Carlotta Cossutta is a researcher in Political Philosophy at the University of Milan. Her research interests include critical theory, the history of women's political thought and feminist and queer theories. She published *Avere potere su se stesse: politica e femminilità in Mary Wollstonecraft* (ETS 2021) and *Domesticità*. Lo spazio politico della casa nelle pensatrici statunitensi del XIX secolo (ETS 2023).

Contact: carlotta.cossutta@unimi.it
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2483-3010

Soft Power
Revista euro-americana de teoría
e historia de la política y del derecho

Vol. 10(2). Julio-Diciembre 2023
ISSN (online): 2539/2239 ISSN (print): 2389-8232
https://doi.org/10.14718/SoftPower.2023.10.2.1

BUILDING HOUSES, BUILDING NATIONS: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENTANGLEMENTS IN THE SHAPING OF THE UNITED STATES*

Carlotta Cossutta
Università degli Studi di Milano

CONSTRUYENDO CASAS, CONSTRUYENDO NACIONES: IMPLICACIONES PÚBLICAS Y PRIVADAS EN LA FORMACIÓN DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

Abstract
The article examines the complex interplay between the public and private spheres, particularly through a feminist lens, emphasizing the political dimensions inherent in the evolving role of the home in North America. It challenges the traditional dichotomy, delving into the intimate connection between the public and private. The home, redefined as politically relevant, becomes a battleground for power dynamics, care responsibilities, and the construction of societal structures. The colonial house is portrayed as a crucial factor in colonization, undergoing transformation into the center of the 'cult of domesticity.' The article unveils the paradoxical nature of sentimentalism and the 'separate spheres' ideology, emphasizing the political value of the home

* Reception date: 26th March 2023; acceptance date: 29th March 2023. The essay is the issue of a research project carried out within the Dipartimento di Filosofia at Università degli Studi di Milano.

while women remain excluded from direct political action. The concluding discussion emphasizes feminist endeavors to bridge the gap between domestic and public life, recognizing women's rights in the home, and advocating for the visibility and political acknowledgment of domestic work in the public space.

Keywords
home; separate spheres; domesticity; feminism

Resumen
El artículo examina la compleja interacción entre las esferas pública y privada, en particular desde una óptica feminista, haciendo hincapié en las dimensiones políticas inherentes a la evolución del hogar en Norteamérica. Se desafía, por tanto, la dicotomía tradicional, ahondando en la íntima conexión entre lo público y lo privado. El hogar, redefinido como políticamente relevante, se convierte en campo de batalla de dinámicas de poder, responsabilidades de cuidado y construcción de estructuras sociales. La casa colonial es retratada como un factor crucial en la colonización, sufriendo una transformación que la convierte en el centro del "culto a la domesticidad". El artículo desvela la naturaleza paradójica del sentimentalismo y de la ideología de las "esferas separadas", resaltando el valor político del hogar mientras las mujeres permanecen excluidas de la acción política directa. La discusión final hace hincapié en los esfuerzos feministas por salvar la brecha entre la vida doméstica y la pública, reconociendo los derechos de las mujeres en el hogar y abogando por la visibilidad y el reconocimiento político del trabajo doméstico en el espacio público.

Palabras clave
hogar; esferas separadas; domesticidad; feminismo

The Domestic Space Between Public and Private

The dichotomy between public and private is based on the idea of a subtraction from the common and shared dimension of collective space. The private is defined by absence, lack, as if it were a void surrounded by the fullness of public space. However, can we truly say that the *din of the public* does not also accompany us in private spaces? The feminist critique of the modern distinction between public and private is articulated around this question, identified as "the crucial foundation of patriarchal political thought" (Phillips, 1992, p. 197). Criticizing this distinction, therefore, immediately becomes a way of questioning the hierarchies and forms of politics, so much so that Carole Pateman argues that this "it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about" (1987, p. 103).

Feminist criticism, from its origins, does not merely extend a public gaze to dimensions traditionally considered private, enlarging a sphere to include new aspects, but without questioning its structure. In contrast, to criticize the dichotomy between public and private is to discuss the very nature of these two spaces and the demands that constitute them. In 1938, in a Europe on the brink of war, Virginia Woolf warned against believing that the separation of the public and private spheres can function as a barrier to abuse and revealed how, on the contrary, this distinction prevents us from seeing the germs of despotism that are born within the domestic sphere in the relations of domination between husband and wife. To read in English newspaper pieces about women and their role in society is reminiscent of the social hierarchies we consider tyrannical when uttered by dictators in Italian or German, "it suggests that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (Woolf, 1938, pp. 97-98). Thus, the opacity of the private sphere allows us, on one hand, to consider our societies democratic and egalitarian even when they tolerate and promote inequality and authoritarianism, and on the other hand prevents us from seeing the social and political structures that make tyranny possible.

The intimate connection between private and public was famously highlighted by Pateman when analyzing the *sexual* contract, i.e., the contract that precedes and finds the institution of civil society, transforming patriarchy no longer into the solitary domination of the father but into an egalitarian bond between brothers that excludes women from politics. This exclusion founds the peculiar status of women, who have never fully emerged from the state of nature despite being part of society, a condition made possible by the fact that "the private sphere is part of the civil society but is separated from the 'civil' sphere" (Pateman, 1988, p. 11). A separation that is only apparent, however, because "civil society bifurcated but the unity of

the social order is maintained, in large part, through the structure of patriarchal relations" (Pateman, 1988, p. 12), which crosses the boundaries between public and private and constructs a two-faced public sphere in which one side always remains in the shadows. The equality of men —male, united by *fraternity*— is made possible by the construction of female inequality, which is indeed instituted by the sexual contract but is indeed configured as natural and prepolitical: "the unequal relations of domestic life are 'naturally so' and thus do not detract from the universal equality of the public world" (Pateman, 1988, p. 117). In this way, Pateman sheds light on "a double opposition and dependency between 'natural' and 'civil'" (Pateman, 1988, p. 11), emphasizing how the claim to construct the political dimension as separate from the private dimension is the structure that allows women's subordination to be justified as natural and rational at the same time.

This separation is made evident by the space of the home, constructed and thematized as a place opaque to the political dimension, a private and intimate space, but one in which relations of power and discipline emerge and act. It is, therefore, a politically relevant space, but often invisible to politics, conceived as an eminently prepolitical space, in the sense both of a remote foundation of the public sphere and sociality and of a possibility of disorder and disintegration of those same social ties. Domesticity, thus, takes on many of the characteristics of the feminine and is configured as the place where femininity reproduces itself and to which it is destined. It is a space laden with meanings, experiences, memories, and ties; a place of care, but at the same time a possible prison; a welcoming refuge but also a sphere of unrecognized work; a condition to which one aspires and from which one tries to escape. All contradictions change as historical situations change, yet these same contradictions remain instrumental in setting social change in motion throughout history. Therefore, observing the home with eyes that are both philosophical and feminine allows us to discover its most politically relevant sides.

Philosophical-political reflection on the domestic begins with Aristotle's treatment of the *oikos* and the consequent traditional partitioning between the 'Political' and the 'Economic'. The *domestic* delineates, in the tradition that goes back to Aristotle, a political concept that serves to delimit a space opposite to that of the square. At the same time, however, the *domestic* comes to be structured as a space opposed to nature, the first place of sociability and sociability and the seat of the first forms of legitimate power. Since antiquity, the home has been configured not only as a physical space but also as a conceptual place that encompasses the relationships of power, care, affection and work that are established within it. Following

Otto Brunner, in fact, one can speak of “the house as a whole” [*das ganze Haus*], that is, of the house as a place that encompasses knowledge pertaining to ethics, sociology, pedagogy, medicine, and the different techniques of domestic and agricultural economics (Brunner, 1968, pp. 103-127). Brunner himself highlights how the power of the *father/sire of the house* acts in the home and how what is opposed to the *societas civilis* (translation of *koinonìa politiké*), to 'civil society,' is not the state, but the home, the *societas* domestica. Therefore, the doctrine of *res publica* or *societas civilis* is called political, while that of the home is called economic instead (Brunner, 1968, p. 202).

From Vitruvius' *De Architectura* onwards, the house has been examined, therefore, in both its spatial and symbolic dimensions, highlighting its trait as a properly human invention. In addition, if in the Middle Ages the house is a ‘disorderly’ space and is primarily understood as an extension of the work space (Lambertini, 2018, pp. 306-324) or a display of prestige, the Renaissance treatment that culminates with Leon Battista Alberti’s *De Familia* begins to delineate domestic space as eminently private for women but as part of a citizenship project for men. Through economic considerations and advice to the *father of the family*, Alberti clarifies what role the citizen should play in all the spaces he traverses: from the streets of the ideal city to the family home. It was precisely this treatise that gave rise to a series of other texts that addressed the fathers of families between the 16th and 17th centuries to illustrate their duties and economic and social role, marking the continuity between private and public space (Frigo, 1985). In the arguments of these texts, “the house is literally understood as a mechanism for the domestication of (delicately minded and pathologically embodied) women” (Wigley, 1992, p. 332), who must be confined within a space and a relationship -that of marriage- that guarantees the reproduction of a social order: “in these terms, the role of architecture is explicitly the control of sexuality, or, more precisely, women's sexuality, the chastity of the girl, the fidelity of the wife” (Wigley, 1992, p. 336).

At the same time, the division between the home as a private place and an external place of work is the result of a process that began in the 17th century in the Netherlands, where the domestic dimension began to take shape as an intimate family space in which private relationships separated from public space were constructed (Rybczynski, 1986). The transformation of the home into an eminently private place is accompanied by the development of the bourgeoisie and a process of f*eminization* of domestic space that is profoundly linked to the care work that women perform almost exclusively. A process that also stems from the transformation of housework, which in the bourgeois family is less and less entrusted to servants and more and more entrusted

to the women in the household. Obviously, these transformations do not erase the more blurred divisions, so much so that there continue to be craftsmen's workshops located underneath homes and farm work where the boundary between home and work is often invisible. However, over the course of the centuries, there has been a change whereby not only has the home been structured as a private place, confined in that space work not considered as such, such as all care work or domestic work performed by women, but this process has also shaped an understanding of work as a public dimension, recognizable and separate from private life.

Moreover, the separation of the home from public space and the very internal subdivision of domestic environments reveals, and at the same time produces, a new idea of privateness (McKeon, 2005). This new sense of *privacy* was gradually produced over the following centuries, redefining the elements of the home in a complex order of layered spaces and room subdivisions, which delineate a social order by literally drawing the lines of demarcation according to different levels of decorum and appropriate behavior for different places. Rooms that are not open to public view, such as bedrooms or bathrooms, are defined, while others become the center of sociality. Thus, an interplay emerges between visibility and modesty, an economy of vision based on a certain blindness, which ensures that the disorder of the body does not infect ethical, aesthetic, political and legal regimes. Social order also depends on an ordering of the body, that is, on detachment from it, and it is this detachment that makes the individual subject possible. In this process, architecture has been used to construct the subject as the agent of a new type of modesty and, in so doing, has played an active role in the constitution of the private subject, considering the body as dangerous and at the same time containing that threat. This disciplining of the body is an extension of the traditional disciplining that takes place in the social construction of 'woman', made necessary by the idea that she is endowed with a body full of humors and uncontrollable instincts. The privatization of sexuality, where sexuality is understood as feminine, is used to produce the individual subject as a masculine subject and subjectivity itself as masculine; in this way, the new conditions of privateness and modesty, also constructed by the spaces of the home, mark the development of a new subjectivity rather than simply modifying a preexisting one.

A Colonial House

The colonial house played an essential role, both in material and imaginary terms, in the colonization of North America. It was a house that functioned as a place of hard work for

all who lived in it and an outpost of a colonization that proceeded through commercial and agricultural enterprises, often described as follows: "the mother at her spinning wheel, children scattering feed to the chickens, a daughter carrying kindling to the hearth in preparation for a day's baking, the father with his older sons in the fields, girdling trees, plowing the land, or mending a fallen fence –the sense of harmony and shared enterprise of this vision of the colonial family has remained compelling for Americans across a span of almost three hundred years" (Boydston, 1990, p. 1). At the same time, however, this house was not yet the *realm* of women, and nothing in the domestic space signaled an eminently feminine place: women's work was part of a working ecosystem taken for granted, in which the whole family was thought of as the protagonist of work activities, which were imagined as a *continuum* between the inside and the outside the home, between domestic and agricultural work necessary for subsistence. The female difference emerged not so much in practical functions but more often as in the case of the literary heroines of 18th century British novels, who were notable for their purity and kindness and not for their domestic skills.

By the mid-19th century this had already changed. The home was so clearly stablished at the center of culture that historians even speak of a "cult of domesticity" (Kraditor, 1968, p. 10), which not only spread quickly but also rapidly pervaded every cultural and social dimension of the newly formed United States. This veritable cult recognized the *domestic* as a separate sphere of society, a place where different values prevailed, where care and piety dominated, and where people could find refuge from the difficulties of public life. A separate and purely feminine environment, thanks to which women, in their homes, became within a few decades the place of moral authority in society but at the same time a sphere that delineates and defines an ideal of femininity, a figure of the "true woman" (Welter, 1966) that serves as a model for inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, during this timeframe women could read a flood of novels in which housewives were portrayed in highly positive terms, although "ironically, while a True Woman was assumed to be a pillar of moral strength and virtue, she was also portrayed as delicate and weak, prone to fainting and illness. She dared not exert herself too much physically or be emotionally startled for fear of her health. Due to her emotional and physical frailty, a True Woman needed to be protected by a male family member" (Cruea, 2005, p. 189). How did these changes come about?

Perhaps the most important factor in the change was the role the home played in politics after the American Revolution. Indeed, the intertwining of home life and politics began even before the war itself, with the boycott of British-made goods. What had been regarded by men and women as a set of uninteresting everyday concerns —what

kind of cloth to use to make a dress, for example, or what food to consume— took on a whole new political relevance. Boycotts would not have worked without the cooperation of women acting within their families, and this gave women a new self-respect and motivation to enter political discussions. Consequently, "the public recognition accorded the female role irreversibly altered its inferior status" (Norton, 1980, p. 55).

This political participation of women immediately highlights the paradoxical character of the cult of domesticity, which certainly confines women within domestic walls but also allows them to think of the home as a basis for political action. As Linda Kerber (1980) and Mary Beth Norton (1980) have shown, women's political involvement through the private sphere took on new forms as early as the beginning of the 19th century. As we shall see more clearly later, it was precisely in this period that women combined political activity, domestic life and republican thought through the role of mother. Even outside formal politics, in fact, maternal activity was crucial: by raising virtuous children and transmitting a civic mentality, they ensured the survival of the republic. Based on this important task, women advocated greater access to education and justified interest and involvement in public affairs. As mothers, women were republicans; they possessed civic virtues and an interest in the public good. Their exclusion from traditionally defined politics and economics ensured their lack of interest in personal gain. Through motherhood, women sought to compensate for their exclusion from the political world by translating moral authority into political influence. Their political demands, formulated in these terms, did not violate the canons of domesticity, to which many men and women adhered.

Starting with this political participation, women's demands were explicitly passed on through the right to vote. In this sense, it is significant to note that the women's suffrage movement in the United States started in the early 19th century during the mobilization against slavery, with which it shared many demands, starting with the criticism of the claim that the inferiority of slaves and women could be considered a natural fact. Many of the women who would animate the suffrage movement, such as Lucretia Mott or the sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimkè, showed a keen interest in the anti-slavery movement and demonstrated their ability to speak out publicly to defend their cause. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton joined the antislavery forces, she and Mott agreed that women's rights, like those of slaves, needed reform. The incident that triggered the need to promote women's rights was the fact that Mott and Cady Stanton were excluded from participating in the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Conference in London precisely because they were women. Therefore, they convened a conference to discuss the issue of women's rights, which took place in Stanton's hometown of Seneca Falls, New York on 19-20

July 1848 and promulgated a declaration calling for women's suffrage and women's right to education and employment opportunities. This was the *Declaration of Sentiment*, a text inspired by the American *Declaration of Independence*. In this declaration, on the one hand, they claimed the rights to vote and citizenship, based on the idea of equality, which is accompanied by the exit from domesticity and the breaking of the mythology of 'separate spheres.' On the other hand, in the same text, we find the valorization of women's difference through fidelity to the idea of a female 'moral superiority', to the maternalism expressed in women's special duties and missions, the appeal to different values and the dimension of feelings. A declaration that unites rights and feelings and that "was the culmination of at least a decade of activism and women's participation in public life" (Baritono, 2001, p. XIX): a construction of a movement and a political action that questioned the separation between public and private, not only linking the intimate realm of feelings to the political realm of rights but also building ties and networks from friendships, proximity, personal relationships and affections. This choice was born out of necessity, as women were excluded from political citizenship, but beyond and "despite this, they appropriated those tools, found in the folds of the American political system, that they could use to assert themselves as public subjects" (Baritono, 2001, p. XIX).

In this sense, it is relevant to note how the link between suffragism and the abolitionist movement not only stems from a historical contingency but is rooted in a critique of the claimed universality of rights, which are presented as an abstraction from individual conditions in the name of formal equality, while slaves and women are excluded precisely on the basis of their primarily bodily particularity. If the rhetoric of rights is, then, presented as a form of abstraction from the body in the name of an individual without essential particularities, the abolitionist and suffragist battles show how this abstraction is made possible precisely by the exclusion of certain bodies, namely, black and female bodies.

Suffragists show not only the link between public space and the domestic sphere but also how men's public freedom is based on women's domestic slavery and how men's equal rights are based on the construction of female difference and its exclusion from politics. They also point out how, even in the domestic sphere, women are not fully empowered, despite a rhetoric that wants designate it to be their area of influence. In fact, as Jeanne Boydston (1990) notes, women do not even have ownership of the fruits of their labor, as they have no private property. It is precisely the lack of ownership that makes it clear how the claimed equality of the 'separate spheres' is nothing more than a way of confining women to an impolitic space but subject equally to male political power.

This is also why, from the 1830s onwards, the house began to be sentimentalized to an unprecedented degree. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact timing of this change

because there was no clearly identifiable event that precipitated it or that allows us to identify an unambiguous origin. However, to explain this phenomenon, we can recognize it as the culmination of a series of long-term trends that manifested themselves in the Anglo-American world. First, childhood began to be a period of life worthy of increasing attention. In this sense, Jay Fliegelman argues that John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* was "perhaps the most significant text of the Anglo-American Enlightenment" (Fliegelman, 1982, p. 13) because it contributed to making childhood a significant moment, giving new value to education and building a style of parenting based on consent and persuasion rather than authority. Locke's empiricism, with its view of the human mind as a *tabula rasa* at birth, implicitly made the home the site of intelligence and character formation. In this sense, only a safe, loving, secure home would be able to produce the desired results.

This view of childhood and upbringing also transformed the relationships between parents themselves, for if their highest duty was to create a serene home to provide optimal nurturing for their children, a new model for marriage had to be constructed. Carl Degler traces the emergence of the modern American family, characterized by marriage norms based on the idea of complementarity and mutual support, 'companionate' (Degler, 1980, p. 8), to the period between the American Revolution and approximately 1830 (Simmons, 2009). Once again, it is not a matter of imagining forms of material equality between husband and wife, but of constructing separate spheres in which both spouses, without invading each other's space, contribute to the common goal of bringing up intelligent and capable offspring, developing their potential.

The most important male writer who dealt with the house was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was undoubtedly the most influential American thinker of his time. It is well known that Emerson, with his 1836 essay entitled *Nature* (Emerson, 1971, pp. 3-48), hoped to initiate the creation of an authentically American culture. From this consideration, he also developed a reflection on the home, expressed later in 1870 in *Domestic Life* (Emerson, 2008, pp. 52-69), which questioned the moral foundations of a just home in a democratic society (Newfield 1996). First, he advocated a distribution of domestic tasks that reflected democratic values, in which it was work that created a common home, with children at its center: "I think it plain that this voice of communities and ages, 'Give us wealth, and the good household shall exist,' is vicious, and leaves the whole difficulty untouched. It is better, certainly, in this form, 'Give us your labor, and the household begins.' I see not how serious labor, the labor of all and every day is to be avoided" (Emerson, 2008, p. 58). Taken in its most literal form, this passage would seem to indicate an absolutely egalitarian approach to housework, but there are many other

passages in the essay that reflect the idea that household chores belong to women. Rather, his attempt was to combat caste distinctions that could lead some to devalue manual labor, thus making it impossible to create safe and secure homes capable of building peaceful households. In his view, Americans needed to rethink their approach to manual labor: “many things betoken a revolution of opinion and practice in regard to manual labor that may go far to aid our practical inquiry [...]. However, the reform that applies itself to the household must not be partial. It must correct the whole system of our social living. It must come with plain living and high thinking; it must break up caste and put domestic service on another foundation” (Emerson, 2008, p. 58). If it is women who have to do the manual labor, putting domestic service on another foundation means imagining self-sufficient homes, in which it is women —even bourgeois women— who take care of the home and its inhabitants.

Moreover, for Emerson, the home becomes an extension of the individual typical of democratic individualism (Urbinati, 2009), a representation of it, functioning not only as a private place but also as a space of conviviality, of bonds to be woven, in a word, of hospitality. Emerson’s emphasis on the importance of hospitality is so pronounced that it seems clear that he was trying to mediate between the public and private spheres in this way. On the one hand, he emphasizes that domestic life is more important to most of us than the public life of the world outside the home: 'domestic events are certainly our affair. What are called public events may or may not be ours' (Emerson, 2008, p. 54). But on the other hand, he was concerned about the negative effect on a society if families simply portrayed themselves in their homes. Therefore, families should be hospitable, and houses should always be open to travelers and friends so much that “the language of a ruder age as given to common law the maxim that 'every man's house is his castle': the progress of truth will make every house a shrine” (Emerson, 2008, p. 67). The house, thus open to the world, becomes a place to host and meet different people, overcoming the isolation of the family but without the domestic work being shared as well. Thus, the leading American intellectual of the 19th century not only took the home seriously as a political space but also explicitly sought to bridge the gap between home and world.

The home described by Emerson is supposed to be caste-free, hospitable, loving and inhabited by a family whose lifestyle can be emulated by others, but who is supposed to make these homes not only safe but also comfortable? Women, with their work that remains taken for granted even when at the center of a political look at the home.

To explain the invisibility of women's work, Boydston speaks of the “pastoralisation of housework” (1990, pp. 142-63), a process that emphasizes the sanctified house as an emanation of the nature of women. To avoid characterizing housework as an activity,

however, it was necessary to rearticulate the notion of work itself, speaking, in the case of women, of *influence*. Women, in fact, did not create domestic space through explicit action but through their ability to influence those they acted upon. Typically, invoked as the female counterpart to formal, supposedly male, political power, the concept of indirect female influence supplanted notions of women as direct agents and thus as workers. As illustrated in 1851 by John Holmes Agnew[1] in an intervention on women, the contrast between supposedly male 'power' (both physical and moral) and female 'influence' could be drawn quite explicitly:

> We may stand in awe, indeed, before the exhibition of *power*, whether physical or moral, but we are not won by them to the love of truth and goodness, while *influence* steals in upon our hearts, gets hold of the springs of action, and leads us into its own ways. It is the *inflowing* upon others from the nameless traits of character which constitute woman's idiosyncrasy. Her heart is a great reservoir of love, the waterworks of moral influence, from which go out ten thousand tubes, conveying the ethereal essences of her nature and diffusing them quietly over the secret chambers of man's inner being. (Agnew 1851, p. 657)

The woman does not *act* alone. Rather, she is able to infuse her natural *ethereal essences* into man through a force that flows impersonally. Agnew concluded: "Let man, then, exercise power; woman exercise influence. By this, she will best perform her offices, discharge her duties" (Agnew 1851, p. 657). This is the crowning of the sacralization of domestic labor, which is no longer work, but a *reservoir of love* that overflows and flows by building houses as comfortable places in which men can find themselves, recognize themselves and act. Through this naturalization of the female essence and its relationship to the domestic sphere, it is possible to recognize the political value of the home while still excluding women from the sphere of action.

Precisely for this reason, at such a historical moment, the home, dwelling, and domestic space are also themes at the center of the feminist debate and in some ways constitute its original thrust. As Dolores Hayden points out, in fact, "the overarching theme of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist movement was to overcome the split between domestic life and public life created by industrial capitalism, as it affected women. Every feminist campaign for women's autonomy must be seen in

[1] John Holmes Agnew (1804-1865) was a professor of ancient literature at the University of Michigan, a member of the Presbyterian clergy, an author of biblical studies, and the first editor of *The Eclectic Magazine*, a monthly magazine published between 1844 and 1907 that carried a selection of the best articles from British newspapers on art, science and literature.

this light" (1982, p. 4). In this context, a twofold objective emerges strongly: to recognize women's rights in the home but also to bring domestic work into the public space, giving it value and freeing up women's time. The aim is to counter the naturalization of domestic space by recognizing it as a place of work but also to escape the women-inaction binomial it constructs. It is therefore a question of rethinking the home to rethink public space and political action, imagining a development of domestic space that allows women to work and be independent, a prerequisite considered necessary to be able to participate in political life. A development that must also transform the way of living, professionalizing, and collectivizing domestic work.

Alongside this explicitly political work, women use the home as a public space, turning even domestic work into an action that contributes to citizenship. This process is particularly evident, for example, in the first North American cookery book, which appeared in Hartford in 1796. Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* (1996) exemplifies both the changing culinary standards of the 18th century and a strongly patriotic sensibility, which turns cooking into a statement of support for the American Revolution, through recipes that use native ingredients and terms that move away from classical English in preference to colloquial English. The kitchen becomes here one of the grounds for creating a new *American* sensibility, a task that, as we have seen, is handed over to women and the domestic space (Levenstein, 1986).

Thanks to this kitchen text, we are faced, once again, with the paradoxical task assigned to women: to form the body of the nation, in the sense of physically forming future citizens but also of shaping a national character and feeling, at the same time as women are excluded —along with slaves and female slaves— from political participation. A role was imposed but also claimed by women both because it allowed them public recognition, however partial, and as a strategy to be able to intervene at least partially in society. A paradox that also becomes evident as this process that takes place in the private sphere is accompanied by a virilization of the public sphere, in which nationalistic ideals are welded together with the construction of a model of hegemonic masculinity that, as George Mosse (1996) notes, takes up the image of the Greek man to bind the male body itself to the idea of virtue, value and respectability. In this vision, the male national body, described as the backbone of a new nation, was opposed to the female and slavery. However, at the same time, women were responsible for managing the relationship between national embodiment and the national body. These contradictory relationships are again highlighted by Mosse, who emphasizes how the division of labor within the family and the distinction between masculinity and femininity were continuously reaffirmed as imperatives of the modern era (Mosse, 1985). Through this

division, according to Mosse, it emerges how the paradox of sentimentalism, as much as the paradox of the 'separate spheres' ideology with which it is often associated, lies precisely in this combination of national symbolism and particular embodiments, an obligation at once to national respectability and to a private virtue that is constantly removed from national power. This dual logic of power and powerlessness meant, in the case of the separate spheres, that separation from the public world of politics and labor (and economic power) was compensated for by the affective power of 'home.' In the case of sentimentalism, the exclusion of women from political action meant, however, that an affective alternative was presented that not only gave political actions their emotional significance, but in addition to this, intimately connected individual bodies —even those excluded from the public sphere— to the national body.

In this context, however, exclusion along the lines of gender and race was constantly reinforced: it is not just a matter of proposing a comparison between the condition of women and that of slaves but also of highlighting more substantial links. For example, Lydia Maria Child, in her *History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations* (1835), points out on the one hand how slavers call slavery 'the patriarchal institution' by referring to the Bible, while on the other hand, the same Bible is used to consider women as property, subjecting them to male domination. From this reflection, Child observes the connections between slavery and patriarchy, which she also exposes through her description of slavery's *desecration* of the home. In her short story, *Slavery's Pleasant Homes* (1843), based on real episodes reported in the press or told by slaves, she introduces the metaphor that defines the plantation not as a Christian home but as an Islamic menagerie. Through this metaphor, Child establishes a parallel between the master's bride, in this case Marion, and his slave Rosa, who is also his half-sister, as she is the daughter of the same father and a slave. Both women occupy the position of harem slaves and the master has exclusive access to the bodies of both. The main difference is that while the master expects Marion to embody the purity ideals of the cult of domesticity and give the house the affectionate character that comes with it, the slave girl Rosa is only seen as a sexual object. Moreover, after pointing out that slavery turns the house into a harem, Child proceeds to examine the resulting perversions of domestic relations. Marion and Rosa are "grown up from infancy together" (Child, 1843, p. 148), suckled by the same mother, but Marion's awareness of her superior rank distorts her affection for her adopted sister: "soon as the little white lady could speak, she learned to call Rosa *her* slave" (Child, 1843, p. 148). Raised to be nothing more than a "pretty little waxen plaything" (Child, 1843, p. 148), Marion in turn treats Rosa like a toy, decorating her with jewelry like a doll. In this way, Child highlights how, despite being both oppressed, the two women occupy different positions and

reveals how white women themselves reproduce the oppression they suffer by replicating it to black women. This account makes it possible to show how the exclusion of women based on a normative ideal of femininity does not produce a unitary and homogeneous female subject but a collection of women occupying different positions, some, such as the slaves, excluded even from femininity itself.

Even through this look at the plantation house, to which a look at the houses on the reservation should be added (Hoxie, 2001; Glenn 2015), it becomes evident how the domestic space is configured as a central field for American politics in the 19th century. A field that women recognize as immediately strategic and on which they always intervene with dual intent: on the one hand, to modify the material conditions that make the home tiring and time-consuming to manage; on the other hand, to question the symbolic and political structures that bind the home to a subordinate and passive model of femininity. A battlefield that signals, once again, the porosity of the boundaries between public and private and the centrality of domestic spaces for thinking about the construction of civil society and politics. Furthermore, observing how houses are materially constructed and investigating the lines of power seen within them allows us to question the processes of constructing citizenship and access to public space. Finally, it is interesting to note how, at a time in history when the sexual divide was becoming deeper and more *naturalized*, the home became the center of a transformative reflection and practice by women, who re-evaluated domestic work and questioned their exclusion. A taking of words that meant recognizing in the domestic space the point of application of different interweavings of knowledge and power and highlighting how it is possible to rethink society and politics even from the space in which we are confined, from the rooms and activities that have been assigned to us by others.

References

Agnew, J. H. (1851). Woman's Offices and Influence. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 3,* 17, October, 657.

Baritono, R. (2001). *The sentiment of liberties: the Seneca Falls Declaration and the women's rights debate in the mid-nineteenth century United States.* La Rosa Éditrice.

Boydston, J. (1990). *Home and work: housework, wages, and the ideology of labor in the early republic*. Oxford University Press.

Brunner, O. (1968). Das 'ganze Haus' und die alteuropäische 'Ökonomik'. In Id. *Neue Wege der Verfassungs-und Sozialgeschichte* (pp. 103-27). Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht.

Child, L. M. (1835). *History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations*. John Allen.

Child, L. M. (1843). Slavery's Pleasant Homes. *The Liberty Bell, 4,* 147-160.

Cruea, S. M. (2005). Changing ideals of womanhood during the nineteenth-century women's movement. *ATQ, 19*(3), 187-204.

Degler, C. (1980). *At Odds: Women and the Family from the Revolution to the Present*. Oxford University Press.

Emerson, R. W. (1971). *Nature. In The Collected Works of R. W. Emerson,* I, *Nature. Addresses and Lectures* (pp. 3-48). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Emerson, R. W. (2008). *Domestic Life. In The Collected Works of R. W. Emerson,* VII, *Society and Solitude* (pp. 52-69). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Fliegelman, J. (1982). *Prodigals and pilgrims: The American Revolution against patriarchal authority 1750-1800.* Cambridge University Press.

Frigo, D. (1985). *The father of the family. Household government and civil government in the tradition of the 'economica' between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.* Bulzoni.

Glenn, E. N. (2015). Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 1*(1), 52-72. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649214560440

Hayden, D. (1982). *The Grand Domestic Revolution. A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities.* MIT Press.

Hoxie, F. E. (2001). *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920.* University of Nebraska Press.

Kerber, L. K. (1980). *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America.* University of North Carolina Press.

Kraditor, A. S. (1968). *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism*. Quadrangle Books.

Lambertini, E. (2018). Economic Ethics. In T. Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Ethics* (pp. 306-324). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316711859.015

Levenstein, H. (1986). The 'servant problem' and American cookery. *Revue française d'études américaines, 27/28*, 127-137. https://doi.org/10.3406/rfea.1986.1226

McKeon, M. (2005). *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge.* The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Mosse, G. L. (1985). *Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe.* Howard Fertig.

Mosse, G. L. (1996). *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195101010.001.0001

Newfield, C. (1996). *The Emerson effect: individualism and submission in America.* University of Chicago Press.

Norton, M. B. (1980). *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Little, Brown.

Pateman, C. (1987). Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy. In A. Phillips (Ed.), *Feminism and Equality* (pp. 103-26). Blackwell.

Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford University Press.

Phillips, A. (1992). Universal Pretensions in Political Thought. In A. Phillips and M. Barrett (Eds.), *Destabilizing Theory* (pp. 10-30). Polity.

Rybczynski, W. (1986). *Home: A Short History of an Idea.* Penguin.

Simmons, A. (1996). *American Cookery* [1796]. Applewood Books.

Simmons, C. (2009). *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II*. Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195064117.001.0001

Urbinati, N. (2009). *Individualismo democratico. Emerson, Dewey e la cultura politica americana.* Donzelli.

Welter, B. (1966). The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860. *American Quarterly, 18*(2), 151-174. https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179

Wigley, M. (1992). Untitled: The Housing of Gender. In B. Colomina (Ed.), *Sexuality and Space* (pp. 327-89). Princeton Architectural Press.

Woolf, V. (1938). *Three Guineas.* Hogarth Press.