

The Women and the Politics

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New Zealand was the first country in the world to award the right to vote to women in 1893, amplifying the political rights they had in the city counties (municípios) since 1886. Australia did the same in 1902 with some restrictions. In Europe, the first country where women won the right to vote was in Finland, in 1906. In England, women began their struggle for the right to vote, but it would be harder reach its highest point with prison, arrest and even death.

In Brazil, it happened in 1932. So, the gender democratic dept has been a long way.

What happens is that this victory did not mean a substantial change in the social values of that time, since women were still submitted to a conservative patriarchal structure and a citizenship model that privileged the public image as a pace for male.

Women, for the way they were introduced to the politics, needed a greater time to adapt to the new reality. The insecurity, the unfamiliarity of the rules of the public world, the cultural and psychological aspects, and the excluding political practices were still affecting the women, keeping them apart of the formal structure of the political power (FERREIRA 2003).

Data from the survey “Women in the America: ways to get the political power”, published in January 2008 by the Bank of Interamerican Development, in partnership with other organizations report that Brazil is the second country of the Americas with the smallest number of women in charge of ministries. Women are in charge of less than 10% of the first positions of the Executive. Mexico and Ecuador are in the same scale of Brazil.

Chile represents a better number – it’s the only one with more than half of the ministries in charge of women.

The access of women to power in Brazil

From a total of 127,4 millions of Brazilian electors, 65,5 millions (51,7%) are women, according to the Superior Electoral Court (TSE). Unfortunately, these impressive data do not reflect the quantitative of elected women, i.e., the amount responsible for the elaboration of the country’s laws.

In 1996, the National Congress created the system of Electoral Legislation Quotas which obliged all parties to enroll, at least, 20% of women in the electoral slate. In the following year, the system was revised and the minimum changed to 30%.

Law 9.504 of September 30, 1997, in its third paragraph of article 10, aiming to create mechanisms to stimulate women's participation established: "From the number of positions resulting from the rules foreseen in this article, each party of colligation should reserve a minimum of 30% and the maximum of 70% for candidacies of each gender." Since then, the number of candidates and elected women has grown.

It is important to point out that although this procedure has been the target of criticism, it has brought visibility to women's exclusion in the political scenario and to the disparity in the political participation, between man and women.

From the current 51.942 councilman only 6.550 are women (12,6%) The percentage of female state deputies is even less. There are 123 (11,95%) against 1.035 male state deputies.

In the campaign of 2004, only 407 of the 5.558 city counties elected women for the major positions. The index of 7,37% is practically the same of the average reported in Latin American countries in the beginning of the 90's.

In general, women with a mandate come from social movements or begin their political lives taking advantage of the family political capital.

According to data from ONU, keeping the current growing rate of 1 to 2%, Brazil will only reach a parity within 400 years!

That's why there is a need to improve affirmative actions, advised by the many treats and international conferences of which Brazil is a signatory.

The Oppression Numbers

The number of women that participate in the labor markets In the world is the highest in history, although these workers are more exposed than men, and have their low productive jobs low paid and vulnerable, without social protection or right, according to the **International Labor Organization** in a report entitled "World Tendencies for Women Employment" presented in March 2008.

Other important data from the report:

- the female world unemployment rate was 6,4% compared to 5,7% for man.
- There are less than 70 women economically active for each 100 men. Frequently, the decision to not become part of the labor force is not an option, but a cultural imposition.

- The relation population-employment of women worldwide was 49,1% in 2007 compared to 74,3% for men. This relation is an indicator of the way that economies use the potential of the population able to work.
- During the last decade, the services sector overcame the agricultural sector as the main job provider for women. In 2007, 36,1% of women worked in the agriculture and 46,3% in the services sector. In comparison, the proportion of men was 34% in agriculture and 40,4% in services.
- There are more women with access to education, but in some regions the equality in this field is far distant from reality.

Following the world trend, in Latin America and the Caribbean, women are the majority in the segment services (where the informality predominates): 74,8% of them are effective in the services against 48% of men.

This way, the vulnerability continues to affect more women than men, specially in the poorer regions of the world.

In Brazil, the Monthly Employment Research of IBGE, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, in six capitals: Recife, Salvador, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo e Porto Alegre (date from the period of January 2003 to January 2008) shows that women are still the most explored.

- representing 53,5% of the Brazilian population economically active, women occupy only 44,4% of the jobs.
- From the total unemployment of the metropolitan regions of the research, 1 million women against 775 thousand men in the same situation.
- One female worker receives in average 71,3% of what a man receives for the same job.
- A woman who has higher education has a salary in average 40% smaller than a man for the same position.
- In January 2008 the unemployment tax among women was 10,1% and 6,2% among men.
- Women are the head of 30% of Brazilian families.

It is not without a reason that women are among the poorest segments of the society. For most of them the change from a vulnerable job to the category of a remunerated job represents an important step towards her economic independence and self-determination.

We know that the world population is getting older and there is a need to insert a greater number of people in the productive world. The women may represent this extra labor force, necessary to the economic growth and the reduction of social inequalities.

Confronting all these obstacles, women follow their way being responsible for the domestic activities, for taking care of the children and other family members. This represents an overload for those who also perform economic activities. As an example of this overload: the number of hours frequently devoted to these tasks: 7 hours per week for men and 20 hours per week for women.

A research conducted by the Ethos Institute in 2007, entitled “Social, Racial and Gender Profile of the 500 Biggest Companies in Brazil and its Affirmative Actions” shows that the gender disparity is still significant among the employees of the companies where the research was conducted.

“This happens specially in the higher positions: the executive with 11,5% of women and management with 24,6%. The disparity continues to be significant even in the levels where women have a greater participation: supervision (37%) and functional (35%).

It means that there is a narrowing effect: there are less women in the higher levels of the companies’ hierarchy.

According to the German philosopher Fridrick Engels (1820-1895) “the women’s emancipation, her equality of condition in relations to men is impossible and will continue to be while women is excluded from productive social work and is limited to the private domestic job. For the emancipation to be a reality it is necessary, before all, that the woman participates in the production in social large scale and that the domestic job do not occupy her beyond an insignificant measure”.

The fact is that the gender discrimination, besides promoting poverty, it contributes significantly to devaluate the role of women in our society.

Why is it important to insert women in politics?

The participation of women in politics is of utmost importance for the development of gender public policies in Brazil. Women are resentful when social policies are not being well executed. We have a lot of examples such as the struggle for more day nurseries, for the access to quality health and education, the struggle to stop violence against women and also for recognizing an invisible job which is the domestic job.

A significant aspect is the massive presence of women in the non-government organization and the volunteer work in Brazil, where women are the absolute majority among volunteers (53%) according to the data from “the Voluntary Portal”.

The same source shows that volunteers have a higher level of education – 23% have post-graduation and 20% have completed higher education – and 31% of them are between 18 and 34 years-old.

When they are not involved with voluntary work, women improve the efficiency of the social action and create solidarity networks, giving an structure to a work that collaborates with the construction of citizenship.

But, women started to perceive what they can do more if they are in the legislative or executive, if they are in the power, exercising power.

We, women, know that only through the active political participation we will be able to interfere in the necessary changes in our society. And the society needs people willing to process these changes, and who have some essential characteristics to exercise the public power:

1. HONESTY – women who have integrity and decency, to give examples of dignity.
2. COMPETENCE – women who make it happen, who do not live on theory but on the practice, observing the society day-by-day.
3. SENSIBILITY – women who are able to decide, while they are public managers, where to invest the scarce public resources.

These are the women in society who do not have resources to purchase their own houses, who need to get assistance from the public hospitals when their children are sick, who need a day care for their children, who need a public school of quality.

And it is the third point that we need the presence of women in the politics. It is the woman who administers the family every day and it makes her sensible to the social problems that interferes in the family routine.

So, the women's participation in the politics is necessary to offer more quality to the Brazilian Politics and also to improve the quality of the application of the scarce public resources.

Dr. Lucia Avelar, professor of the University of Brasilia and author of the book entitled Women in the Brazilian Political Elite states that the participation of the woman in the public life brings a new trend. Men and Women differ in their priorities and complement themselves, since women are more sensible to social and family questions, giving priority to their origins, such as living conditions, work, raising children, health, educations and reproduction.

The difference may be enriching, but the inequality can turn to crime in the sense that all society suffers with the damage.

It is necessary to create a new awareness of the role of women in society and the presence of women as managers is indispensable. So, it is important for the woman to struggle for the power and exercise it, but with her own characteristics, with sensibility, with sense of justice and ethics when treating with the public property. The society moves forward when it happens.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN CITY COUNTY ELECTIONS (Municípios)

The city county is the space where daily routine develops. It is where the possibility of dialogue, negotiation and development of opportunities and people's potentialities is concretely established.

The city county elections are the adequate space for the woman to place herself as a candidate with good chances of success.

In 2008, women presented 1.580 female candidates against 13.677 male candidates. In the city county elections of 2000, 317 women were elected (5,70%) and 5.241 men (94,28%). In 2004, women were elected to conduct 418 assignments in City Halls. This number is really significant as it represents an increase of 31,86% in relation to the number of elected women in 2000. These numbers demonstrate that women have advanced and made a difference in municipal elections.

To win the local power is the most viable option for women who share their time with multiple tasks: household, children education and many other. The Chamber and the Senate demand a higher sacrifice from one's private life, as it is necessary to relocate to the capital of Brazil.

May women who chose a public life have a supporting female network to fulfill the political assignment: they are mothers, sisters, sisters-in-law, godmother or friends who accompany them. This leads us to a discussion about the meaning of power to women.

Women are aware of the difficulties faced by them to ascend to power. So they are more sensible in the search of solutions of common problems to render less difficult the distance of their sons, or to go shopping by implementing an adequate logistic and find some time for themselves and their families.

Improving the participation of women in the city halls election is the first step to change the access and exercise power in the country.

AND WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?

Women want to struggle for getting deeper into democracy. They want a fair society and it requires universal public policies and affirmative actions, assuring equal rights.

Women are tired to be the fighting fellow. They want to share the practice of power. And to share this practice, women need to be part of the political process.

The importance of this exercise resides in the fact that the political essence is the transforming action. It is the political action, this transforming action, which is the process of organizing the society, so it may not be manipulated by a dominant minority.

To empower woman is to strengthen democracy, the human right, the husband, or fellow, the child, the family, the society, the nation, the world. Women just want to replace history for the utopia of building a better society.

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Observation:

The article Women and the Politics, was published by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Foundation in the book Dialogue and Exchange between Political Parties, Políticos y Sociedad Civil em Mercosur - 2008

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