



## THE MARITAL SEPARATION AND WOMEN'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONFRONTATION: A LIFE ISSUE

<sup>1\*</sup>Rita de Cássia Barbosa de Sousa, <sup>2</sup>Tânia Rocha Andrade Cunha  
and <sup>3</sup>Ivana Patrícia Almeida da Silva

<sup>1</sup>Graduated in pedagogy by the University of the Southeast of Bahia/UESB, Master in Memory: Language and Society by the Post-Graduation Program in Memory: Language and Society, University of the Southeast of Bahia - PPGMLS/UESB; Doctorate at the same PPG; Member of the Women's Law Municipal Council of Vitória da Conquista - Bahia

<sup>2</sup>Graduated in Social Sciences by the Federal University of Bahia (1980), Master's in Social Sciences by Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (1999) and Doctorate in Social Sciences by the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (2004). Doctor Professor of The Post-Graduation Program in Memory: Language and Society da University of the Southeast of Bahia

<sup>3</sup>Psychologist, Doctor by the Center of Interdisciplinary Studies on Women, Gender and Feminism at UFBA - Federal University of Bahia, Master in Memory: Language and Society at UESB - State University of Southwest of Bahia

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### ABSTRACT

The Marital Relationship up keeping represents a major challenge between different subjects just as the upshot when it is tagged by suffering and pain. The present paper has as goal to arouse reflections about the violence that impacts women in the affective relation scope, and on marital separation, as a resistance form. We have as goal to examine the issue of marital violence, how it impacts in the couple's life and which aspects make it difficult for women to break the bonds with their offenders. For this purpose, we used qualitative research data about violence against women that were carried out in different periods. Our analytical focus was grounded on the authors' studies who were devoted to the subject and had major contributions to the comprehension and combat of violence against women. As a result, we noticed that in the majority of cases, women would only break up the marital bond after running out of all the possibilities of keeping the relationship.

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### INTRODUCTION

The violence perpetrated against women does not know the boundaries of class, age, educational level, race and ethnicity. It is a present thematic on the day order, in the means of communication, in feminists' speeches as much as in violence combat institutions, like the justice and the police.

#### \*Corresponding author: Rita de Cássia Barbosa de Sousa

Graduated in pedagogy by the University of the Southeast of Bahia/UESB, Master in Memory: Language and Society by the Post-Graduation Program in Memory: Language and Society, University of the Southeast of Bahia - PPGMLS/UESB; Doctorate at the same PPG; Member of the Women's Law Municipal Council of Vitória da Conquista - Bahia.

It was kept silent until the 1970s, the violence matter will be noticed when the feminist movement and other women's groups concerned about the magnitude of the phenomenon through reports calling the attention of the media and the State to spotlight the grievances perpetrated against women and children in their particular residences. At that period, this violence yet limited to the domestic space, became a common sense part and obtained a political aspect, bringing validation to the reports made by the organized movements and the women themselves about the several forms of violence suffered in the marital relation (CUNHA, 2007).

Marital violence is a modality of domestic violence that happens between partners in the intimacy sphere. Of a private character, this kind of violence is a powerful mechanism of social control and it is characterized by systematic behaviors that keep a communicational pattern always with the purpose of causing suffering to the other individual. The damages caused by marital violence are devastating. They provoke severe damages in the physical health as much as in the mental health of women and their children. Despite violence being a common issue that hits many women all around the world and that it can be identified as a cyclical system, this fact does not imply that all women victims react at the same way to the maltreatment suffered. Each woman is a singular subject, with an identity and personal experiences, even if they have similar lives.

The marital relationship builds an axis where there are formed others relations that set the family scope. It is idealized as an affectionate experiences place, in which it's shared all dreams, anxieties and wishes with the partner, however as happens in the majority of affectionate relations, coexistence may be tagged by a lot of difficulties, divergences, conflicts and violence. As states Saffioti (1998b) the sacred character that for a long time has covered family and the unquestionable man's power over women and their children forbid that people, mainly women, report the violence they suffer from their partners in the family scope, in all societies. Many times, women themselves use excuses to justify the violence perpetrated by their partners, blaming on the drinking, stress, unemployment, among others. This way, one of the exits found by many women even as last resource is the marital separation.

## METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES

This paper has as goal to examine domestic violence and the conditions surrounding it in the process of marital separation. From a qualitative study, which permits an examination of the collected data, we defined some particular goals in order to identify the key causes of domestic violence and the motives that make it harder for women to break bonds with their offenders. With the intention of hitting the planned goals, we examined semi-structured interviews that were performed in two assessments: "The Female Head of the family: Housewife or homeowner?<sup>1</sup>" and "The Silence's Price: rich women suffer violence as well."<sup>2</sup> In the course of the current work's accomplishment, we used the qualitative research's method, assuming the semi-structured interviews technique because it is a technique broadly used in the research's field. In line with Minayo (2010, p.21): "Qualitative research answers to very specific matters. It is involved in the Social Sciences with a level of reality that may not or ought not to be measured, "establishing this way an information data's source essential for studies of this character. With respect to the theoretical approach, we based ourselves on authors who have added to gender and violence studies such as: Saffioti (1998b), Saffioti and Almeida (1995), Porchat (1992), Cunha (2007) and others, which allowed us to reassess affective connections and marital separation in relations tagged by violence.

## RESULTS E DISCUSSION

**Violence in the marital relation:** Domestic violence involves physical, sexual, emotional or patrimonial abuse of a subject that lives in the same home as the offender, irrespective of the existence of relationship, there included marital violence against women. Violence perpetrated against women in the marital relation is a worldwide issue related to power, privileges and control held by man and nurtured by the ignorance, law's inability and fragile government attempts to guarantee respect for the existing laws. As stated by Saffioti and Almeida (1995, p.4), "Male violence against women reveals itself in all phallogocentric societies." As a result, gender violence may be taken as an omnipresent phenomenon, happening in all social classes and in all cultures, irrespective of economics' growth level. More and more, the domestic violence confronted by many women in the marital relation is realized as a severe public health problem, in addition represent a human rights violation. Even facing so many women's achievements in current times, it still today shows a terrible picture.

The " 2015 Map of Violence: Murders of Women in Brazil" shows that of the 4,762 women's murders registered in 2013 in the country, 50.3% were perpetrated by family members, and in 33.2% of these cases, the crime was practiced by the partner or previous relationships. These nearly 5,000 deaths represents 13 daily female homicides in 2013. The 2015 Violence's Map also shows that between 1980 and 2013, 106,093 Brazilian women were killed. From 2003 to 2013, the female victims number increased from 3,937 to 4,762, resulting in a rise of more than 21% in that decade (WAISELFISZ, 2015). Furthermore, they only take this action when violence hits a spot where they can't stand it anymore and, in line with Langley and Levy (1980), it differs from woman to woman. Besides these data, studies have shown that many women just come to the decision to break a relationship after being through a series of attacks and reconciliations, known as the Violence Cycle<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, they only take this action when violence hits a spot where they can't stand it anymore and, in line with Langley and Levy (1980), it differs from woman to woman. Secured by a society that conserves and strengthens male values, men practice in the intimacy space the worst forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence, like rape and sexual humiliation against women and children, which takes up a subordinate spot in the social hierarchy of gender. This shaming and power situation was experienced by Isabel for a long time, as she says: I stayed there around ten days, we stayed in separate bedrooms, he didn't accepted that I stayed in the bedroom, he told me to take everything out of the bedroom because he didn't want me to stay there anymore. I was still there and told him that I wouldn't leave. He said, "Let's see if you won't leave." I felt so embarrassed, I couldn't accept that situation anymore and I really had leave. He would tell me to leave, he said that there wasn't space left for me, that I had to get a place, that I had to go out of there. (Isabel, 43 years old, High School Level)

<sup>1</sup> Master's dissertation (Social Sciences) – Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. São Paulo, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> Doctorate Thesis in Social Sciences) Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo. São Paulo, 1999)

<sup>3</sup> The American Lenore E. Walker was one of the first specialist to study about marital violence like something cyclic, which stated that the way that violence happens between the couple is not unique, but the most frequent. However, she highlighted that not all the violent relationships go through this cycle (HIRIGOYEN, 2006).

The man's violence use against the woman in the marital relationship proves his intention of making her meet his wishes and can express herself in several ways: physical, psychological, sexual, and patrimonial leaving profound marks both in the women's body and soul. I was afraid he would kill me, because he said, 'If you separate from me, I'll kill you.' It made it difficult for me to make a decision. 'I'll kill you and kill the kids too' (Cleide, 44 years old, Higher Level). Embora seja difícil apontar apenas uma causa para o rompimento de uma relação conjugal, a violência para muitas mulheres, foi considerada a "gota d' água" para o final da relação (Carvalho, 1998). The daily coexistence with several forms of violence opens a massive wound in the couple's relationship. The amount of women tired of suffering beating from their partners and husbands isn't small. Though it is difficult to indicate only one reason for the ending of a marital relationship, violence was taken for many women as the "last straw" for ending the relationship (Carvalho, 1998).

**Separation: reasons and ways of confrontation:** The separation is the process' outcome in which one of the members the couple or both, for different motives don't find satisfaction in the coexistence. The consciousness of their circumstances of financial dependence, of family strain, adding the affective dependence, are enough motives to make the woman bear the situation of violence in the family. Consequently, they delay the idea to report their partners for the attacks made, until the day they identify that it isn't possible to handle the situation anymore and decide, at an increased cost, to definitively split from the partner.

Nowadays in a marital relation, it isn't needed a motive for separation anymore, if the relationship is in crisis and if there isn't the emotional satisfaction anymore, it is valid that these bonds are undone. The respondent women argued numerous reasons that added to the split of marital bonds. The splitting decision represents one of the most difficult moments in a marital relationship, because it includes the children issue, the financial matter, the pressure imposed by the family and other groups of coexistence. These difficulties get worse by the woman's emotional situation, in the face of a condition in which even recognizing the split as the most feasible exit, she is unwilling and tries to delay the decision. In a few relationships, alcoholism turns up to be the cause of separation. In others, betrayal is pointed out as the leading cause of break up, and in several other situations, it appears not to have had real motive for the splitting.

Oh! It was the drinking and the fact that he spanked me, I couldn't stand anymore. I'd often tell him I would leave, but he wouldn't believe me. But one day, he beat me hard, so much I thought he would kill me. Then a neighbor told me to go away, that he would eventually end up killing me, this neighbor who gave me the money for the ticket. (Norma, 41 years old, domestic servant). Other woman's appearance. When he found this woman he told me to find another husband like he arranged, but I told him: "I won't ever want another husband and I'll raise my children so you'll see". (...) He even told me he bought the rings, he tried it on my finger. (...) He found a woman to get married. He organized his things and left. (Joana, 62 years old, Street cleaner). Norma's situation is quite illustrative of a situation that leads to the marital split. At the start of the marriage her husband drank only on weekends, but over the time, it became a daily practice. In Joana's case, she highlights cheating as the main motive for separation.

Besides the reasons indicated by Norma and Joana, other women reported that financial dependence was one of the factors that added for them to stay in a relationship marked by violence. In Maria Luiza's case, what kept her stuck to the relationship was this type of dependence: He didn't accept it, because for me the idea of splitting became very clear on the first five years of marriage [...] I wanted to split up, but I saw myself powerless because I didn't have a job and he didn't give me the conditions to work and I knew that it was a domination (Maria Luiza, 62 years old, High school level).

The fact that they weren't in the job market or didn't earn consistent salaries to their expenses made many women to fear that with the split they wouldn't assure their and their children sustenance. Nevertheless, despite of the highlight brought by some of them to the financial issue, we highlight that in many situations the affective-emotional dependence has become the element responsible for keeping the relation with the offender. Even though experiencing an abusive relation, some women yet don't see marital split as a possibility of life restoration. This is what we realized in Isabel's report, when expressing her feelings about the separation meaning:

My feeling was hatred, I wished to die and to kill. I felt conned it was like a piece of me was taken. I have never seen such coldness in a human in my life, such indifference from one person to other, such ruthlessness. He didn't even told me the reason why he was splitting up from me. I even told him: "You married me to fill the hole of your life, because you were cheated, your wife betrayed you, you married me to fill that cheating space that you were on. He didn't answer, he told me nothing, he didn't say a word, it's like it was really it. I've never met such a cold person in my life. At the moment he said, "I want to separate from you, you don't serve to me anymore, I don't want you anymore, it was like he had stabbed me and turned the knife inside me. Until today I feel it, it's something that didn't heal inside me (Isabel, 43 years old, High School Level). In this apparent fragility and sorrow state that many women find themselves after the ending of a relationship particularly when it is tagged by the partner's indifference who, when individually deciding on the separation, treats his partner as a thing showing a domination based on the patriarchal order when he said: "You aren't good for me".

**Separation: a life issue:** The marital separations is seen by many as a way of freeing the women that face difficulties in problems in coexistence with their spouses. But after all, why it is so hard to deal with this breakup?. When writing about the separation's pain, Porchat (1992, p. 104-105) states that most authors that study this thematic look at separation as "the second emotional experience" - the first one is close people's death, being able to occur depression pictures. Besides that, there are couples who although separated and living new affective relations, keep "a sense of bond" with their ex-partners. When questioned about the experience of the first days after separation, we noted that the majority of respondent women said to be experiencing feelings of pain and loss:

I felt lost in the world, lost, lonely, without anybody. I went to my aunt's house. I saw myself with no friends, I saw myself without relatives, I saw myself without value. I felt like garbage, I wanted to die (Isabel, 43, High school Level). In spite of the pain and loss feelings stated above, some women like Ana Lucia, experienced conflicted feelings, so at the same

moment that she saw herself free of a draining and violent relationship, she exposed the fear of the occurrence of new violence episodes, showing that the marital split doesn't always ensure women the needed safety:

Of relief, of relief and fear. Panic. I would enter into a "craziness state", there were moments in which I was afraid of him coming in here and pressuring me to come back and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to say no. The feeling I had was that I would scream in hopelessness. Relief, I didn't have a repressor, I had an owner. Some days after he called me attacking me, saying that I he wouldn't deliver a coffee, something like this, and I told him, "I already have somebody in my life, I don't care about you" He told me: "For me, I can kill one, I kill two, I kill three, I kill all of them, you aren't worth it, you're worth nothing" (Ana Lucia, 53, High school Level). Earlier reports show that in the process of marital separation, women experience mixed feelings of hatred, grief, fear, comfort and mainly of hope for a new life, free from the masculine domination, as Maria Luiza's report (62 years, High school level): "[...] I am another person, my dreams aren't so strong, I don't think it is a fairytale anymore, that is a beautiful thing that we should do, isn't it?! [...] I really used this tool to survive."

### Final Considerations

To break an abusive relationship is a process that usually includes rejection, guilt and submission periods up until the woman becomes aware that the violence will continue to exist. This decision-making may be considered as the start of the abusive relationship breaking process and of its acknowledgement as a subject of rights. In these conditions, a good portion of the women splits, nevertheless some time after, trusting on a change of behavior of the partner, many of them restart the relationship, setting a cyclical state of violence, in which the part of reconciliation ends and new attacks happen. Then, some women recognize that it is needed to definitely cut ties with their partner. Though marital separation is very common in the current days, it usually causes suffering for the people sentimentally involved, after all at the same moment that the relation's end might bring comfort and hope, it might also come followed by other feelings like fear and insecurity what may explain the fact that in the majority of cases women decide to break the marital bond only after running out of all possibilities for keeping the relation.

This way, in cases of relationships characterized by violence one can lose children, friends, lifestyles, socioeconomic status, and more severely self-esteem and the relevance of life. These losses can yet give space to insecurity and mainly to an emptiness that is hard to fill, but that with confidence and courage women that experience uncertainty can endure and try to be happy.

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