be known as *Anos de Chumbo*, literally 'Years of Lead.' In short, these measures of authoritarianism institutionalization laid out the foundations for the dictatorial repression throughout its duration.

Supported by this formalization, the violations of women's political liberties, far from being exhausted in the scope of institutional politics, were exteriorized in broad and systematic ways throughout the dictatorial regime. From censorship to torture, women who resisted the dictatorship had their integrity violated in several ways. Before analyzing them properly, it is essential to verify what exactly the state rebuked so vigorously.

3 WOMEN AND POLITICS DURING THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP: FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL SPHERE TO THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS

Following the tone of any other authoritarian regime in History, in the Military Dictatorship in Brazil political subjects were identified in bulk by the government, with no attention paid to the existence of specific identities. Under this perspective, diversities were pushed aside because they were seen as divisive from the broader struggle against oppression and thus "nullify differences and build unified political subjects, disregarding female presence and framing it in categories that disqualify it. To this extent, the invisibility of women as political subjects is instituted." ⁷ (COLLING, 2015, p. 378).

⁷ Our translation. Originally: "*anulam as diferenças e constroem sujeitos políticos únicos, desconsiderando a presença feminina e enquadrando-a em categorias que a desqualificam. Nessa medida, institui-se a invisibilidade da mulher como sujeito político.*"

It is difficult to survey a detailed view of women's political situation during the Brazilian dictatorial regime, especially in its early years, considering that a large part of the topic's academic production followed this universalization bias. It is also worth noting that the dictatorship itself did not have homogeneous phases. On the other hand, the production of authors who debate the subject may bring a more specific perception of that moment.

Briefly mapping the institutional arena, it is noticeable that the low numbers of women in the federal parliament and the political scenario of the period as a whole did not completely frustrate the reactions to the regime's authoritarianism. Elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1966, Júlia Steinbruch (MDB/RJ), for example, defended congressional immunity as an instrument to repeal intimidation of congress members (AZEVEDO; RABAT, 2012), when she manifested against the request made by the Federal Supreme Court (STF, in Portuguese) to prosecute Congressman Márcio Moreira Alves (MDB/RJ).

Nysia Carone (MDB/MG), in the same legislature, had as one of her banners the defense of the rights of people who were victims of the arbitrariness of Institutional Acts (AZEVEDO; RABAT, 2012). Lígia Doutel de Andrade (MDB/SC) sustained a critical tone that denounced the abuses of the dictatorship, as can be inferred from an excerpt from her speech, delivered in the rostrum of the Chamber of Deputies, in May 1967:

[...] 'there is still imprisonment without charged guilt: the sacred right of defense is still denied; institutional acts are still intended to be in force. On the other hand, the national riches and the best results of the people's work, put in the vaults of imperialism, continue to drain away, here installed more strongly after the events of 1964' (BRAZIL, 1967 apud AZEVEDO; RABAT, 2012, p. 93).⁸

It is not possible to say, therefore, that women were totally absent from institutional political life. However, their possibilities for action, particularly those opposed to the regime, were quite restricted and the restriction worsened in years of greater dictatorial repression.

Given this context, it is equally challenging to gather more information on women's performance in institutional politics, although scarce records can be found in works that have carried out research to recover women's memory in the representative sphere, some of which are mentioned here. Conversely, women's political action in clandestine organizations and/or in publicly denouncing dictatorial violence against family members also provides an essential perspective of the moment's analysis.

⁸ Originally: [...] “*ainda se prende sem culpa formada: ainda se nega o direito sagrado de defesa; ainda se pretende estejam em vigor os atos institucionais. De outro lado, continuam se esvaindo as riquezas nacionais e os melhores frutos do trabalho do povo, carregados para os cofres do imperialismo, aqui instalado mais solidamente após os acontecimentos de 1964*” (BRASIL, 1967 apud AZEVEDO; RABAT, 2012, p. 93).

With obstacles to the right to vote, be voted, and participate in groups and demonstrations against the government, many women began to work in clandestine organizations or alternative spaces in local communities, sometimes linked to the Catholic Church, trade unions, and human rights movements (BIROLI, 2018).

Teles (2015a) points out that part of society's women participated in some of the 40 clandestine leftist organizations that existed during the regime, in activities including participation in guerrillas, articulation of resistance in the press – who were also clandestine –, distribution of print material, and domestic organization of buildings ("apparatuses") that functioned as the operational base for planning the actions to be developed.

Exploring this scenery, Ridenti (1990) brought in his study some crucial highlights of women's participation in these organizations. Based on data from "*Projeto Brasil: Nunca Mais*" (Project Brazil: Never More), which gathered information about the opposition movements to the dictatorship, the author systematized that, of those prosecuted for involvement with armed opposition groups, 18% of those engaged were women.

There were also different profiles, mostly varying according to women's social position linked to such organizations. Women from the lower class were commonly arrested or exiled more for their involvement with male activists than for their own participation, while those with better social and education status had more direct participation in the activities, something expressed in the numbers of prosecuted women. These numbers showed that, including armed and unarmed leftists, there were only ten prosecuted manual workers, in contrast to the number of 422 women who were students, teachers, or engaged in some other higher education profession (RIDENTI, 1990).

The entry of women into opposition groups, even if limited, proved to be quite significant. Notwithstanding, besides facing violations of their rights by the regime, activists were not at all safe from discrimination within the group they integrated. In these environments, the debate on gender relations was neglected in the name of broader agendas of resistance, which reaffirmed men's dominant position in the groups (COLLING, 2015).

In most organizations at that time, specific agendas for women still did not receive much attention, as the focus was on a perspective of change shaped by the transforming action of new members, without gender distinctions. Sexist stereotypes were also reinforced in these spaces, something noticeable in the interview given to Ridenti (1990) by former activist Vera Silvia Magalhães, who came to manage an opposition organization and reported that: "[...] I think that in 1969 I would have left management for a thousand other reasons, including because new members

were appearing. But there was a fantastic point [made] that I was an emotionally unstable person"⁹ (RIDENTI, 1990, p. 120).

In the 1970s, however, the feminist movement broke out in the country with sharper contours. As a result of women's resistance to the dictatorship, groups of women, mostly from the middle classes and more intellectualized, reaffirmed the particularities of women's claims within the context of general mobilizations for social transformation. In contrast, in its early days, the movement was perceived as deviant and demoralizing by the right and, to a large extent, viewed with mistrust, minimized as a bourgeois agenda by the left (SARTI, 1998).

Despite this resistance to their participation, women's presence in the fight against the military dictatorship was fundamental for the politicization of gender relations, shaping a feminist movement that postulated a certain organizational autonomy, based on the understanding that its potential for critical thinking was associated with the keeping of distance from both the State and political parties (BIROLI, 2018).

On the other hand, the 1970s also saw the black movement's re-articulation, which the coup had demobilized. At the beginning of the decade, Black theater was taken up again in São Paulo by the Center for Black Culture and Art – CECAN. In Rio de Janeiro, the soul movement – which was to be called Black Rio – gained space in the urban scene, gathering workers, high school students, and university students from both the North and South of the city (GONZALEZ, 1982).

From May to June 1974, the "African-Brazilian Weeks" took place in Rio de Janeiro, which included artistic exhibitions, popular manifestations, lectures, and seminars on black culture. Also, in 1976, Black movements of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro began their relations, which would culminate, in 1978, in the creation of the Unified Black Movement Against Racial Discrimination (MNU, in Portuguese) (GONZALEZ, 1982).

At the intersections between feminist and antiracist struggle, Black feminism also began to become politically organized, responding to the need to recognize identities within both movements, since, for a long time, there was no debate around inequalities between white women and black women and inequalities between Black women and Black men (RIBEIRO, 1995).

Regarding the participation of women during the black movement meetings in Rio de Janeiro, which followed the African-Brazilian Weeks, Gonzalez (1982) stated that, at a given moment, they started to meet in isolation, to later, together with the others, discuss the common problems. Among male colleagues, reactions to the female presence varied between sexism and

⁹ Our translation. Originally: "[...] acho que em 1969 eu sairia da direção por mil outras razões, inclusive porque havia quadros novos surgindo. Mas houve um argumento fantástico, de que eu era uma pessoa emocionalmente instável".

solidarity, with some men – usually older members – making pejorative comments, motivated by the discomfort they felt at their female fight companions' successes.

In the wake of these events, 1975 was declared by the United Nations (UN) as the International Year of Women. The issue of women's demands as problems to be faced by society was gradually stimulating the creation of public political groups by women, among which it is worth to mention "*Brasil Mulher, Nós Mulheres*" (Brazil Women, We the Women), and the "*Movimento Feminino pela Anistia*" (Feminine Movement for Amnesty) (SARTI, 1998).

In 1975, with the First International Women's Conference in Mexico and the declaration by the UN of the next ten years as the decade of women, the week of debates "The role and behavior of women in Brazilian reality," sponsored by the UN Information Center, was held in Brazil, and activist Terezinha Zerbini also created the aforementioned Feminine Movement for Amnesty (PINTO, 2010). The Feminine Movement for Amnesty sought to raise awareness of the abuses committed by the dictatorship through public demonstrations in which mothers, wives, companions, and daughters denounced acts of torture, arbitrary arrests, and disappearances of people who were targeted by the regime's actions (COLLING, 2015).

Overcoming barriers, women's presence in the amnesty agenda was not only restricted to mass mobilizations but also influenced the development of press coverage that began to incorporate the female vision on critical political issues to women and position itself regarding the situation of the country critically.

In this political scenario, in 1975, the newspaper "*Brasil Mulher*" (Brazil Women) was launched, edited by journalist Joana Lopes, and followed by the newspaper "*Nós Mulheres*" (We, the Women). Both brought together groups of women who discussed issues related to the living conditions of working women, women living in the peripheries, and black women, as well as discussing issues at the national political level, such as amnesty and censorship (TELES, 2014).

At the end of the 1970s, with the beginning of political liberalization, the feminist agenda gained more and more space. However, until the early 1980s, the movement was still markedly unitary, without recognizing the diversity of the identities and demands of women who were part of it (SARTI, 1998). It was only in the 1980s that feminism began to adopt a more expressively intersectional stance (BIROLI, 2018).

At this stage, the articulation of the feminist movement was intrinsically linked to the struggle for the end of the dictatorial regime, taking into account that the experience of exiled activists and students in the United States and Europe contributed to dialogues with feminist movements abroad (ROESLER; SENRA, 2013). In this sense, authors such as Costa (2007)

establish the feminist movement of the 1970s as structured amid a field of multiple demands: for the country's re-democratization and women's autonomy.

During the last government of the military Dictatorship, under president João Baptista Figueiredo (from the government's party ARENA) in 1979, bipartisanship came to an end. With this, MDB and ARENA were extinguished and began to share the institutional political space with the *Partido Democrático Social*¹⁰ (PDS), the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*¹¹ (PMDB) – a new name for MDB, PTB, the *Partido Progressista Brasileiro*¹² (PPB) – from which emerged the *Partido Progressista*¹³ (PP) –, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores*¹⁴ (PT) and the *Partido Democrático Trabalhista*¹⁵ (PDT) (REZENDE, 2013).

With the Amnesty Law of 1979, exiled activists returned to the country, sharing their experiences and bringing new political influences, mostly European feminism. These experiences met with the experiences of those who had stayed in Brazil, contributing to a movement that, in the 1980s, rose as a prominent political force, spreading out into groups throughout the country and entering political parties, unions, and other institutions (SARTI, 1998).

Finally, in the regime's final years, institutional politics also began to be less repressed by the government. In the 1982 elections, which led to the last legislature (1983-1987) before the 1987-1988 Constituent Assembly, and with the return of a multiparty system, eight women federal deputies were elected: Ivete Vargas (PTB), Cristina Tavares (PMDB) and Júnia Marise (PMDB), who had previously held office, and Bete Mendes (PT), Irma Passoni (PT), Lúcia Viveiros (PDS), Rita Furtado (PDS) and Myrthes Bevilacqua (PMDB), as put by Vogel (2012). It is noticeable that these elected deputies had distinct party affiliations – at least four different parties. It is also worth mentioning that was the largest number of female federal deputies elected within dictatorial governments.

From this brief discussion, it is noted that the dictatorial governments that succeeded each other between 1964 and 1985 did not manage to make female political expressions completely impossible. Although the institutional arena was not a fruitful field, women circumvented many of the suppressions and restrictions to their rights both in clandestine organizations and in the feminist movement and movements of family members persecuted by the regime. However, it does not mean that the regime's reaction to these expressions was not severe; a topic that the next section will discuss.

¹⁰ Social Democratic Party.

¹¹ Brazilian Democratic Movement Party.

¹² Brazilian Progressive Party.

¹³ Progressive Party.

¹⁴ Worker's Party.

¹⁵ Democratic Labor Party.

4. REPRESSION TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE 'YEARS OF LEAD': PERSECUTION, GENDERED VIOLENCE, AND MEMORY

The response to the various female political actions commented on so far came in the form of specific repression, which had connotations of power and domination of the male order, in the face of breaking gender standards by the female population. It materialized through psychological, physical, and sexual abuses by military agents, especially against the captured political activists.

It is important to emphasize that since gender is a social structure that reaffirms inequalities in social, political, cultural, and economic areas, the crimes committed by the dictatorship must be treated by taking gender into account. Human rights violations were directed at women and men during the regime. Still, for the female portion, oppositionists' persecution was added to the hatred towards many of these oppositionists being women. There was the use of distinctive elements of gendered violence, such as the instrumentalization of maternity and abortion as mechanisms of torture (TELES, 2015b).

In the structure of the National Truth Commission¹⁶ (CNV, in Portuguese), the investigative teams were broken into thematic commissions that would reconstruct the official narrative on the Dictatorship abuses from different perspectives. Among the 13 working groups established to carry out these tasks was the so-called "Dictatorship and Gender," which had the results of its investigations contemplated in Chapter 10 of Volume I of the CNV's final report, published in December 2014.

The Chapter is entitled "Sexual violence, gender-based violence, and violence against children and adolescents." It includes some definitions of gender, followed by transcriptions of victims' testimonies. Some accounts by political activists in the Chapter demonstrate the specificity of dictatorial violence directed at women and are the subject of analysis in this study.

The CNV was the first official transitional instrument to include the category gender in its analyses. At a conceptual level, the report presented gender as a sociocultural construction defining masculinity and femininity patterns that interact with context and time and are independent of individual choice (BRAZIL, 2014). More specifically, the report refers to gendered violence, highlighting that since patterns of violence are structured in the social sphere and through their hierarchies of power, those that rise above gender inequalities also reflect a specific type of repression, and this was stamped on dictatorial action against women (BRAZIL, 2014).

¹⁶ The Truth Commission (CNV) was installed in 2011 and promoted investigations regarding human rights violations in Brazil between September 18, 1946 and October 5, 1988. This investigation's results were systematized and published in a final report, which also offered recommendations for the Brazilian state.

The victims' stories are relevant for constructing a memory that tends to be placed into oblivion, precisely because of the sensitivity inherent to the very violation of human rights to which women detained by the state were exposed. Remembrance had become an act of courage and resistance, especially in portraying how the female body itself was used as an instrument of torture and submission, when women were humiliated and erotized by their body traits, raped, violated in their intimate parts through electric shocks, and in their dignity in various other ways (BRAZIL, 2014).

Due to the effects of differentiated violence based on the gender hierarchies present in society, the experiences of torture, imprisonment, and death were equally distinct according to the positions of domination and submission socially inscribed in these hierarchies (SETEMY, 2020). About gendered violence that covered up repressive practices, Maria Aparecida Costa, a political activist who opposed the regime and who, between December 1969 and January 1970, was tortured in *Operation Bandeirantes*¹⁷ (Oban, in Portuguese), expressed that:

The simple fact, I think, of you being among men, just men. Only men who would give you a look, how can I put it? It's that look which... Because you are a woman, you also realize that there is perhaps, sometimes, a wave of much greater anger. I don't know if it's because of the question 'why is a woman doing this? Why is a girl doing this?' And it's a way, maybe, a lot of wanting to disqualify you in every way. [...] (BRAZIL, 2014, p. 404)

¹⁸

By deconstructing any supposed gender neutrality, one realizes that the violence committed against women was not the same as the one committed against men. The association between the feminine and the political was itself already considered deviant by the government and its agents.

Although, especially in the early years of the regime, there was a period when the condition of women in society was not intensely problematized, the experiences of women in leftist organizations and movements that publicly denounced the dictatorship's violence against their families shook patterns concerning the restraint to the private sphere. It signaled a critical step in changing the female population's typically domestic role (RIDENTI, 1990). This shift potentialized repression directed at women who fought the dictatorship. Another passage in the report, still from Costa's testimony, emphasizes this aspect:

¹⁷ The military regime created it in São Paulo, 1969. It was dedicated to the disbandment of opposition groups (deemed as counter-revolutionaries).

¹⁸ Our translation. Originally: "O simples fato, eu acho, de você estar no meio de homens, só homens. Só homens que têm sobre você um olhar, como eu diria? É o olhar que te... Pelo fato de você ser mulher, também você percebe que há talvez, às vezes, uma raiva muito maior, eu não sei se é pela questão de achar 'por que uma mulher está fazendo isso? Por que uma moça está fazendo isso?' E é uma forma, talvez, muito de querer te desqualificar de todas as maneiras. [...]" (BRASIL, 2014, p. 404).

[...] I think that you feel exposed and you are exposed, you find yourself before them in a double way: you are entirely at their hands as a human being, and in your feminine condition you are naked, you are at their mercy, aren't you? Of all that. [...] As men were too, but perhaps, being a woman, I think this has a terrible weight. For your education, for your social, ideological education. It is already an exposure, and it increases your exposure even more [...]. Usually, you are educated and expected to protect your femininity so that it exposes itself in other situations [...]. (BRASIL, 2014, p. 404)¹⁹.

The female body, seen as the object of male domination, was exploited by torturers in every possible way. The women arrested were left without any defense against the torturer, who added their own layers of cruelty to the acts he performed, deconstructing the tortured victims' integrity (MERLINO; OJEDA, 2010).

The mechanisms of torture, wrapped in humiliation, sought to make clear the inability of female victims to manifest any resistance to the practices to which they were subjected. The following testimonial contains the description given by deponent Lucia Murat, also a political activist and victim of torture during the dictatorship:

It was in this picture, on his return, that Nagib himself did what he called **"scientific sexual torture."** I was naked, with a hood on my head, a rope wrapped around my neck, passing through my back to my hands, which were tied behind my waist. While the torturer kept touching my breasts, my vagina, penetrating with his finger, I was unable to defend myself because if I moved my arms to protect myself, I would hang myself and instinctively turn back (BRAZIL, 2014, p. 406, author's highlight)²⁰.

The sexualization of the female body, which was naturally seen as submissive, had the ability to leave women even more exposed to acts of torture. It was more than a mechanism of intimidation; it was an instrument of demonstration of male power.

The "scientific sexual torture" to which the victim referred translates a gendered pattern existing in dictatorial violence. The torture practiced against women focused on parts of the female body more directly associated with femininity, such as the breasts and the vagina. This torture related to a kind of censorship, both to the body and to their own subjective identity, which was a punishment for going on to the public sphere with contestations to the arbitrariness of authoritarianism (SETEMY, 2020).

¹⁹ Our translation. Originally: "[...] eu acho que você se sente exposto e você é exposto, você enfim, se encontra diante deles de uma dupla maneira: você está inteiramente nas mãos enquanto ser humano e na tua condição feminina você está nu, você está à mercê, não é? Disso tudo. [...] Como os homens também foram, mas talvez, por ser uma mulher, eu acho que isso tem um peso terrível. Pela tua formação, pela formação social, ideológica. Por si já é uma exposição e aumenta ainda mais a tua exposição [...]. Normalmente você é educado e visto para proteger a sua feminilidade para que ela se exponha em outras situações [...]." (BRASIL, 2014, p. 404).

²⁰ Our translation. Originally: "Foi nesse quadro, na volta, que o próprio Nagib fez o que ele chamava de '**tortura sexual científica**'. Eu ficava nua, com o capuz na cabeça, uma corda enrolada no pescoço, passando pelas costas até as mãos, que estavam amarradas atrás da cintura. Enquanto o torturador ficava mexendo nos meus seios, na minha vagina, penetrando com o dedo na vagina, eu ficava impossibilitada de me defender, pois, se eu movimentasse os meus braços para me proteger, eu me enforcava e, instintivamente, eu voltava atrás" (BRASIL, 2014, p. 406, author's highlight).

It is also essential to draw attention to other variables integrated into gendered violence in the period, deepening it. In this regard, Carvalho (2016) emphasizes that an integrated understanding of the markers that delimit this violence, such as race, class, and ethnicity, is fundamental to formulate and verify reparatory mechanisms and recovery adequacy of the memory of victims of dictatorships. For example, in terms of the regime's response to black women, the human rights violations perpetrated involved at least a double violence: gender and race.

The account of nurse Maria Diva de Faria, arrested on September 5, 1976, in São Paulo, show the confluence of these elements. She was tortured in the Information Operations Detachment/Internal Defense Operations Center (DOI- Codi/SP) while listening to racist comments like: "What an ugly [racial slur]. She should be at the stove. Ugly black, with that belly. That's not [good] even for cooking. She shouldn't even eat with this ugly black belly."²¹ (MERLINO; OJEDA, 2010, p. 57).

Years earlier, in 1970, Alceri Maria Gomes da Silva, another black woman, a member of the workers' movement and the Revolutionary Popular Vanguard (VPR, in Portuguese), had been shot dead in São Paulo with four shots in an onslaught by security agencies investigating the existence of a resistance group. Her body was never found, but political prisoners' statements reported that she was murdered by Oban agents led by Captain Maurício Lopes Lima (MERLINO; OJEDA, 2010).

In general, it is noticeable that for women somehow behaving in a way that was not accepted by the regime or being openly opposed to it, the state response was manifested in the form of acts of persecution guided by evident gendered violence. This process was not homogeneous, even regarding the identities of female victims.

This dictatorial repression has also left its mark on the transitional process. Although it is not the purpose of this study to make an accurate reflection on how the Brazilian Transitional Justice incorporated the issue of gender, it is essential to point out that the visibility of the violations to women's political rights occurred in the dictatorship bumps into the way truth and memory about the period are recovered.

Finding space for analysis on the formulation of post-dictatorial justice mechanisms to understand the specificities of the victims' identities finds resistance in the male-centered aspect of this process, regarding accepting that the violations committed during the regime were not gender-neutral.

²¹ Our translation. Originally: "*Ó negra feia. Isso aí devia estar é no fogão. Negra horrorosa, com esse barrigão. Isso aí não serve nem para cozinhar. Isso aí não precisava nem comer com essa banhona, negra horrorosa.*" (MERLINO; OJEDA, 2010, p. 57).

At the root of this problem is one of the characteristics common to Latin American countries' transitional processes that came out of dictatorships in the 1980s: the more pressing matter was giving answers regarding the fate of dead and missing people, safeguarding the circumstances of each case. As this demand was considered more urgent, women were only secondary or indirect victims of the conflict at that first moment: they were the mothers, daughters, and companions of the dead or disappeared, not being granted the voice to lead their own History of oppression (CARVALHO, 2016).

This understatement of female memory was not exhausted in the immediate post-conflict period, and difficulties persisted in dimensioning the gender variable in transitional policies. The obstacles become apparent in the account of the militant Maria Amélia de Almeida Teles, member of the Truth Commission "Rubens Paiva," from the state of São Paulo:

When I thought, along with other former political prisoners, of dealing with the theme of 'truth and gender,' I met resistance from members of the Truth Commission, professionals, and activists who dealt with questions of truth. They claimed that both men and women were equally tortured, murdered, and disappeared. Why highlight women? My answer is that torture is immeasurable for both men and women. Torture dilacerates the human dignity of both sexes. But women, because they are historically discriminated against, suffer specific effects (TELES, 2015b, p. 507).²²

The obstacles to affirm the frameworks that define the oppression and violence experienced by women under the dictatorship also came from activists and professionals focused on recovering truth and memory. This misunderstanding reinforces the official reproduction of a "universal victim" of the military regime.

From this perspective, the inclusion of a gendered perspective is a demand for the recovery of memory concerning women's political struggle and their assimilation into transitional processes. It is also a demand for women's insertion into deliberation spaces and the formulation of Transitional Justice policies as recipients of these. It is, as well, a call to reflect on how the investigation and reparation of gendered violence that occurred in the past, in a scenario of conflict, can be a crucial factor for combating it in the present (ROESLER; SENRA, 2013).

On the contrary, it is usual for the instruments used by Transitional Justice to frame human rights violations in generic categories such as "execution" and "disappearance." This framing loses

²² Our translation. Originally: "*Quando pensei, juntamente com outras ex-presas políticas, em tratar do tema 'verdade e gênero', encontrei resistência por parte de integrantes da Comissão da Verdade, profissionais e ativistas que lidavam com as questões relativas à verdade. Alegavam que tanto homens como mulheres foram igualmente torturados, assassinados e desaparecidos. Por que dar destaque às mulheres? A minha resposta é que a tortura é imensurável tanto para homens como para mulheres. A tortura dilacera a dignidade humana de ambos os sexos. Mas as mulheres, por serem historicamente discriminadas, sofrem efeitos específicos.*" (TELES, 2015b, p. 507).

sight of victims' subjective experiences and their correlations with gender hierarchies, summarizing gendered violence as an offense against human rights in the broad sense (CARVALHO, 2016).

As for the political sphere, the violations of women's human rights during the Brazilian military dictatorship are historical baggage that should not be forgotten, and the investigation of these facts must remain true to women's effective political action in this period and the way the State repression reacted to it (TELES, 2015b).

In Brazil, it was only with the installation of the CNV that this issue began to gain some prominence when the working group "Dictatorship and Gender" was formed, and its results were later published in Chapter 10 of the final report, just mentioned above.

Recognizing that the state tortured and killed countless women because they questioned the arbitrariness to which society was immersed and/or simply because they were considered to be transgressors of what should be their social place *par excellence* (the private sphere), albeit with a delay of years, was an important conquest for the right to truth and their memory.

However, even this late achievement was not complete since some important points did not receive due attention. Addressing some of these problems, Carvalho (2016) criticizes, besides the generic use of crime categories to frame the violence suffered by women, the lack of statistical data on this specific violence, the quantity and profile of the victims heard, and the inability to build memory about female victims involving an intersectional perspective, which contemplates their diverse identities, racial, social, and ethnic.

There was also a weakness in establishing correlation between the potentiation of repression against women and feminist agendas' growth with challenges to gender patterns. Moreover, there was a shallow analysis of the punishment specificity to some women just for being in affectionate relationships with militant men, and no deepening in the discussion about gendered violence directed at mothers who struggled to know the whereabouts of their children (DUQUE, 2018).

In the investigation of women's political deaths and disappearances, the results were also not as satisfactory. Volume III of the CNV Report, entitled "Political Deaths and Disappearances," counts 49 women killed and missing during the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (CNV, 2014b). However, it is estimated that the number is much higher, also because during CNV's operation period – between May 16, 2012, and November 14, 2014 – there was minimal progress in the investigations. This outcome occurred in part to the Armed Forces' combative attitude and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – they would not easily provide information about the period, especially concerning deaths and disappearances (TELES, 2015b).

On the whole, what is verifiable is the lack of politicization of the diverse manifestations of oppression that victimized women during the dictatorial regime. This fact contributes to the homogeneous violence image's composition, even if already within a gendered perspective. Once specified, the type of violence prioritized by recounting official History, several other types that also circumvented violations of women's political freedoms are lost and need to be analyzed.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The dictatorship resorted to legal validation to associate the military coup with an original constituent power to consolidate its authority for so many years. This understanding of the coup in constitutional categories was expressed in the various institutional acts edited to formalize authoritarian legality, marked by repression to any dissonance to the regime's standards. Women were also the target of this repression. However, for them, the repression had particular aspects and, since they had won basic political rights just a few decades ago, the effects of authoritarianism's institutionalization were even more severe.

This context did not prevent many of them from expressing themselves politically, usually through the protest movements against the regime. In the impossibility of acting in institutional politics and public debate as a whole, alternative spaces of political action have become environments more prone to women's participation. In this regard, some considerations can be made.

The first consideration regards the growth in demand for female autonomy, both within and outside the feminist movement during this time. It manifested itself both in the struggle for this autonomy and in the direct entry of women into groups of resistance – spaces considered masculine – to oppose the regime's arbitrariness. The point here is that the violence against women at this stage had a close relationship with their displacement from what was considered their conventional place in society.

The second observation is that, even in the most rigid moments of the regime, in the late 1970s, there was already talk of specific guidelines for the female population. A feminist movement, which was not so well seen even by left-wing organizations, took shape and, years later, met with the antiracist struggle, claiming the end of authoritarianism and the fight against gendered oppression.

This challenge to the mandatory masculinity of political subjects was violently rebuked, and some testimonies by political activists, taken from the report of the National Truth Commission and other works on the subject, showed how dictatorial violence against women had specific

character. It confirms the hypothesis initially raised because it reveals that the framing was not only of a mere authoritarian response to oppositionists, but it was rather potentialized by the fact that it was in front of women activists. This aspect is evident in the narratives of using the female body itself as an instrument of torture.

In their various dimensions, women's struggles, whether in clandestine organizations, the feminist movement, the Women's Movement for Amnesty, or institutional politics, were fundamental to the fight against the military regime. Despite this, it turned out that little attention was paid, when the dictatorship came to an end, to this resistance headed by women and the distinct violence they experienced.

Besides the fact that the regime's universal victim is considered male, there is also no immersion in the plurality of identities involved among the female victims. The consequence of this was that the only official space in which women's political activism was discussed – the National Truth Commission – still brought little in-depth analysis in some points, such as those mentioned throughout the last section of this study.

There is little discussion about the fact that the repression of women's political participation was increased by gendered violence and that this violence could be specific depending on other aspects of the female victim's identity. Therefore, remembering this is fundamental for qualifying transitional policies in a constitutional framework formally oriented towards gender equality. This understanding is crucial for the recovery of women's dictatorship's memory and the debate on violence against women in politics, which remains contemporary, albeit in another context.

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