

The construction of publicly significant feminine identities in the Portuguese Quality Press<sup>i</sup>

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This chapter explores how the Portuguese Quality Press construes feminine identities as publicly significant. The conceptualisation of the public sphere as intertwining with, or repressing, private issues is analysed in two instances. First, through content analysis of the *Diário de Notícias* and *Público* newspapers from February to April 2006 on the basis of a typology defining liberal and radical feminisms. The topics deemed as publicly relevant, whether focusing on autonomy and equality in the public sphere or on the interrogation of the privacy of personal issues, point to debates between those two feminist currents. Critical Discourse Analysis is then applied to texts relating to the private sphere categories that attain particularly high and discrepant frequency ratings in any one month. Our principal objective here is to test the hypothesis that private issues gain visibility essentially due to short-lived, external circumstances. Newspaper adherence to feminist ideals at a manifest level may therefore be negated at a more latent level, perpetuating an understanding of power as synonymous with a liberal conception of the public sphere that trivialises the private.

## I. Introduction

This chapter explores how feminine identity is constructed by the Portuguese quality press as being of public significance. The articulation of power as synonymous with the ‘public sphere’ will be analysed so as to uncover the degree to which ‘private’ issues, traditionally associated with women, are either given visibility or repressed in an allegedly universal domain.

The debate over what is public and private has been particularly expounded on by both liberal and radical feminist positions on power, understood as meaningful access to a public sphere. The privileging by liberal feminism of a discourse on ‘rights and rules’

that regulates interaction through criteria of justice within the public sphere contrasts with radical feminist attempts to politicise personal issues, drawing attention to the public relevance of issues allegedly pertaining to the private sphere. Whilst liberal feminism presupposes the existence of a dichotomy between public and private spheres, claiming that private life should not be the object of coercive regulation, radical feminism argues for the dilution of that very dichotomy (Humm, 2003: 151), interrogating the boundaries of strictly delimited public and private domains.

The affirmation, through the media, of a truly representative democratic public sphere implies a high degree of universality. If we are to interpret this universality as the full exercise of participatory citizenship, the public sphere appears to be constantly transversed by the private domain, thus reproducing the will to politicise the personal that characterises the radical feminist current. The extent to which the Portuguese quality press conceptualises the public domain as intertwining with, or simply repressing, private issues, habitually associated with the ‘feminine’, will be explored and problematised in this chapter.

## II. Literature Review

Various feminist theorists (Fraser, 1990; Felski, 1989; Benhabib, 1997) take issue with the universality posited by the Habermasian conception of the public sphere, which allegedly consists in a ‘realm of social life’, open to all, in which individuals come together to discuss political issues relevant to the ‘common good’ (1989). They focus on the social exclusions that influence the deliberative processes within the official public

sphere. The object of analysis thus becomes the activity of participants in counter-public spheres rather than that of participants in an official public sphere. Because the feminist counter-public sphere is founded on the specificity of a female identity, it distances itself from Habermas's project in that the will towards emancipation is oriented towards the assertion of particularity in relation to issues of 'gender, race, ethnicity, age and sexual preference' (Felski, 1989). Moreover, it critiques a strict dichotomy between public and private realms, drawing attention to the fact that the public and private are intertwined (McDonald, 1995).

However, the feminist counter-public sphere can also be read as premised on the idea of universality, due to presupposing the universal character of gender oppression. In privileging the latter, the feminist counter-public sphere is often accused of marginalising struggles based on other exclusions, namely those of race and class. bell hooks, for example, states that working-class women were suspicious of the feminist movement from its onset, due to recognising the limits inherent in the definition of 'feminism'. For hooks, difficulty in reaching consensus on this term facilitates a comfortable, 'upper middle-class' liberal feminist hegemony, centred on romantic issues of freedom and equality (1997: 23-4).

Taking into account these critiques of the feminist counter-public sphere, authors such as McLaughlin claim that feminist media studies should recuperate the concept of the traditional public sphere, going beyond 'the tendency to focus on internal, oppositional identity at the expense of a consideration of the media's role in hindering the

establishment of representative space necessary for democracy in late capitalism' (1993: 614). Seyla Benhabib has also defended the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality, upholding dialogical consensus as a form of overcoming disagreements between factions through the 'capacity for reversing perspectives' and the 'capacity to assume the moral point of view' ensuing from dialogue and debate (1997: 52).

Content analyses which focus on the representation of women in the media have traditionally operated within the liberal feminist perspective, concentrating on the 'presence of absence' and gender stereotypes (Tuchman, 1978: 406-7) so as to assess whether or not these hinder the exercise of participatory citizenship. A logic of sameness between male and female rationality provides the basis for women's claim to equality and autonomy: 'since women are as rational as men, society carries a duty to give its female citizens equal opportunity to take part in social organisation' (Gambaudo, 2007: 94). However, women's greater visibility in the public arena leads to a distancing from the liberal focus on 'sameness' and equality. Instead of placing emphasis on women's capacity to assimilate characteristics associated with masculinity such as rationality, proactivity, and responsibility (Gambaudo, 2007; 94-5) – traits that allegedly caused women to judge themselves from a male perspective –, radical feminism foregrounds women's right to difference, namely to the specificity of a 'female' identity. Radical feminism thus draws attention to the fact that liberal feminism imposed a masculine model on women's recognition in the public sphere, outside of which they remained invisible.

### III. Methodology

Content analysis of *Público* and *Diário de Notícias*'s text units centring on women both as subject and object of news was complemented, in a second instance, by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the coded units. The *Diário de Notícias* and *Público* were selected as quality papers due to habitually being used as benchmarks when assessing the quality of other Portuguese newspapers. For the sake of optimisation of resources, analysis was restricted to the first week of February, the second week of March and the third week of April 2006.

Taking into account that the liberal and radical feminist debate gravitates around what type of issues – either public or private – should have visibility in the public sphere, a typology contemplating categories that define liberal and radical feminisms served as the basis for the coding of text units drawn from two newspapers so as to assess the representativity of those very categories.<sup>ii</sup> The kind of topics deemed as publicly relevant, whether focusing on autonomy and equality in the public sphere on the one hand or on the interrogation of the privacy of personal issues on the other hand, ultimately point to the debates between those two feminist currents.

The fact that three 'private sphere' categories – homosexuality, transsexuality and maternity – attain high frequency ratings in any one month in contrast to the other two months analysed, alongside the fact that public sphere categories are clearly more represented than those associated with the private domain, can be interpreted as indicating that private issues gain visibility essentially due to short-lived, external

circumstances. On the basis of this presupposition, it would be reasonable to infer that pieces coded under homosexuality, transsexuality and maternity during the month of particularly high coverage might reveal profound contradictions between topical adherence to feminist ideals at a manifest level and other elements articulated at a more latent level that contribute to an ambivalence of meanings regarding the apparent celebration of such causes. CDA was thus applied to these text units so as to explore incongruities between their explicit and implicit levels, hopefully allowing for an understanding of the ideological underpinnings that reproduce and legitimate the mental representations shared by members of either paper's 'ingroup'. Such ideological underpinnings may circumstantially appear to be shaken at a manifest level; however, reading between the lines might actually confirm the attempt to formulate social judgements in keeping with either newspaper's readers' ideologically-conditioned view of the world.

For Van Dijk, the 'aim of CDA is to critically analyse the details of discursive domination ...by specific elite authors, and in specific contexts' (2008: 821). In effect, news reporting which sidelines the negative actions of influential social agents serves the purpose of 'implementing locally the overall ideological discourse strategy of positive self-presentation of in-groups' (Van Dijk, 2006: 129) defined against a detrimental presentation of the out-group.

In order to understand the 'ingroups' that *Público* and *Diário de Notícias* address, one must contextualise the respective demographic readership profile. During the time-frame

analysed, ranging from February to April 2006, the average Portuguese readership for general interest daily newspapers was that of 25.8% within a universe comprising 8,311,409 individuals, of which 4.5% were *Público* readers and 3.2% *Diário de Notícias* readers. While 42.6% of *Público*'s readers belong to the managerial and professional classes – corresponding to the AB grouping according to the U.K National Readership Survey (NRS) social grade scheme –, aged between 25 and 45, *Diário de Notícias*'s leading audience, at 30%, comes from the supervisory and clerical (C1) grouping. *Público* caters to a 'youngish' audience, for 31.2% of its readers are less than 30 years old and 41.1% are aged between 31 and 50, in contrast to *Diário de Notícias*'s readership which is composed of 68.2% of individuals aged between 31 and 64. Furthermore, *Público*'s audience boasts a higher level of education than *Diário de Notícias*'s, with 44.1% of its readers having undergone a schooling period ranging from 10 to 12 years, against *Diário de Notícias*'s readers, 39.6% of whom underwent a schooling period ranging from five to nine years. However, *Diário de Notícias* is the only Portuguese newspaper with a predominantly female readership, totalising 52.6% against *Público*'s 40%. *Público*'s audience is mainly urban, due to the paper achieving highest circulation rates in the two major Portuguese cities, namely Lisbon and Oporto; despite its sales being more widespread in Lisbon than in other areas, *Diário de Notícias* also has high circulation rates in the Northern and Central coastal regions, implying the existence of an audience that is not as urbanised as that of *Público* (Sources: Marktest Bareme-Imprensa, 2006; Meios e Publicidade, 2008).

By focusing on the relations between discourse and power, CDA seeks to uncover the strategies through which the media ‘influence people’s minds’, namely ‘their knowledge or opinions’ (Van Dijk, 2001: 355). This influence can be articulated through the Gramscian concept of hegemony (1996), according to which the power of dominant groups is exercised, on a daily basis, through persuasive rather than repressive means. In this sense, then, rather than seeking to alter recipients’ view of the world, the media seek to reproduce the mental representations shared by the members of a particular ‘in-group’. Through recourse to particular language and symbolisation that create ‘a common sense’, or social consensus, that helps ‘shape popular life’ (Hall, 1996a: 439), media texts provide ideological support for dominant power structures.

#### IV. Content Analysis Results

The content analysis results laid out in the table below clearly show a prevalence of public sphere issues over those of the private sphere in the two papers analysed. In general terms, the private sphere serves as a comparative counterpoint to that of the public sphere: any public sphere parity attained has to be read in light of visibility of private sphere issues. The topics that appear in the table are only those which reveal a frequency rate above 5% for at least one of the newspapers. Topics which averaged below 5% in both newspapers were considered to not warrant sufficient attention on the part of the press so as to be visibly significant.

While *Diário de Notícias* beats *Público* on almost every count regarding women’s visibility – a fact that may explain its being the only Portuguese newspaper with a

predominantly female readership – *Público* takes the lead regarding two ‘public sphere’ categories, namely ‘cause promotion’ and ‘high hierarchy’. The fact that the women it chooses to give visibility to within the public sphere are those who champion causes and belong to a high political, economic or social hierarchy is in keeping with this newspaper’s elitist bend, catering to an audience from an AB grouping. The greatest discrepancies between the two papers can be found in coverage of private issues, namely those of relationships and maternity, with the *Diário de Notícias* assuming a prominent role in this matter. Again, the fact that this paper has a readership composed of 52.6% women, most of whom belong to a moderately educated C1 social group may explain the greater news-value given to these categories here than in *Público*. The deviancy rate between public and private sphere visibility in *Diário de Notícias* is 5.3% compared with *Público*’s 8.3%, which may lead to us to reflect on the fact that the extent to which both newspapers differ in coverage of public and private is not as significant as other results might indicate.

***Table with global averages for most frequent categories. Shaded areas represent the highest percentage within each category.***

| <i>Categories</i> | <i>Público</i> | <i>Diário de Notícias</i> |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Liberal Feminism  | 40,6%          | 51,6%                     |
| Radical Feminism  | 11.2%          | 16%                       |
|                   |                |                           |
| Female Equality   | 36,3%          | 45,6%                     |

| <i>Categories</i>                           | <i>Público</i> | <i>Diário de Notícias</i> |
|---|----------------|---------------------------|
| Female Autonomy                             | 22,0%          | 28%                       |
|   |                |                           |
| Public Sphere Visibility                    | 24.3%          | 27.3%                     |
| Influence                                   | 15,2%          | 17,0%                     |
| Cause Promotion                             | 10,0%          | 9,1%                      |
| High Hierarchy                              | 9,2%           | 8,4%                      |
| Political Participation                     | 7,1%           | 8,2%                      |
| Judicial Complaints                         | 4,6%           | 5,3%                      |
| Celebrity                                   | 4,1%           | 5,8%                      |
|   |                |                           |
| Private Sphere Visibility                   | 16%            | 22%                       |
| Relationships (Homosexual and Heterosexual) | 6,0%           | 9,7%                      |
| Maternity                                   | 5,2%           | 9,8%                      |
| Body  | 10,6%          | 12,9%                     |

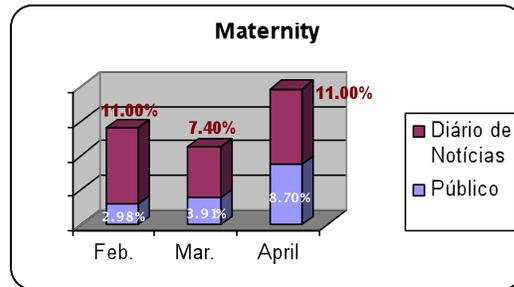
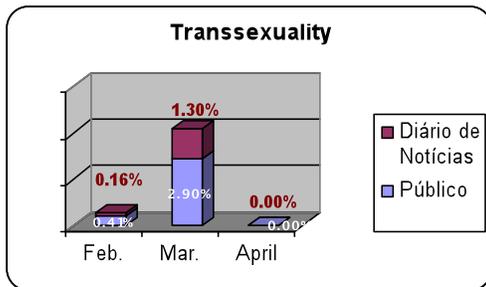
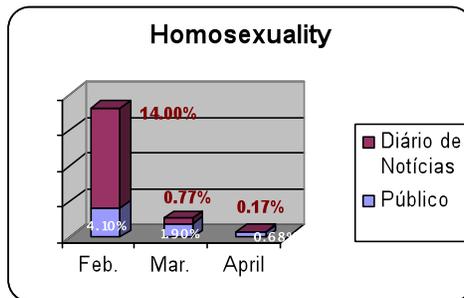
Emphasis on public sphere issues conceptualises female power according to a model of masculine authority. The degree of parity and hierarchy attained by women in political, work and trade union sectors, the degree of influence exercised by women as celebrities, cause promoters and models to be followed, the degree of authority recognised by women as credible agents in the exercise of power and, lastly, the degree of female participation

on the civic, political and union levels express the level of gender recognition in the public sphere. Legal complaints focusing on topics such as rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence and discrimination in the workplace, all of which correspond to manifestations of violence, or social coercion, that draw attention to the vulnerability of women and to the inequity of gender relations, also attests to the level of visibility of a sexual politics of rights in the public sphere.

Female visibility in the private sphere focuses on female action within the domestic sphere, a type of action that is not usually visible in the public sphere. Jean Bethke Elshtain (1979) used the term ‘non-intentional power’ to designate the way a certain group is regarded as holding power due to its position in society. Following this line of thought, we can consider that women hold ‘non-intentional’ power in the private sphere, due to a cultural and historical legacy that associates them with activities such as caretaking, home management, and maternity. The theme of the body can be understood in light of the concept of ‘non-intentional power’, for women acquire social status by showing off a body that is a marker of health and beauty: health and beauty are goods that acquire exchange value to the extent that they connote a woman’s reproductive and competitive capacity within the private realm. In effect, female power in the public sphere, with the exception of the ‘celebrity’ category, is generally conceived according to ‘masculine’ parameters, and is thus antagonistic to that of the private sphere, where the most valued activities usually relate in some way or other to the body.

## V. Critical Discourse Analysis of Topical Issues

In February, homosexuality in both newspapers scored a higher frequency rate than normal due to the possibility of lesbian marriage being on the agenda.<sup>iii</sup> Despite ranking low in absolute terms, transsexuality was given more coverage by both papers in March. This came about because of the abuse and death of a Brazilian transsexual, Gisberta, at the hands of a group of adolescent boys. Maternity was pervasive in the news during April due to the Portuguese Socialist Government’s decision to close a number of maternity wards throughout the country with the aim of concentrating services in larger hospitals so as to maximise efficiency.



***Charts for “Homosexuality”, “Transsexuality”, and “Maternity”***

i) Homosexuality in *Diário de Notícias*

When two lesbians attempted to marry February 1 2006 in Lisbon’s 7<sup>th</sup> Registry Office, they received a great deal of media attention, notably from the *Diário de Notícias*. The

issue I would like here to explore, on the basis of Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, is that of the type of 'in-group' the *Diário de Notícias* wished to appeal to in its coverage of the attempt at homosexual marriage. If on one hand the news features of this paper appear to empathise with the lesbians' cause, on the other hand a subtle mechanism of social censorship manifests itself.

Teresa Pires and Helena Paixão are first depicted as the active agents of an attempt to legitimate their 'love' before the whole of society. Emphasis is placed on their fairy-tale like 'dream' of marriage, an aspiration to 'recognition and dignification' (Câncio, DN 2006a) which would place these two lesbians on par with the 'common citizen', that is, with the 'ingroup' that the *Diário de Notícias* readers can empathise with.

Despite their aspiration towards the conventionality of marriage, the women are represented as having a mind of their own and as openly defying society's social codes. We are told that a gardener turned his hose on the two lesbians, because they dared to walk a street hand-in-hand. The gardener's hose can be read in-between the lines as symbolising a phallus that embodies generative power. Lesbianism is thus represented as offensive to the masculine psyche, which cannot accept the idea of the 'uselessness' and 'powerlessness' of a hose, a hose that then must be turned on the two women in a revengeful act of masculine affirmation.

Both have collected, throughout their lives, 'insults, humiliations, betrayals and abandonments' (Câncio, DN 2006a), leading them to leave Lisbon and seek refuge in a

more tranquil town. The predicates used to depict their lives until this moment of media frenzy point to victimhood, or passivity, whereby ‘things are being decided or done, for or against them’ (Van Dijk, 2000a: 40): while they were once visible ‘victims’, a target to be pointed at by the *Diário de Notícias*’s conventional ‘in-group’, they are now visible ‘agents’, attaining the dignity they crave through a short-lived media infatuation with two women starving for fame. In effect, Teresa and Helena are depicted as taking advantage of ‘this moment of self-exhibition, fame and glory in a life that has until now been marked by rejection and persecution’ (Câncio, DN 2006a). The fact that the piece stresses that the lesbians’ media notoriety is sure to be short-lived leaves readers torn between empathy for Teresa and Helena’s fight against discrimination but simultaneously comfortably aware that any attempt to legalise homosexual marriage is condemned to failure in the near future.

## ii) Homosexuality in *Público*

While the February 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the *Diário de Notícias* dedicated its first two pages to news features on Teresa and Helena’s attempt to marry, *Público*’s first two pages for that same day were dedicated to the foreseeable success of Ang Lee’s *The Secret of Brokeback Mountain* at the upcoming Oscar Ceremony. The film, which narrates the romantic entanglement of two gay cowboys in the United States of the 1960’s and 70’s, is hailed as breaking the film industry’s conventional codes, broaching a ‘difficult and controversial’ theme (Siza, *Público*, 2006a). Because the topic of lesbian marriage can be assessed along similar lines, it is better introduced, according to *Público*’s logic, by an international film agenda that is the target of a certain elite cultural discourse. *Público*’s

discourse on culture posits a 'self' moulded in the best tradition of Western liberal values, namely freedom and tolerance.

Teresa and Lena are scantily referred to in the main news feature dating from February 1 (Branco, *Público*, 2006b). In fact, they only briefly appear as subjects in the first paragraph of the article, when we are told that they will try to marry in Lisbon's Seventh Registry Office. Their agency is soon replaced by that of a petition in favour of gay marriage that 'counts MPs amongst its subscribers'. From then on discourse is completely centred on the positions that political parties have on the issue, namely whether or not they intend to defend an alteration of the Civil Code in Parliament.

In the classically least important position of a journalistic text, that of the last paragraph, Elza Pais, president of the Commission for the Equality and Rights of Women, nominated by the Portuguese Government, gives her seal of approval to the lesbians' initiative for placing discussion of same-sex marriage on the political agenda. By giving voice to this 'apparent concession' (Van Dijk, 2005: 202-3) at the end of the news piece, the feature returns full circle to the beginning, when we are told that the lesbians wish to marry. The fact that they appear at the beginning and end of the text masks their absence from its body, indicating the irrelevance of these two women, in the eyes of *Público's* 'ingroup', to the resolution of the legal problem at hand. Effectively, editors usually assess the relevance of information on the basis of newsworthiness, or utilitarian value, to the newspaper's target group (Van Dijk, 2005: 205). As such, *Público's* coverage of a private sphere issue is shielded behind a rational, political discussion focusing on the

juridical viability of Parliamentary approval of gay marriage so as to avoid any type of accusation of sensationalism. This attempt to sidestep direct confrontation with the private caters to the tastes of an urbanised, educated, upper-middle class readership who, despite being sympathetic to the gay marriage juridical debate, may shirk away from excessively personalised narratives, charged with emotional undertones, due to the latter evoking the entertainment polarity which contrasts with that of the public interest defended in *Público*'s statutes (2007).

### iii) Transsexuality in *Diário de Notícias*

Transsexuality, a theme that is usually absent from the *Diário de Notícias*'s pages became conspicuously present for a brief moment when a Brazilian transsexual, Gisberta, was tortured and killed by a group of boys, between 11 and 16 years of age, who were living in a Catholic correctional home. The focus on the incident was very much juridical, centring on the condemnation of the youngsters.

The first article on Gisberta's death alludes extensively to 'habeas corpus' (DN, 2006b), the prisoners' right to challenge the terms of detention, without once defining what this legal term means to the ordinary citizen. The descriptions of the punitory measures inflicted on the minors are intricate, ranging from internment in correctional centres to preventive imprisonment in the case of the 16-year old. Gisberta, who is absent from the text after making a brief appearance in the lead, resurfaces in the last phrase as a passive subject who will be remembered at a vigil service held that very evening. Emphasis on the condemnatory measures to which the minors will be subject to foregrounds the

difference between the ‘tolerant’ conduct of the readers’ ‘in-group’ in contrast with the brutal intolerance of difference on the part of the young ruffians. A moral consensus is articulated around the fact that deviant behaviour must be rightfully punished. In effect, the deviant youngsters occupy the active ‘subject positions’ (Van Dijk, 1985: 73) of the news piece in contrast to Gisberta, who is completely emptied of any agency whatsoever.

In another article, we are told that Gisberta had distanced herself from family and that it was thanks to a common friend that family members were informed of ‘her decadence, disease and, finally, death’ (Câncio, DN, 2006c). The implication is that Gisberta lived in social isolation from ‘normal’ family life, a normalcy that *Diário de Notícias*’s lower middle-class, moderately educated and predominantly female ‘in-group’ can easily identify with. Van Dijk suggests that due to pragmatic, or contextual, reasons, a significant dimension of discourse is to be read in-between the lines, ‘being inferred by recipients from shared knowledge or attitudes and thus constructed as part of their mental models of the event or action represented ...’ (2000b: 218). Bearing in mind *Diário de Notícias*’s target group, such an implication is relevant due to pointing to rupture with family as normatively deviant, a deviance that ‘fate’ would ultimately punish.

#### iv) Transsexuality in *Público*

Despite also concentrating on the punitive measures inflicted upon the minors, *Público* appears to be particularly interested in whether or not Gisberta died by drowning. The title ‘Exams Confirm that Gisberta Died by Drowning’ (Laranjo, *Público*, 2006c) indicates that Gisberta was indeed a victim of homicide, having been thrown into a well

still alive, and not ‘simply’ a victim of corporeal offence. The implication, camouflaged by juridical terminology, is that the difference between the two alternatives is significant, as if ‘corporeal offence’ were indeed something transsexuals might be moderately used to.

The issue of whether or not the youngsters involved in the crime were conscious of Gisberta being alive before throwing her into the well is allegedly fundamental to the State Prosecution Service. *Público* places itself in the latter’s role, only to shroud its concern over the ‘morality’ of the youngsters beneath a denotative interest in the juridical mechanisms of the process. What I am affirming is that *Público* has a vested interest in articulating a consensually normative view that the youths’ behaviour is wrong. However, contrary to *Diário de Notícias*, *Público* carefully refrains from exercising emotionally-laden, sensationalist ‘moral judgements’ on any any explicit level, preferring to attribute responsibility for the boys’ actions to the foster-care institutions which supervised them. According to Van Dijk, ‘negative properties attributed to outgroups ... may be enhanced by focusing on their responsible agency’ (1995: 24); in this case, the adolescents’ ‘responsible agency’ is suppressed by that of the institutions in which they were educated.

For example, in another article, a suspect’s teacher traces her student’s profile as ‘impeccable, pleasant and kind’, ‘a good student, on the verge of finishing 9<sup>th</sup> Grade’ and ‘not particularly rebellious’ (Faria, *Público*, 2006d). A few of the interns in the care of the religious residential institution ‘Oficina de São José’ frequented the Secondary School

Oliveira Martins. When these students misbehaved, they were suspended and the School would inform the residential institution. However, the latter usually turned a blind eye to the situation. Rocha states that the School had asked for support from the auxiliary bishop of Oporto, only to be ignored. The implications are that the minors involved in the death of Gisberta are not truly guilty: the responsibility is placed, instead, on the Catholic Church which ignored warnings that the Oficina de São José was not fulfilling its duty. This conclusion ties in agreeably with the secular aspirations of a newspaper whose liberal Enlightenment values are in keeping with the attitudes of an above average educated, urbanised, upper middle-class ‘in-group’.

v. Maternity in *Diário de Notícias*

Contrary to *Público*, which gives extensive coverage on April 16 to the closure of a series of maternity wards by the Portuguese Government, the *Diário de Notícias* remains curiously silent on the issue. However, the focus on maternity appears to have been ‘transferred’ to other health issues linked to maternity, namely those of infertility and congenital foetal anomalies.

The *Diário de Notícias* ran two news features on these topics under the titles ‘Social Pressure Affects Infertile Couples in the Cradle of the Nation’ (Silva, DN, 2006d), alluding to the city of Guimarães as the residence of the first King of Portugal, and ‘Foetal Anomalies in Amarante County’ (Silva, DN, 2006e). Focussing on the above average infertility rate in the region, the first feature informs readers on the social pressure couples are subject to due to traditional family structures being in place.

In a case in which the infertility factor was precisely male, a woman said that she heard her mother-in-law, for example, telling her son to ‘find another wife’ because she wanted to be a grandmother. (Silva, DN, 2006d)

Interestingly, the text stresses that the infertility case here referred to was male, as if, had it been female, the mother-in-law’s exhortation would have been more comprehensible. Thus, despite critiquing the conservative posture of Guimarães’ inhabitants, the journalist contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes that connote infertility with a biological ‘female’ flaw, implying that biological reproduction – translated as ‘maternity’ – is a ‘wife’s’ principal function and that any deviance from this norm may bring on negative consequences.

The second feature quotes statistics that point to a higher than average rate of congenital foetal anomalies in Amarante county, resulting in legally induced abortion (Silva, DN, 2006e). *Diário de Notícias*’s discourse on the matter is medical, attributing the malformations to environmental factors. The types of anomalies detected in pre-natal diagnoses are explained in detail, although none of the would-be mothers were actually interviewed.

We are told that two of the cases occurred in a traditionally high-risk group of ‘young (and single) mothers, who were not using contraception’ (Silva, DN, 2006e). Curiously, medical discourse usually emphasises the high risk of pregnancy in older women, but

here the fact that these mothers are young – and, most importantly, single – appears to translate into a pernicious factor for pregnancy. Taking into account that *Diário de Notícias*'s target group consists mainly in lower-middle class, moderately educated women, one can assume that medical discourse may be serving as a veil for a normative social consensus condemning pregnancy in unwed mothers.

If we heed Van Dijk's claim that news events are usually ordered 'not as an arbitrary series, but as one coherent unit' (1985: 87) that has global semantic significance, then the episodes reported in the second feature can be interpreted as globally indicative of a conflation between 'scientific' medial discourse and journalistic discourse. In effect, the journalist recounts events from an authoritative medical perspective, thus avoiding any intromission into a private sphere – that of pregnancies 'gone wrong' – which would be too delicate and difficult to delve into in a rural environment such as Amarante. Scientific discourse under the form of either statistics or medical explanations is used as a strategy to enact normative claims that 'persuasively display objectivity', allegedly representing 'the "fact" against mere opinion and impression' (Van Dijk, 2000b: 222). This strategy provides credibility to journalistic discourse whilst simultaneously investing it with a 'neutral' dimension that shields the public interest from what is regarded as essentially private.

#### vi. Maternity in *Público*

The category 'maternity' received particular attention from *Público* on February 16 2006 due to the Health Ministry's decision to close down nine of the fifty maternity wards in

the country. One news feature adopts a medical perspective on the logistics of the ward, informing the reader of the few stays for delivery, the decrease in the number of births, the limited number of doctors, the existence of overworked health professionals and the precarious conditions for babies with serious pathologies who have to be transported to Oporto for treatment.

The two rooms, which allow for four simultaneous child-births, are empty and few women are visible. “We have given leave to some patients this morning”, hurriedly explain the doctors... (Campos, Público, 2006e)

The predicate ‘hurriedly’ insinuates that the doctors are covering something up, thus giving a more positive impression on the functioning of the ward than is true to reality. Hence, although the journalist attempts to create distance from the doctors’ perspective by conveying a sense of inauthenticity in the latter’s discourse, this very discourse is coherent with the idea that the ward lacks the conditions that would allow it to function normally. By supporting the Government’s discourse on ward closure after having given us some elements to assess the disadvantage of that measure, *Público* seems to be adhering to a semantic strategy of ‘apparent empathy’ (Van Dijk, 2005: 202) – as if to say, of course these populations will be negatively affected by the Health Ministry’s decision, but at the end of the day women will be giving birth in much safer conditions in larger hospitals. This structure of news discourse allows *Público* to avoid creating a ‘bad impression’ (Van Dijk, 2000a: 41) amongst those readers empathic with the plight of

rural populations who stand to lose acquired rights to health-care in smaller regions, far off from the main urban centres.

## VI. Discussion

The greatest discrepancies in frequency rates between both newspapers pertain to issues of the private sphere. In effect, the categories conjugal relationships, maternity and female body appear considerably more often in *Diário de Notícias* than in *Público*. These results indicate that *Público* is not particularly comfortable in dealing with matters of the private realm on a daily basis. However, the fact that *Diário de Notícias* reveals a greater permeability to the private sphere does not mean that it is significantly more in tune with radical feminist issues. In fact, it appears that the latter are broached by both papers due to topicality of themes that are usually ostracised from the media agenda. It is precisely in this context that the issues of homosexuality, transsexuality, reproduction – under the form of infertility and congenital anomalies – make their appearance.

Radical feminism emphasises the affirmation of a specifically female universal essence that opposes the normative logic of patriarchal values. As such, the possibility of defining woman through ‘the natural life of the body’ (Cocks, 1984: 35), namely through fertility and reproduction, as well as the affirmation of a specific form of female sexuality through ‘lesbian existence’ (Rich, 1980), are themes that are on the radical feminist agenda. Because radical feminism, in its search for the affirmation of an essence, at times puts to question a certain heterosexual normativity (Thompson, 2001: 14), mainstream newspapers such as *Diário de Notícias* and *Público* prefer to stick to the more

conventional liberal feminist discursive framework that centres on 'rights' as an affirmation of female autonomy and equality.

Taking into account that the media seek to reproduce, rather than alter, the mental representations shared by a specific 'in-group', using persuasive means to that effect, one can legitimately presuppose that both *Diário de Notícias* and *Público* conceptualise their respective audience as adhering to a liberal ideology regarding women's role in society. Because the difference in portrayals of public and private domains is clearly unbalanced in both papers, one can legitimately conclude that the liberal concept of equality is not regarded as intersecting the private domain. We can thus speak of heterogeneity (Fairclough, 1995: 167), or contradictions, rooted in the news, as regards how gender inequality is interpreted and portrayed. If on one level the newspapers analysed espouse liberal feminist ideals, giving substantial visibility to women in the public sphere, they simultaneously socially legitimise a consensual view on the 'private' as irrelevant to the public domain.

As such, gendered representation in *Diário de Notícias* and *Público* continues to posit a claim to equality that is founded on a logic of sameness between male and female rationality. The dominance of a pervasive masculine model which women must adopt so as to obtain public recognition means that the specificity of a 'feminine' identity defined outside of this model remains elusive to the quality press. Thus, where content analyses of the 1970's concentrated on the meagre and stereotypical representation of women in the public sphere, the former ought to now give more incisive attention to the discrepancy

in the visibility of women in the at of private issues, traditionally connoted with the 'feminine', on the other hand. The fact that 'respectable' quality newspapers do not habitually contribute to fostering 'dialogue and debate' (Benhabib, 1997: 52) on private matters implies that they do not provide a truly representative space for the exercise of participatory citizenship to women who do not fit into the masculinist parameters of the Western liberal tradition, the latter which judges equality on the basis of women's capacity to assimilate 'positive' characteristics associated with masculinity. In this sense, McLaughlin's (1993: 614) exhortation that feminist media studies recuperate the concept of the traditional public sphere may seem pertinent as long as the latter is understood as an unaccomplished project of modernity, the universality of which needs to be rethought and reclaimed.

## VII. Conclusion

At a time when the 'stigmata of affectivity' (Thornton, in Murphy, 1999: 413), or the debasing influence of the emotions is said to have been transposed to the public sphere, leading to a blurring of the frontier that separates public from private, the research project undertaken witnesses that the traditional divide remains in place. Indeed, despite the 'nomadism' of contemporary theory, much of which celebrates concepts such as 'hybridity, fluidity and transgression' (Murphy, 1999: 412), the Habermasian public sphere, allegedly open to all, continues to guide itself according to the parameters of rational discourse, ostracising those voices (Gould, in Pajnik, 2006: 392) which are not sufficiently trained in the techniques of logical argumentation to warrant public visibility.

Radical feminist themes, namely those related to the affirmation of the specificity of a feminine identity in terms of sexuality, reproduction and the gendered body, integrate the private sphere. From the perspective of the radical feminist current, women are the only ones capable of defining the specificity that characterises their ‘lived experience’ of womanhood (Thompson, 2001: 12). Bringing out certain issues linked to female oppression in the private sphere through the imposition of an identity and way of life defined in masculine terms would presumably draw attention to the unequal logic of the public sphere, where the private must be suppressed so as to allow a criteria of sameness between male and female rationality to serve as a foundation for women’s claim to equality. Both *Público* and *Diário de Notícias*’s coverage of private matters sheds light on these as isolated ‘rarities’, the topicality of which may, at times, drive them to the front pages of ‘respectable’ newspapers.

We can point to the frequency rates of women’s representation in the public sphere – 24.3% in *Público* and 27.3% in *Diário de Notícias* – as indicative of either women’s low visibility in the public sphere, or women’s growing visibility in the public sphere, depending on the perspective. More interesting than affirming whether or not women are visible in the public sphere is, to my mind, the fact that matters of the public sphere continue to be more prevalent than those of the private. Thus, when Williamson (1986: 106) points to women’s prevalent role as ‘the guardians of “personal life”’, a role that converts them into ‘a kind of dumping ground for all the values society wants off its back but must be perceived to cherish’, I would take issue with this affirmation. Instead, I wish to claim that the increasing proportion of space currently allocated to women in the

public sphere may actually lead to a consolidation of the public/private dichotomy, because quality newspapers tend to represent women on the basis of a logic of sameness with men, emphasising those traits, such as rationality, proactivity, and responsibility (Gambaudo, 2007; 94-5) that cause women to judge themselves from a male perspective.

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<sup>i</sup> This essay stems from a wider project on the representation of women in the Portuguese Press (POCI/COM 55870/2004), funded by the EU and the Portuguese Government.

<sup>ii</sup> Basing ourselves on the theoretical discussions of liberal feminism, we divided this mega-category into two large categories, namely autonomy and equality. Within autonomy, we placed the following sub-categories: employment/unemployment; financial availability/financial unavailability; compulsory schooling/non-compulsory schooling; mobility/immobility; conjugal relationship/non-conjugal relationship (marriage, cohabitation, divorce); reproductive rights/no reproductive rights: birth control, abortion (health and legality). Within equality, we inserted the following sub-categories: remunerative equality/remunerative inequality; judicial power: plaintiff/defendant; power in the public sphere: influence (cause promotion and celebrity), authority, participation. Radical feminism, in turn, was expressed by the category female essence, within which the following sub-categories were placed: homosexuality/heterosexuality, maternity: assisted reproduction/unassisted reproduction; female body/male body (transsexuality, androgeny); female mind/male mind (irrationality/rationality).

<sup>iii</sup> Same-sex marriage is legal in Portugal since June 5 2010. However, neither the time-frame nor the political circumstances in which the law was ratified fall under the scope of this article.