

Urban hostilities: a feminine perspective on urban space

Hostilidades urbanas: uma perspectiva feminina sobre o espaço urbano

Hostilidades urbanas: una perspectiva femenina del espacio urbano

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Abstract

The present paper discusses women's use of public space, approaching through historically outline the influence of the patriarchy and the concept of private propriety in the non-recognition of female reproductive work. Beyond that, the research



focuses on the challenges faced by women, especially in the urban context, when entering the job market and environments that were not initially designed for them. Although women have gained space in professional environments, they continue to be responsible for reproductive work, placing a certain overload on them and contributing to the feminization of poverty. Finally, the work highlights the importance of rethinking the urban structure to welcome the specific needs of women, providing safer and more inclusive environments. By understanding and addressing the complexities they face in the use of public spaces, we hope to contribute to creating more equitable and accessible cities for all social groups.

Keywords: Women. Urban space. Public space. City. Hostilities

Resumo

O presente artigo discute o uso do espaço público pela mulher, abordando através de um traçado histórico a influência do patriarcado e do conceito de propriedade privada no não reconhecimento do trabalho reprodutivo feminino. Além disso, a pesquisa enfoca nos desafios enfrentados pelas mulheres especialmente no contexto urbano ao se inserirem no mercado de trabalho e em ambientes que não foram inicialmente projetados para elas. Embora as mulheres tenham conquistado espaço nos ambientes profissionais, continuaram responsáveis pelo trabalho reprodutivo, o que corrobora para uma sobrecarga e contribui com a feminização da pobreza. A conclusão destaca a importância de repensar a estrutura urbana para acolher as necessidades específicas das mulheres, proporcionando ambientes mais seguros e inclusivos. Ao compreender e abordar as complexidades enfrentadas por elas no uso do espaço público, espera-se contribuir para a criação de cidades mais equitativas e acessíveis a todos os grupos sociais.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres. Espaço urbano. Espaço público. Cidade. Hostilidades.

Resumen

El presente artículo aborda el uso del espacio público por parte de la mujer, explorando a través de un recorrido histórico la influencia del patriarcado y el concepto de propiedad privada en el no reconocimiento del trabajo reproductivo femenino. Además, la investigación se centra en los desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres, especialmente en el contexto urbano, al incorporarse al mercado laboral y a entornos que inicialmente no fueron diseñados para ellas. A pesar de que las mujeres han ganado espacio en los ámbitos profesionales, continúan siendo responsables del trabajo reproductivo, lo que contribuye a una carga adicional y contribuye a la feminización de la pobreza. La conclusión resalta la importancia de repensar la estructura urbana para atender las necesidades específicas de las mujeres, proporcionando entornos más seguros e



inclusivos. Al comprender y abordar las complejidades que enfrentan en el uso del espacio público, se espera contribuir a la creación de ciudades más equitativas y accesibles para todos los grupos sociales.

Palabras clave: Mujer, espacio urbano, espacio público, ciudad, hostilidad

INTRODUCTION

The division of tasks based on gender is intrinsic to the development of humanity. However, this division starts to become conflicting when the idea of private property, accumulation, paid work, and production as a highly valued activity emerges. Heleieth Saffioti (2013, p. 53) states that when exchange value begins to permeate the articles produced by workers, they begin to be configured as goods, and the workforce gains the same determination.

Within the logic of the emergence of capitalism, there was a clear division of tasks linked to each gender. According to Saffioti (2013, p. 61-66), women have always had a particular importance in work; after all, those in the lower social strata were involved in the production of goods and services. That is, they were never alienated from work and had always worked to support the subsistence of their families. In pre-capitalist societies, the family was the economic nucleus, and because of this, the work that women performed was focused on the benefit of this group (in it and for it). In this way, women would be placed as inferior to men in the legal, social, and political spheres. Still, their participation in the productive system - in a certain way - was necessary and important. This participation was limited due to the impossibility of occupying privileged positions, always being relegated to the most subordinate positions possible. Thus, with the effective establishment of the capitalist system in our society, women were placed in a place of complete marginality (Saffioti, 2013, p. 65-66).

Consequently, over the years, it was established that women would accumulate this tortuous participation in productive work with all the demands of reproductive work, which is fundamentally necessary to sustain the entire system and socially devalued, as it does not generate goods in itself. Women were largely relegated to the private space, responsible for everything that involved caring for the home, children, the elderly, and unpaid activities. However, patriarchy emerges with the non-recognition of this reproductive work, hierarchizing the importance of each function in the family and supporting the maintenance of the power and dominance relationship of men over women.

The discussion of the social and economic structure from a gender perspective is fundamental when raising a debate on the right to the city, mainly related to security. Geographer Ana Fani Carlos (2007, p. 20) talks about how the city results



from a process of human construction, a historical-social product. For her, the city would reveal itself throughout history as an always fluid result of events and human actions accumulated over time, giving rise to future possibilities created in everyday life. According to the ideas debated by the author, a dissociation between space and society would not be possible, as social relations would materialize physically in a concrete territory (Carlos, 2007, p. 20-21).

The city is the physical space where we see the social relationships and events of our society reflected, as Terezinha Gonzaga says in her thesis *The City and Architecture – Also a Woman: conceptualizing the Methodology of urban planning and architectural projects from a gender point of view*, says that a city is a place of social activity, where meetings, celebrations, consumption, work, leisure, and social struggles take place (Gonzaga, 2004, p. 17). If we observe throughout the history of cities, it is possible to see how religious practices, social relations, customs, economic and commercial issues, and power relations were physically reflected in the spatial conformation of cities and architectural production.

In this sense, it is also observed that, in many cases, when public space becomes present in human relationships, women are not included in this environment. The private space of the residences (where reproductive work takes place) is allocated to them. This becomes even worse when we think that society – and, consequently, cities – are structured based on political relationships, in which they did not initially participate. We can say that the urbanized city is organized into political, economic, educational, and commercial environments, and only in the last thirty years have women started to insert themselves into them in a more substantial way and, even so, in an extremely slow way, this insertion is due to need for self-sustenance, or as a result of clashes against the conventional patriarchal structure.

However, even though female bodies have conquered spaces in society throughout history, reproductive work remains, in most cases, the responsibility of the women in the family. These women work outside and inside the home, moving in a highly complex way through the city that does not serve them in terms of structure, security, or mobility. Therefore, this work discusses the issue of the use of the city by female bodies and the difficulties encountered regarding mobility and permanence in public spaces. To this end, the article contextualizes the topic, articulating the historical outline of the occupation of cities and the authors of feminist epistemology.

Contextualization

The way women occupy the city's public spaces today was a historical social construction, and to understand it, we first need to understand how their social position followed the history of the formation of cities and what their role was



in this long process. According to Terezinha Gonzaga (2004, p.73), before being economically in lower classes, women are culturally inferior. This happens so that the dominant ideology - capitalist and sexist in question - can be sustained since, as we know, for there to be a system of domination, there must be a system subordinate to it. The author states that spaces were conquered by men and sustained in a relationship of domination over women, children, slaves, animals, and nature. Given this, we will understand private property as the initial milestone of this domination, taking into account that, although matriarchal knowledge was essential in promoting this permanence, women were little valued as a foundation and much less included in the use of this space that was developed later. In towns and urban settlements throughout history.

Silvia Federici, in her book *Caliban and the Witch: women, body and primitive accumulation*, talks about how the European movement of enclosures and expropriations confabulated between church, state, and landowners, which occurred from the end of the 15th century in Europe and 16th century America, were the precursors to the establishment of private property and how they greatly affected women. According to Federici (2017), when land was privatized, women found it more difficult than men to support themselves. Nomadic work was more difficult for them because of exposure to male violence and mobility, which was hampered by pregnancy and caring for offspring. Thus, women were increasingly involved and confined to reproductive work.

The figure of the housewife, constructed by social changes throughout history and reinforced in the 19th century, ended up strengthening women's position in society. This configuration reflects the solid sexual division of labor and an intrinsic influence on the way people live in cities. In this way, women's place ended up being defined and reinforced countless times as being inside the house, where they carry out non-productive tasks (Montaner; Muxí, 2014), while men's place of stay is the place of work, this degrading, manual and laborious. Indeed, the reflections of this social constitution are still frequently observed today.

However, as Dolores Hayden (1984, apud Freitas, 2019, p. 2) points out, the domestic role imposed on women required a social position from them, and the transformation of this social position would not happen if their domestic responsibilities continued to support the hegemonic family model. Since then, the white middle-class woman has been working outside the home while trying to keep it in order. To make this possible, they frequently assigned this role to another woman, usually black. For this other woman, the female fight for the right to work was not an issue, considering that she always needed to contribute (or, often, fully provide) financially to support her home.

In this context, the work that, until then, was carried out by women without remuneration, began to be outsourced to other even more exploited women (CARNEIRO, 2003), with them being hired to educate their children and maintain the domestic environment of the first women., and care for the sick and elderly. From



this perspective, Saffioti (1987, p.116 apud Neves; Alves, 2020, p. 237) associates the complexity of the situation of women's oppression in current Brazilian society to the intersection of three systems of exploitation: patriarchy - which acts on the body subjugated feminine, racism - which acts on the exploited black body and capitalism - which acts on the proletarian body.

When these women, who were previously much more confined to their homes because they did not perform any paid work, begin to access productive positions outside their homes to supplement the necessary income and thus meet new consumer demands, they are faced with a city that does not was designed to serve them: their journeys are more complex than those of men, since in addition to work, they also have to bear reproductive activities, that is, they need to take their children to and from school, shop at the market, take care of elderly and bedridden relatives, and continue traveling the entire route they were already taking.

It is women who will feel in their bodies the precariousness of access to material and symbolic goods produced by cities and offered unequally (Alfonsin, 2006, p. 254). They are the ones who will experience the difficulties related to the accessibility of sidewalks, which are not suitable for using a stroller or for children walking; the lack of security in certain locations due to insufficient lighting, excessive blind facades, and vacant lots; and, also, the great exposure to harassment events, whether on public transport, in urban spaces or private spaces. Leslie Kern (2021) talks about "rape myths", defining them as an essential component to support what we know as "rape culture" and which are used to blame the victim. Some lines like "What were you wearing?", "why didn't you report it?", "what were you doing on the street so late?", "but also, that's not an environment for her", shows how much our Culture still tries to blame harassment on women. Even victims accuse themselves of acting inappropriately by waiting for the bus alone, going to a certain bar, walking alone, and taking shortcuts (Kern, 2021).

Neves and Alves (2020, p. 241) state that, when it comes to urban planning, it is indisputable that Brazilian women are being made invisible. This directly influences the use and appropriation of spaces by female bodies, as well as the participation of these bodies in decision-making processes regarding space. According to Ferreira and Silva (2017, p. 5 apud Neves; Alves, 2020 p. 241), built environments reflect the stereotypes of so-called feminine and masculine places, and the masculine perspective is predominant in producing urban spaces. The separation of commercial, industrial, and residential sectors by rationalist and functionalist urban planning contributes to the imprisonment of the female body, reinforcing the division of labor. This imprisonment is linked to the fact that displacement is a barrier between women and the services that the city offers. If she is not safe to travel around the city, as highlighted and exemplified above, there are problems related to urban mobility, which also mainly affect these female bodies, who are the majority of public transport users.



Women and urban space

The fears that lead women to hold their keys in their hands as they walk towards the gate of their houses, so as not to expose themselves when looking for them in their bags, or the fear that makes them avoid going too close to facades with setbacks, which can hide someone who poses a threat, or the fear that motivates the choice of a longer and more time-consuming route instead of a shorter route that may present even imaginary dangers, are feelings generally not experienced - or even thought about - by men.

Leslie Kern (2021) talks about how her experience differed from that of her brother when they moved to a new city when they were young. She talks about how her pregnancy experience made her feel unwanted in urban space at the same time that her body became more public than before. The feeling of exposure bothered her because it attracted people's attention at the same time that she felt invisible in places where she needed some support. It was a contradiction to be seen as someone who needed special care and attention, but also someone who people pretended not to see so they didn't have to give up their seat on the subway. Later, with the use of the baby stroller, he had to hear rude speeches about the space it occupied and dealt with the reality of a city that had no space for the stroller or for his children to walk side by side.

In addition to the difficulties of traffic with strollers and small children, we face the lack of public bathrooms both to meet the needs of menstruating bodies and to meet the reality of mothers - generally those responsible for children - who need to change their babies' diapers. Many establishments also limit the presence of children, which makes sense in environments that are inappropriate for them. However, this also restricts the presence of mothers since the child, in most cases, is continually under the care of the mother.

On the other hand, concerning male bodies, it is very common to see them urinating in public places in an unhindered and carefree way; even if they are parents, attending, without external judgment or restrictions, establishments that may be inappropriate for children; and roaming the city freely without the constant fear of external threats to your body. Therefore, it is clear that public space is a place experienced very differently by men, who feel safe, and by women, who do not feel safe even staying in public spaces or moving around the city. In the wake of this debate, geographer Sônia Alves Calió (1991, apud Alfonsin, 2006) will suggest that, for a city that is more inclusive of female bodies, there must be the construction of public baby-changing facilities, a balanced distribution of service equipment throughout the city's neighborhoods, the use of public lighting as a security measure, and the incorporation of women in decision-making processes regarding housing projects.



Mobility

The routes taken by women in cities have also changed throughout history and have become more complex with the organization and modification of urban forms. It is known that women are primarily responsible for the care chain and, therefore, in addition to their paid productive activity, they end up being responsible for tasks such as taking and picking up children from daycare/school/extra classes/doctors, shopping at the supermarket, taking the elderly to health appointments, etc. From this, we can see that there is, concerning urban mobility, a gender problematization that is expressed in the way of moving around the city, in which means of transport women and men use most and in the access allowed to each one.

Studies investigating this problematization point out that women's travel patterns are different from men's and that the complexity of female travel is generally greater. In most scenarios, men's routes are limited to the linear home-work route and have greater access to private vehicles. According to the National Department of Transport – DNIT (2022), the estimate of the number of driver's licenses issued in Brazil is that only 35% are for female drivers, with men making up the majority of vehicle drivers in the country. Even women who have a license often do not have a car, or they belong to a family with just one vehicle, which usually ends up in the possession of their father, brother, or husband.

Therefore, women use public transport and walk more to get around the city and take trips to multiple destinations and purposes (Silva; Dantas; Dimenstein, 2020, p. 03). According to Medina *et. al.* (2020), most public transport users are women (74% of women use public transport or walk, compared to 62% of men). The option for this modality is related to income; according to the authors, the poorest women are the ones who use these modes the most. This factor also contributes to making routes more complex. Still, according to the same research, many women without the financial means for public transport choose to get around the city on foot. For this reason, it is necessary to think about adequate infrastructure so that walking can take place safely and healthily, being an attractive and light activity for the female body.

As previously mentioned, regarding the means of transport and the distances traveled by women when traveling, we also face issues of lack of safety, harassment, and exposure on public transport. A working group monitoring women's relationship with urban mobility in the city of São Paulo used some icons in a study in which they asked women how they felt in the situations described, and some terms stood out. According to research, moving around the city is generally linked to negative feelings and insecurity that reverberate in the female body. As described by women, all ways of moving indicate problems – which do not affect the male body. As previously mentioned, men have no problem with, for example, exposing their genitals in public to urinate; they do not reflect on the threat of harassment, and they are not bothered by “catcalls”, etc. Even the aspect



of overcrowding on public transport is perceived differently by both men because even if it is uncomfortable for men to be on overcrowded transport, this does not pose a threat to their physical integrity, as it may pose to women in the sense of facilitating harassment.

The Walkability Institute's research also brings an icon about urban space and women's feelings when accessing and staying in it. Many said they rushed by or didn't even pass due to a feeling of insecurity. This feeling seems to be the factor that most prevents women from occupying and enjoying spaces that should be welcoming to everyone.

Public Place

As children, the girls play in the square's playground with the boys. When pre-teens, they play ball, and if they play, they are judged for being there among them. As teenagers, they may skateboard and continue playing ball, but they are "too fragile" for this type of sport, and they must stay at home, be studious, and already be responsible for helping with housework. As adults, they may, who knows, return to using this same space for the outdoor gym (when these work and users are brave enough not to fear such exposure). When they become mothers, they take their children to play on the playground. The ladies may have more opportunities to make the most of the space by simply sitting and chatting with the neighbors, and the gentlemen use the chess tables and chat to entertain themselves. In this sense, as previously mentioned, there is a gap between pre-adolescence and motherhood in the use of public spaces for leisure, and, according to research by the Patrícia Galvão Institute in 2023, the women who suffer the most harassment are in the range from 16 to 34 years old. In other words, the age group that suffers the most harassment is also the one that uses public spaces least for leisure or stay.

A woman's feeling of insecurity is generally also related to a man who may present a potential threat, which does not happen to other women, for example, and the opposite does not happen. Men sometimes feel threatened by the presence of other men who may exhibit dangerous behavior or a stereotype related to violence and/or theft, but this is hardly expected of a woman. A context in which women generally feel safer is in the peripheral areas where they live, and we observed that this happens for a few reasons: in more vulnerable neighborhoods, people generally know their neighbors better than in affluent communities. Where the houses are new and the residents do not cross paths; Poorer families tend to live closer to their relatives, often in the same house, in "puxadinhos," or on the same land; Another factor that contributes to the feeling of security in communities is that many families are headed by women in this context, representing a certain authority and also forming a mutual support network between these mothers who are mainly responsible for supporting their families, sometimes leaving their



children with each other in times of need or have agreements to exchange favors among themselves about the care of their children or elderly people that allow them to carry out their tasks outside the home.

Looking at the feeling of security in communities, it is possible to consider that the relationship between people, neighbors, and getting to know the community brings security. The presence of people and relationships provides this feeling. The feeling of belonging is perhaps the secret to this security. Therefore, it is essential to create environments in which women can feel part of the space, safe to stay, and comfortable carrying out activities in public. It is important to point out that debates involving gender issues are structural in nature. Our society is anchored in a sexist culture that helps sustain the foundation of our social model. Therefore, it is essential to highlight that architectural and urban planning interventions aim to mitigate these issues, however, they are unable to address them in their entirety. Only a structural change in our society would be capable of this. Even so, looking at the cities we inhabit, taking into account gender theories, can be fundamental for us to start thinking about ways for urban centers to be more democratic and safe for female bodies. And this is the discussion that the work aims to address.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is impossible to think about the right to the city based on issues related to urban security, detaching this debate from a gender perspective. The most insecure bodies in cities are female bodies and the bodies subject to their care (elderly people, children, sick/disabled people). They are the ones who navigate the fissures of hegemonic planning, producing urban space in different ways, through complex everyday uses.

Perhaps the key to more inclusive urban planning, which will respond to so many current problems and provide safer cities, lies precisely in observing how these bodies reinvent themselves in the face of the enormous challenges found in urban centers that are so inhospitable to them. An approximation of urban theories with practical actions and a politicized positioning – as has been proposed, for example, by insurgent theories – can have a lot to contribute to our thinking about urban security and the right to the city.

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