

## Gender issues in Plato and Euripides: ancient bodies and gender performativity\*

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### Abstract

The current article draws on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory to analyse two classical text of Greek Antiquity – the *Bacchae* by Euripides and *The Republic* by Plato. The concept of gender performativity will be used to illustrate analogously even anachronically, how much the Greek imaginary, in spite of being temporally distant, can fruitfully contribute to, what we would identify as one of the most sophisticated contemporary theories in contemporary gender studies, both as this imaginary emerges from the literary discourse of the tragedy or the discourse of philosophy. This will allow us to show how the two above mentioned texts can contribute to the contemporary debate on the critical theory of gender identity, as these are fixed in performative acts that make gender conform to anatomic sex, limiting gender to the two possibilities of masculine or feminine. Considering the historical context and the question that are specific to the world of Ancient Greece, our analysis will permit us to cast light, in particular, on the strategies that Plato and Euripides drew on to disrupt the gender norms of the polis. Examining the texts allows us to argue that in antiquity, as well as in the contemporary world, albeit in different ways, discussions of gender relations are fitted primarily by the political discourse regarding these relations.

### Keywords

Plato – *Republic* – Euripides – *The Bacchae* – *Gender performativity*.

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## Introduction

The tradition of feminist studies, which merges with the disciplinary field known today by the perhaps more politically correct term, gender studies,<sup>3</sup> gives us an understanding of the categories of sex as produced by a specific power constellation which aims to – rhetorically – “create the effect of its own originality, naturality and inevitability” (BUTLER, 1999, p. xxviii [BUTLER, 2010, p. 9]). That is, a binary distinction of sexes, which fixes the feminine and the masculine in an imagined dichotomy. The construction of this binary opposition follows the intention to relegate the feminine to the place of *paranomía*, with respect to the point of view of empowered masculinity, which attributes to itself the function of *nómos*. The naturalisation of the sexual roles, therefore, would be the rhetorical result of a specific power strategy. It is in this way that Butler is able to affirm that – in this binary logic of the discourse of the sexes – “*being female is a natural indiposition*” (BUTLER, 1999, p. xxix [BUTLER, 2010, p. 8]).

The economy of these pages does not permit that we examine, with the detail it deserves, even the most recent feminist interpretation of Plato, as it dates back to Vlastos (*Was Plato a feminist?*, 1994), to a great length surpassed by Julia Annas (1996), and the reading of sexual difference by Luce Irigaray (1994), Giulia Sissa (1990), Sylviane Agacinski (1998) and Adriana Cavareiro (1999; 1995), and the more recent Foucaultian and Derridean approaches (SANFORD, 2010, p. 6). Suffice it to say that the thematic is polemic and the debate intense, as the different hermeneutic results that feminist studies of Plato are arriving at show.

What most interests us is the hypothesis that the ancient Greek culture, and Plato with it, is quite distant from this definition of the sexual man/woman dichotomy as we know it in our modernity, namely as rhetorically justified in the natural/biological distinction of sex.<sup>4</sup> It is Sanford who raises this hypothesis in their recent book titled *Plato and Sex* (2010), the repeated prohibitions against men behaving themselves as women in the *Republic* would be proof of exactly this, as they suggest a certain commutability between the sexes and that the definition of what it is to be a man or woman would depend more specifically on a series of characteristics which, in theory, and practice, could be assumed both by men. Truth be told, Vlastos had already noted a certain denaturalisation (or better yet, still-not-naturalised) of sexual difference in the pages of Plato when he affirmed, with respect to the characteristics that define the woman, that, “*Plato is not saying that are there as the permanently fixed, invariant, character of the female of the species, its nature: there in no reference of women’s phusis in [Republic]*” (VLASTOS, 1994, p. 18).

If, on one hand, it is certainly not justified to be speaking about gender relations in ancient Greece in dualist contemporary terms of sex-gender,<sup>5</sup> on the other hand, upon reading the ancient texts, the vertical way of organising relations between men and

**3-** The concept gained visibility in the 1980s with the re-systematization by Joan Scott in the article *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis* (1995), originally published in 1986. Nevertheless, before her important theorists used the term, such as Gayle Rubin (1975) e Nancy Chodorow (1979).

**4-** An exception in modernity is the “description” of human sexuality by Freud, in its proximity with the Platonic Eros. See for example the *Três ensaios sobre a teoria da sexualidade*, in which Freud posits that his theory in the main coincide with the Eros of the “divine Plato”. For a more in-depth discussion of the relation between these concepts see Sanford (2010, chap. 3).

**5-** See edited book by Thomas K. Hubbard (2014) *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*.

women does catch the eye. This hierarchy has in the man the prerogative to order the economy of power and *status* of individuals. Neither is the well-known importance that Greeks gave to human reproduction, often limiting the role of women to reproduction, to simple receptacle. The body as receptacle was her destiny.<sup>6</sup> With these observations in mind, we will analyse two texts, namely the *Bacchae*, by Eurípedes and the *Republic* by Plato. This will allow us to analyse to what degree these texts present one or the other approach. An alternative in which gender relations might be different, both from the ancient and the contemporary periods.

## Politics of Dionysiac confrontation

Greek culture, particularly the Athenian culture, appears to be oriented more along lines of what, in contemporary theory, with Butler (2010, 2011), we call gender performativity. That is, deliberate performative acts that can be developed into both a denaturalisation and a re-affirmation of gender norms. The cultural intelligibility of the performance is what tells us whether the acts subverts the norms or whether it is co-opted by the process of imitation of acts, which, due to their endless repetition, seek to normalize, conform and identify the material with the performance, or, in other words, the anatomical sex with gender identity. In this way we take the concept of gender performativity to illustrate analogously, even if anachronistically, how much Greek imaginary, though temporally distant, can provide us with good examples for what we would call one of the most sophisticated theories in gender studies today – whether this be via philosophical discourse or dramaturgy.

Lessa (2010) notes that, in Greek culture, gender roles, even if idealised on a normative level and identity acts, did not live fully up to their expectations; Thus, as an example, we see the so-called “high-born women”. These women learned a set of rules to follow in order to preserve their status. Nevertheless, as Lessa notes, the clothings and adornments worn by high-born women would from time to time be similar to such clothes reminiscent of the goddess of love, *Aphrodite*. Thus, seeing a Melissa with the clothes of *Aphrodite*, would have created a contradiction. Another detail that is characteristic of the diffuse border between the masculine and the feminine in the context of ancient Greece is the existence of a type of female clothing made by *chitón*, which could be used both by men just as well as women, which gives yet another “sign of the permeability between and complementarity between masculine and feminine space”. (LESSA, 2010, p. 38).

Precisely these relations have not ceased to go explored by dramatists. Thus, it is a well-known fact, that, in Greek theatre, the tragedy and the political were linked by the way they touched on questions which compelling the spectators. In the style of Eurípedes, for example, he, “on the contrary, not vacillate in to write political plays scenes or sayings that judgement about the remnant and it appears to do eco of the current problems”

**6-** The analysis of this aspect of the work of Plato is quite extensive and has as its primary reference the discussion in *Timeu* concerning the third element: *Chorã*. Lucy Irigaray (1994) and Judith Butler (2011) have dedicated significant attention to the study of this book. In the field of classical studies and its fusion with gender studies we find work such as by Emanuela Bianchi (2006) and Stanimir Panayotov (2011).

(ROMILLY, 1999, p. 103). It is in this terrain, therefore, that we will first construct our scene to think gender performativity in this period.

In the theatre of Euripides, we see a classical example of the notion of performative gender acts. Thus, in *Bacchae*, Dionysus is represented as a god whose gender performance is ambiguous. This god of excess – in a Nietzschean reading – enacts performances that cross the boundaries of the socio-political limits on anatomy. He carries out a true parody and shows himself to be conscious that the very origin of that which he imitates and performs is already a copy. In this way he plays with the norms as he does not have a fixed definition and by known that there is no ideal onto which we may attach such norms. As Romilly notes, Dionysus plays with images,

He starts the play under a false identity which he maintains till the end: thus, he passes for a Lydian priest, and only the spectator is in on the secret. It is also necessary to see how he mocks of Pentheus! Mocks it by words, spread ambiguous words, acts with supremacy in the face of the ignorance of the others. And when Pentheus send him to arrest he changed his shape. This master of illusion then becomes a bull; and, while the man is absorbed wanting to tie the bull, the god looks with amused irony: 'and I [...] was sitting and calm, looking'. (ROMILLY, 1999, p. 129-130).

Thus, Dionysus observed Pentheus infuriated as he played with transforming his body. In this play, the personality of Pentheus is a man who is put in a governing position, that is, in a position of power. One of the characteristics of his mode of governing is the aversion to all change of already established norms.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Pentheus not only expresses revulsion about the performances of Dionysus, but also those that accompany him: The women that “leave their houses” and even Cadmus and Tiresias, who, in their old age, do not stop honouring the god of timbrels and dances. His acts are political acts and he insists on showing his sovereignty. Pentheus thus claims for himself the power to decide who lives, how to live, and who dies. Let us allow for Pentheus’s own verses to elucidate this *dynamis that today we call, with Foucault and Agamben, biopower*,<sup>8</sup> as it is so familiar to us.

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**7-** Here the norm's notion is the sense given by Butler (2004, p. 41), according to your definition, “a norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation. Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce”.

**8-** Foucault (2008) dedicated part of his work to the study of the themes of government, state and power. He investigated how these structures have transformed over the centuries, culminating in the intensification of the control over life and death, a practice that is already present from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, and coincides with the birth of the juridical institutions and a new form of governing disassociated from the power of the king. Agamben (2010) takes up Foucault in several of his political analyses, and in the book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* he discusses sovereignty and biopower. In it Agamben radicalises the analysis according to which the political is constituted in the very sovereignty over the life and death of the body. In the words of Agamben: “Like the concepts of sex and sexuality, the concept of the “body’ too is always already caught in a deployment of power. The “body” is always already a biopolitical body and bare life, and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power.” (AGAMBEN, 2010, p. 181-182). The philosopher Achille Mbembe (2017), in the book *Politiques de l'inimitié*, is heavily influenced by the theories of Foucault and Agamben in his analysis. Mbembe, in his discussion of biopower establishes a relation between the state of exception and the state of siege, demonstrating of these forms of rule are, in the last instance, directly related to the control over life and death of certain individuals and bodies, from there comes the formulation of his concept of necropolitical (MBEMBE, 2017, p. 115).

Pentheus - I have captured some of them; my jailers have bound their hands and locked them in our prison. Those who run at large shall be hunted down out of the mountains like the animals they are - yes, my own mother Agave, and Ino and Autoñoë, the mother of Actaeon. In no time at all I shall have hem trapped in iron nets and stop this obscene disorder.

[...].

Pentheus - I am also told a foreigner has come to Thebes from Lydia, one of those charlatan magicians, with long yellow curls smelling of perfumes, with flushed cheeks and the spells of Aphrodite in his eyes. His days and nights he spends with women and girls, dangling before them the joys of initiation in his mysteries. But let me catch him in this land of mine and I'll stop his pounding with his wand and tossing his head. I'll have his head cut off his body! (EURÍPIDES, 2011, v. 227-41 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 227-41]).

Thus, for biopower life does not matter, but only some types of life. The lives that do not matter are left to abjection. The extermination of such abject bodies, incoherent and unintelligible is a common political practice, and is one more demonstration to affirm who institutes the norm and coherence by the obvious means of force and fear. In this way the lives of those who matter, that is, of those that carry in their bodies the normalisation of the sovereign discourse, will have their lives spared. Not because they matter in fact, but because they help maintain the sovereignty of those that have the force and power to dictate which performative acts should be realised. In this way the spectacles of horror and death serve as landscapes to be appreciated. Then Dionysus asks: "But for all your pain, you'd be very glad to see it?" Thus, Pentheus says: "Yes, very much. I could crouch beneath the fir trees, quietly." (EURÍPIDES, 2011, v. 816 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 815-816]).

And what happens when Dionysus tires of the parody and starts to intervene into politics? The punishment that Pentheus receives is, as we know, dressing as that which is repugnant to him, a bacchante. He not just dresses, but also performs.

Dionysus - Then you must dress yourself in women's clothes.

Pentheus - Why? I'm a man. You want me to become a woman?

Pentheus - What is this costume I must wear?

Dionysus - On your head I shall make your hair long and luxuriant.

Pentheus - And then?

Dionysus - Next, robes to your feet and a headband for your hair. (EURÍPEDES, 2011, v. 821-834 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 821-834]).

Surrendering to Dionysus, Pentheus, in a state of madness, not only changes his clothes<sup>9</sup> but also his identity as "a man of power". He permits himself to shake like a bacchante

**9-** In Amerindian perspectivism, according to Eduardo Viveiro de Castro (1996, p. 423), there is a conception associated to the notion that "the manifest form of each species is a mere envelope (a 'clothing') to hide the human form [of people]". What Viveiros de Castro calls "clothes" is the malleable notion of what makes the body variable, as each will wear the clothes of his "tribe", but even that will not fix the attributes, as it is "exchangeable and disposable clothes", which would allow permeability and metamorphosis. It is important to note that in Western cosmology, it is the body that is allied with nature and it is that unites beings; in Amerindian cosmology, the reverse happens, the body is the one that differentiates beings. For Amerindians, second to Viveiros de Castro, there is only one culture. However, there are numerous natures, which implies the thesis that

(EURÍPEDES, 2011, v. 930-931 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 930-931]), and has a performance as bacchante. Concerning the detail of his tunic on his left ankle, the dramaturge presents his corporeal expression: “bending backward to look”, Pentheus says to Dionysus that “at least on my right leg. But on the left the hem lies straight” (EURÍPEDES, 2011, v. 937-938 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 937-938]). Dionysus, attentive to his value and the sensibility to aesthetic detail, shows this ironically in congratulating him on his change in his “change of heart” (EURÍPEDES, 2011, v. 944 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 944]). It is in this way that the “effeminate stranger” manages to take vengeance on those that do not honour his divinity. However, he does more than take vengeance: he succeeds in rupturing the nucleus that sustained this same sovereignty. The death of Pentheus symbolises the disruption of the family, such as it signified in ancient Greece.<sup>10</sup> Cadmus is deprived of male offspring (EURÍPEDES, 2011, v. 1034-35 [EURIPIDES, 2013, 1034-35]). Women, even under the intoxicating effect of Dionysus carry out an insurrectionist performative act that they pride themselves of, as they understand the limits to which they are subjected. They understand that their bodies can do more than the limits imposed by the *polis*.

Agave - Now, Father, yours can be the proudest boast of living men, because you are the father of the bravest daughters in the world. All of your daughters are brave, but I above the rest. I have left my shuttle at the loom; I raised my sight to higher things - to hunting animals with my bare hands. (EURÍPEDES, 2011, v. 1231-39 [EURIPIDES, 2013, v. 1231-1239]).

As stated in the above, as performative gender act may both reaffirm a norm, as well as, based on the norm, promote the proliferation of others way of being. It is in this broad sense that the unfolding of events was then subversive. It was furthermore so because this crossing between genders, this disobedience to the idealised form of gender, when externalised into the political field of the city, has effects that are moral, ethical and, certainly, political. The gender performativity of bacchantes, even if in a transitory way - given that it occurred in the temporal space of Dionysian rites - pointed to a way to suspend the model of the Athenian political system of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, that is, a paradigm which, in its practice, subordinated women to reproductive activities of the polis above all. Within this paradigm there were not many possibilities for Athenian women, outside of performing the act of gestating human beings as legitimised within marriage.<sup>11</sup> According to Daraki (1994, p. 181), “the civic marriage regulates a single, narrow domain: the renewal of the political city”. The question that may be asked is: what kind of form does the political orientation take? And in which direction would this take the politic in the *polis*?

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the “difference is given by the specificity of the bodies”, (VIVEIRO DE CASTRO, 1996, p. 437). The bodies are a “set of affections or ways of being that constitute a habitus” (VIVEIRO DE CASTRO, 1996, p. 438).

**10-** Pierre Vernant observes that in the 5th century BC, there were many forms of union, nevertheless, “the democratic city strives to privilege one form of union and exclude the others” (VERNANT, 1992, p. 52).

**11-** About this subject: see the article *In Defense of Medea: a legal approach to Euripides* (LEÃO, 2011).

## Gender justice

We will now look into how this takes place in the philosophical discourse of Plato, or rather, how the exercise of thinking a just city brings him to construct subversive proposals for the customs of his time. Let us start by presenting these proposals that change the rules of the game of naturalised gender identities, even for their peers.

The polemic Plato stirs in Book V of the *Republic* is well known. The inclusion of women in the class of guardians was not easily accepted by his interlocutors, nor has it been over the last 2500 years by generations of Platonists.<sup>12</sup> In the dialogue, the difficulty that Plato's interlocutors encounter with thinking gender relations like Plato does it, lies in the conception of sexual difference between men and women as not only perceived, but as a biological and anatomic difference, as well as an ontological one. It is furthermore presupposed that each anatomic sex performs gender acts that conform to their anatomy. The problem here is how the concept of gender remain fixed within the limits of two sexes and two genders, in a way that culturally constituted genders are harmonised with the sexes.

An example of this conformity is the association of a person with a vagina with a performance of a woman, in the way that society categorises such a performance. There is here a mimetic effect, in which the body with a vagina corresponds to a woman, that is, a person of the female sex. However, it is known that this association simplifies the diversity of performances that a body with a vagina or a penis can have. The problem is: if anatomical sex exists as two,<sup>13</sup> why must gender identities also have the same number? If this is the case, "it would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category" (BUTLER, 2010, p. 25 [BUTLER, 1999, p. 11]). This is Butler's criticism of the theory of cultural construction of gender. According to the philosopher, this theory has as its first premise: i) that anatomical sex difference is unquestionable as it is legitimised by the discourse of biology, and, secondly, ii) that gender manifests itself in a sexed body by way of experiences and cultural significations.

What is generally not understood is the fact that performative acts are the effect of a cultural discourse that is exhaustively repeated with the intention of maintain the domination of one group over another. The imitation of this true gender is incentivised and realised by the very individuals that desire recognition in the group and this is spread out into the political and social body. In this terrain, Plato and Butler keenly and brilliantly critique the political structure that presumes and defines the codes of

**12-** Natalie Harris Bluestone, in the book *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and Modern Myths of Gender* (1987), investigates the Platonists reception of the Book V, in the period from 1870 to 1970. In their studies, she identified changes of view regarding the proposals of the Book V over time. Bluestone observes that the reception focused on the negative criticism of the proposals, as well as gaining sceptical and conservative.

**13-** Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993), in the article *The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough*, in which she points out the important biological and medical data showing that there are many anatomical degrees between male and female. According to her, in the standard medical literature the term intersex is used, which for its part divides all humans babies into three groups, those being: female, hermaphrodite and male. However, Sterling advocates for a further subdivision, based on biological studies of the hermaphrodite group, due to its complexity. These would be: *hermes*, *mermes* and *fermes*, and they are grouped according to the similarities and differences they present. For Sterling (1993, p. 21), sex is an "infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories".

intelligibility, putting them in the *safe* camp of an essentialist ontology, that is, as natural, thereby taking away their political character.

Plato starts by saying that the females of dogs do everything similarly to the males, and that is possible, according to him, because within the species the care for the offspring is not limited to the female. Thus, if one wants women in the same positions as men, it is necessary to give them the same education (PLATÃO, 1949, 451 e [PLATO, 1997, 451e]). But is different nature not one of the conditions for attributing different functions? How then permit that women do the same as men if they are differently made by nature? Should functions not be compatible with the nature of each?

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the themes discussed in the *Republic* have as their aim defining justice,<sup>14</sup> elucidate the characteristics of a just city and present a paradigm that may realise the project of this city. In this way we can understand that the proposals that Plato has for women as a class aims at the well-being of the whole city, including women.

Socrates - We take ourselves, then to be fashioning the happy city, not picking out a few happy people and putting them in it, but making the whole city happy. (PLATÃO, 1949, 420c [PLATO, 1997, 420c]).

[...]

Socrates - With this in mind, we should consider whether in setting up our guardians we are aiming to give them the greatest happiness, or whether - since our aim is to see that the city as a whole has the greatest happiness - we must compel and persuade the auxiliaries and guardians to follow our other policy and be the best possible craftsmen at their own work, and the same with all the others. In this way, with the whole city developing and being governed well, we must leave it to nature to provide each group with its share of happiness. (PLATÃO, 1949, 421c [PLATO, 1997, 421c]).

In proposing a reorganisation of the social and political configuration of relations in the *kallipolis*, Plato disrupts the very paradigm of gender relations, seeing them from another angle: from this new perspective men and women would take on almost radical alterity in the eyes Athenians of their time.

Socrates - But perhaps much of what we are saying, since it is contrary to custom, would incite ridicule if it were carried out in practice as we've described.

Socrates - What is the most ridiculous thing that you see in it? Isn't it obviously the women exercising naked in the palestras with the men? and not just the young women, but the older ones too - like old men in gymnasiums who, even though their bodies are wrinkled and not pleasant to look at, still love to do physical training?

Glaucon - Yes, that would look really ridiculous as things stand at present. (PLATÃO, 1949, 452a-b [PLATO, 1997, 452a-b]).

**14-** See, [PLATÃO, 1949, 472b] Plato (1997, 472b): "Well, then, we must first remember that we got to this point while trying to discover what justice and injustice are like".



The proposal that Plato makes concerning gender relations is possible because he does not see anatomic sex as a limit on the performances of individuals. He puts men's sexed bodies together with those of women on the same level, and it is from this level that he starts out on the political construction of the organisation of gender identities. We here use the contemporary terms to define Plato's (difficult) movement in the first wave<sup>15</sup> of his proposal to include women in the government of the city. As he himself stresses,

Socrates - Can we say, then, that we've escaped one wave of criticism in our discussion of the law about women, that we haven't been altogether swept away by laying it down that male and female guardians must share their entire way of live, and that our argument is consistent when it states that this is both possible and beneficial. (PLATÃO, 1949, 457b-c [PLATO, 1997, 457b-c]).

Rarely has such a moment occurred in the Western thought history, where it was possible to think politically the performative acts of men and women. On the contrary, it has been common to restrain them to anatomic sex with all that this signifies, such as, for example, the compulsory of maternity and to think the female anatomy as corporeally weaker in terms of physical force, and have this as a limit on their participation in the politic. Nothing more significant than for this rupture than the words of the philosopher:

Socrates - Therefore, if the male sex is seen to be different from the female with regard to a particular craft or way of life, we'll say that the relevant one must be assigned to it. But if it's apparent that they differ only in this respect, that the females bear children while the males beget them, we'll say that there has been no kind of proof that women are different from men with respect to what we're talking about, and we'll continue to believe that our guardians and their wives must have the same way of live. (PLATÃO, 1949, 454d-e [PLATO, 1997, 454d-e]).

To give an account of the idea that "Then there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she's woman or to a man because he's a man, but the various natures are distributed in the same way in both creatures" (PLATÃO, 1949, 455d [PLATO, 1997, 455d]). Plato says that it is necessary to distinguish what they refer to when they talk about *physis* in this dialogue. He thus starts to outline the argument, maybe the most important one, for his defense of the social and political rights of women. First, he says that it is necessary to distinguish what he terms *different nature* and *proper nature*. From this distinction, he goes on to pose an astute question: is the nature of the bald and the hairy the same? If we assume that the perceived difference between the bald and the hairy does not permit them to transition between positional spaces then the prohibition consists only in making, of the physical difference, an illusory barrier to mobility. However, if we admit that the bald and the hairy potentially have the

**15-** In the book V of the *Republic*, Plato outlines three political proposals that complete the project of the *Kalipollis*. Given the degree of difficulty and novelty in these proposals, the philosopher uses a marine metaphor, naming them *waves*. Plato presents each of the proposals according to the degree of complexity of each respectively. In his own words: "You may not know that after I have escaped to waves, you are now raising a third, which is the tallest and hardest to climb if them all" (PLATÃO, 1949, 472a [PLATO, 1997, 472a]). The first wave concerns social inclusion and politics of women, of the class of guardians, in the government. In the second "wave" Plato proposes a social organisation based on the community of women and children, of the class of guardians; in the third and final "wave", which he also considers the hardest, Plato presents the argument according to which the ruler should be a philosopher.

same natural capacities, the barrier *constructed based on physical difference, which is only a difference on the level of the senses, is not applicable anymore.*

Socrates - Therefore, we might just as well, it seems, ask ourselves whether the natures of bald and long-haired men are the same or opposite. And, when we agree that they are opposite, then if the bald ones are cobblers, we ought to forbid the long-haired ones to be cobblers, and if the long-haired ones are cobblers, we ought to forbid this to the bald ones.

Glaucon - That would indeed be ridiculous!

Socrates - And aren't we in this ridiculous position because at that time we did not introduce every form of sameness and difference that was relevant to the particular ways of life themselves? We meant, for example, that a male and female doctor have souls of the same nature. Or don't you think so?

Glaucon - I do.

Socrates - But a doctor and a carpenter have different ones? (PLATÃO, 1949, 454c-d [PLATO, 1997, 454c-d]).

The example permits the conclusion that men and women, being gifted with the same nature, have the same capacities if they are given the same education and training. That is, their nature does not differ them; their difference is only anatomical and that should not prevent women from developing other capacities than those bestowed on them by the customs.

To this Simone de Beauvoir would add: even if it is concluded that the sex and anatomy of women imposes a limit on them, it is necessary that we define:

As soon as we accept a human perspective, defining the body starting from existence, biology becomes an abstract science; when the physiological given (muscular inferiority) takes on meaning, this meaning immediately becomes dependent on a whole context. (BEAUVOIR, 2015, p. 76 [2010, p. 75]).

The discussion of the inclusion of women in the class of guardians would also have this intent, that is of making it clear that individually, as much between men as between women in their respective groups differ between themselves, that is, men differ between themselves, women are not all the same and the same happens within both sexes. However, these differences, as we have seen, are not *per se* arguments for the exclusion of one or the other sex from certain functions.

Socrates - We'll say, I suppose, that one woman is a doctor, another not, and that one is musical by nature, another not.

[...]

Socrates - Then, what do you think about this?

Glauco - What?

Socrates - About one man being better and another worse. Or do you think they're all alike?

Glauco - Certainly not. (PLATÃO, 1949, 455e-456d [PLATO, 1997, 455e-456d]).

In a city in which the laws are just people would use these differences from the common good. There would both be excellent female as well as male doctors, just as there would be both excellent female guardians and male guardians. Nevertheless, organising this work is the function of the governing class of the polis to build the just politics. It is about not just giving women equal opportunities on the intellectual level, but also the practical conditions for the development of all their capacities as a whole. Going on, Plato says that:

[...] and then, as the children are born, they'll be taken over the officials appointed for the purpose, who may be either men or women or both, since our offices are open to both sexes" (PLATÃO, 1949, 460b [PLATO, 1997, 460b]).

In other words, that which is considered by his interlocutors as "very easy for the wives" (PLATÃO, 1949, 460d [PLATO, 1997, 460d]), Plato sees as necessary for the development achievement of *kallipolis*.

Mikkola (2016), in her recent work *The Wrong of Injustice*, does not directly reference the Republic, but could nevertheless have a fruitful dialogue with the Athenian philosopher. Thus, she shows how, still to this day, injustices continue to be committed against women on a large scale, only for being women. Injustices that are shaped within a process of what she terms *dehumanization* – or, in the vocabulary of Butler (2011) and Kristeva (1982), abjection. *Dehumanization* is a series of violence committed against women that take away the dignity of the person. These forms of violence sometimes prevent women from participating with equal opportunities to men in social life. General forms of injustice such as domination, discrimination and oppression bring with specific form of injustice, such as sexism (femicide, physical and psychological violence and sexual violence), racism, homophobia, social prejudice, as well as many others. Mikkola adds the prohibition of women from education, in a global context, to this context of *dehumanisation*.<sup>16</sup>

For instance, consider the practice of denying females access to education. This denial has repercussions for a wide range of basic welfare interests and constitutes an indefensible setback to such interests where the indefensibility is partly explicated in terms of underlying patriarchal social arrangements. Of course, in this case such social arrangements also cause women's welfare interests to be hampered. Now, such denials are usually based on certain supposed facts about women and their nature. In so doing, the treatment clearly fails to recognize that there is nothing intrinsic about women that makes them incapable of being educated or choosing their own life plans – it simply gets the relevant facts about women qua human. Furthermore, the denial is indefensible in being unjustifiable and inexcusable. It is unjustifiable on epistemic grounds: namely, it is simply empirically mistaken to think that there is something about women's nature and natural abilities that justifies the denial of education. (MIKKOLA, 2016, p. 170-171).

**16-** According to the research led by UNESCO Atlas of Gender Inequality in Education (2016), on the global context, there are 16 million girls between 6 and 11 years old that never will attend school.

The proposals of Plato for women can be understood today, above all, as a form of political contest. To contest the politics that excludes and segregates. A politics that, laden with its corruptible character, is for the few, be it in a democratic capitalism system or authoritarian. When the philosopher puts women in the political arena, he does not seek to say what women are, nor determine a feminine *ethos*. That is, he does not seek to reorganise gender roles in the polis, for this would, in a certain way, presume established gender identities. The Book V, being part of a broader project for the city, would not admit to such rigid limits on the codes of performative gender acts. However, Plato insists on familiarizing his interlocutors with the possibility of new bodies in politics.

Glaucon - Like a sculptor, Socrates, you've produced ruling men that are completely fine.

Socrates - And ruling women, too, Glaucon. (PLATÃO, 1949, 540c [PLATO, 1997, 540c]).

The turn from parody to the political, perhaps become more emphatic in Plato than in Euripides. Thus, Plato does not only subvert the notion of who are the political subjects but also brings up possibilities outside of the intelligibility of the political body. In other words, the "fragile bodies" of women emerge in the heart of the city.

Socrates - This is the quickest and easiest way for the city and constitution we've discussed to be established, become happy, and bring most benefit to the people among whom it's established. (PLATÃO, 1949, 541a [PLATO, 1997, 541a]).

## Final considerations

Our analysis of two texts, in different styles but both from classic antiquity, seen under the prism of a contemporary theory shows us how much ancient texts can help us understand the problems of our times. An understanding of the analysis than we embark on can occur exactly because of the marked difference between the understandings of gender identities and their social representations. Thus, Plato and Euripides, clearly show how much the borders between the masculine and the feminine, as much in the sphere of sexuality as in the sphere of the political, are diffuse and emerge from political discourse, as Butler points out, which seeks to conform the possibility of performative gender acts with a binary narrative of gender identities. Undoubtedly, the texts have permitted an exercise in thinking possibilities of configuring gender relations.

Euripides, in the theatre presented a vision of which configurations a city can get, depending on the *ethos* of the person governing it. In this way he showed us a polis dominated by political practices that segregated and excluded all forms of manifestations of that which was not recognised as tradition given by the sovereign power. Plato, in his sagacious style of making philosophy, involves us in his discourse, with which he provides evidence for the arbitrariness of custom, ironizing the tacit acceptance of tradition. He thus proposes, within a political work, an exercise in thinking collective relations in a different way, an exercise in both thought and action. In this way Euripides and Plato acted with a spirit of disrupting the norms and customs of their times, contributing to suggesting the possibility of rupturing, to some degree, with the identities attributed to women.

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