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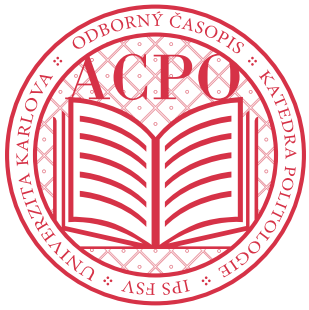

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Republicanism and Feminism: A Plausible Alliance. The Case of Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*

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Abstract:

Margaret Fuller is chiefly known as the author of the first American feminist manifesto, Woman in the Nineteenth Century, *published in 1845. This article undertakes to read Fuller's work through a republican lens by viewing her discussion on women's rights as a part of the antebellum debate on American democracy. It also aims to put together two approaches, republicanism and feminism, whose relationship some scholars consider to be antithetical, i.e. Phillips (2000), Friedman (2008) and Hirschmann (2003) but which, in general, has been scarcely analysed. Although republicanism called for freedom and equality among men, it never seriously considered, especially in ancient and early-modern times, the status of women and the recognition of their civil and political rights. However, recent studies, such as Vega (2002), Coffee (2012), Costa (2013) and Halldenius (2015), have tried to reinterpret the possible dialectical connections between women and republicanism, opening up new lines of research on this topic. The purpose of this paper is therefore to provide new food for thought to this contemporary academic debate by adopting a historical approach.*

This paper argues that Fuller's use of the concept of 'liberty' in her defence of women's civil and political rights corresponds to Philip Pettit's (1997) definition of liberty as 'non-domination'. Taking freedom to mean independence from arbitrary power, Fuller demonstrated that due to their submission to the arbitrary power of men, women totally lacked any measure of independence, and could thus be defined as 'slaves'. In addition, Fuller bolstered these affirmations by considering a further form of interference resulting from what Alan Coffee (2012) has called 'social domination', which was based on cultural values and traditions that condoned women's exclusion from social, political and working life on the basis of their supposed physical and intellectual inferiority. This did not allow them to exercise their right to freedom as independent agents.

The paper demonstrates that thanks to the use of republican paradigms to develop her feminist critique, Margaret Fuller took republicanism a step further and developed a more inclusive and egalitarian model of republican liberty that embraced women. Indeed, her feminist internal critique of republicanism can offer new food for thought to the contemporary academic debate on the compatibility between republicanism and feminism. The research brings to light how Fuller criticized women's legal status and the institution of marriage, how she compared the condition of women to that of slaves, and how she supported higher levels of education for women as a right and an emancipatory instrument in a free republic.

Key words: *Margaret Fuller; republicanism; democracy; feminism; women's rights*

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Introduction. Democracy in America: potentials and contradictions

In the first half of the 19th century, a new voice entered the international political debate on the elements of American democracy of that time. The debate had been started by European authors who had visited the country, keen to understand the functioning of what was then the only republic in a world consisting almost entirely of monarchies. Among them were the Scottish thinker Frances Wright, the French diplomat and political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville, and the English writer and journalist Harriet Martineau. Their intellectual interest had been stimulated by the fact that the quality of life of an increasing population together with the ongoing industrialization process, had developed in a democratic context in which the ruling principles, the equality of conditions and opportunities, freedom and self-government, were considered as revolutionary in the Old World. Aware of both the great potentials and the marked contradictions of American democracy, many American thinkers also entered the debate; among others, they included Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In *antebellum* America, in fact, social and political differences continued to be based on race and gender: while the United States had declared the principles of freedom, independence and equality through the *Declaration of Independence*, it maintained legislation that did not recognize black people's or women's rights. The new voice that entered the debate was that of the thinker, journalist and activist Margaret Fuller[2], who in 1845 published her famous book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, considered to be the first feminist[3] manifesto in America.

Born in 1810 into a middle-class family in Cambridgeport near Boston, Massachusetts, Fuller experienced the contradictions of being a woman in a republican state right from an early age. Her father[4] was a republican lawyer and a representative in the United States Congress who was a staunch supporter of the 'enlightened' ideas coming from Europe. In the name of the universality of reason, he decided to give his daughter a boy's education, and this made her all the more aware of the social and political difficulties "*of*

[2] See Allen (1979); Anthony (1920); Blanchard (1987); Capper (1992); Chevigny (1994); Clarke, Emerson, Channing (1856); Dickenson (1993); Higginson (1884); Howe (1883); Hudspeth (1983–1984); McGavran Murray (2008); Marshall (2013); Matteson (2012); Miller (1963); Myerson (1980); Stern (1991); Urbanski (1980); Von Mehren (1994); Zwarg (1995).

[3] Jane Rendall (1985: 1) has pointed out that the English word *feminism* was not in use in the 19th century. Although the French term *fèminisme* was coined by the Utopian socialist Charles Fourier, it was not until the end of the century that the word became more used in everyday English. Even though the use of the term *feminism* in reference to something that happened prior to the emergence of women's liberation movement might be considered as anachronistic, I consider it appropriate to describe Margaret Fuller's demands for a new role in society through the publication of her book. Indeed, by using the word in this context I want to indicate that Fuller was aware of the *political* implications of norms about marriage, education, property and culture, and that she did not stress merely their moral dimension. Fuller challenged the hierarchical organisation of society and struggled for a *political* equality among individuals. See Dubois et al. (1980) and Halldenius (2015).

[4] Timothy Fuller (1778–1835), republican and Unitarian, was part of the group of the Jeffersonian Democrats. The principles underlying the party were the trust in American republican institutions, the recognition of civil and political rights, the opposition to aristocracy and corruption and the concept of virtue. During his political career, Timothy Fuller stood up against slavery and advocated liberal stances. His commitment to provide his daughter with advanced intellectual training, traditionally reserved to men, derived from his Enlightened faith in the universality of reason. According to Higginson (1884: 22), the education Margaret Fuller received was nothing peculiar for that time, "*except that it was applied to a girl*". For a focus on Timothy's political ideas and on the education given to his daughter, see Clarke, Emerson, Channing (1852: I, 11–31); Crosland (1856: 274–275); Higginson (1884: 7–42). For more information on Jeffersonian Democrats, see Wright (1928).

being of the softer sex" (Hudspeth 1983: I, 237). Thanks to the long hours spent in her father's private library, she was greatly influenced by the republicanism of Thomas Jefferson, whose collected works she had read almost in their entirety, and by his political ideas of freedom, limited government and virtue: "*I was charmed with his mental activity, his philosophical spirit of enquiry, his freedom and firmness in thought or action. He has given me a higher idea of what a genuine citizen of this republic might become*" (Capper 1992, I: 134). During her school years, she became familiar with the Roman republican tradition of thought, and with classical authors such as Cicero and Sallust, whose conceptions of political liberty are at the very heart of the foundation of the United States.

A committed republican, Fuller spoke out on individual rights through her articles and in her work *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*[5] (1844) she declared her support for the antislavery cause, for Native Americans and for women. In her capacity as the first female foreign correspondent for the *New-York Tribune*[6] she visited Italy during the first war of independence and the establishment of the Roman Republic, expressing high regard for Giuseppe Mazzini's political ideas of unity, independence, freedom and equality[7].

Woman in the Nineteenth Century was written during her stay in New York and was a reworked version of the article published by Fuller two years earlier in the journal *The Dial*[8]. It drew much inspiration from the greatest work on women's rights that had been written up to that time: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published by the English thinker Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. Although this work had been written during a time in which the ideas of the Enlightenment were dominant, and thus differed philosophically from the dominant Unitarian and Transcendentalist thrust of Fuller's work, both books adopt the same republican paradigms and propose similar solutions to the question of women's rights[9].

I intend to argue that Fuller's book represents a useful tool to reread the 19th century debate on American democracy, which affirmed universal principles but in reality excluded from citizenship entire segments of the population defined by race and gender. Through the lens of the republican ideal of liberty as non-domination, and in order to support women's rights, Fuller developed what Halldenius (2015: 6) has defined as *"an internal critique of republicanism"*. Bringing to light Fuller's republican approach to liberty is then one of the keys to interpreting her ideas concerning 'the woman question'. Indeed, on the one hand

[5] An account of the trip Fuller took in the summer 1843 across the Western territories, *Summer on the Lakes* is a critique of the contradictions of European colonization at the basis of the United States' foundation. Published in 1844, the work is the result of the journal the thinker kept during the trip and her many visits to Harvard Library (she was actually the first woman alllowed to study there). See Higginson (1856: 194).

[6] *The New-York Tribune* was a newspaper established in 1841 by Horace Greeley, a committed reformer and supporter of women's rights. For a complete collection of Fuller's dispatches, see Mattson Bean, Myerson (2000); Reynolds, Belasco Smith (1991).

[7] For the exchange of ideas between Fuller and Mazzini, see Falchi (2010: 63–94). In Rome, Fuller called upon her fellow Americans to stand up for the Italian revolution and support its population. She stated that "*This cause is OURS, above all others*", because Italian revolutionary principles, freedom and independence, were the same that had animated the American process of liberation from English monarchic tyranny. "*Please think of this, some of my friends, who still care for the eagle, the Fourth of July, and the old cries of Hope and Honor*" (Reynolds, Belasco Smith 1991: 161).

[8] As Fuller herself declared in the *Preface*, *"The following essay is a reproduction, modified and expanded, of an article published in 'The Dial, Boston, July, 1843', under the title of 'The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men: Woman versus Women'"*. Fuller (1845: v).

[9] For an account of Wollstonecraft's republicanism, see the recent volume edited by Coffee and Bergès (2016) and Halldenius' work (2015).

Fuller supported the principles of republicanism, independence, freedom and equality; on the other hand, she stressed the contradictions of a republic that excluded women and black people from any full recognition of their civil and political rights.

As mentioned above, Fuller's work connects to the republican tradition of thought that had its origins in Europe. Coming from the Roman tradition evident in the writings of Cicero and Sallust, later codified by Machiavelli, from the mid-17th century onwards English revolutionary republicanism had moved to the New World to contribute to the ideological construction of the new American states. The republican ideal of liberty was in contrast with Hobbes' theory, according to which liberty was "*the Silence of the Law*", in which each individual was considered as 'free' in every unregulated field of national legislation. On the other hand, the neo-roman approach, adopted by English republicans (e.g. John Milton and James Harrington) after the 1649 regicide, defined liberty as non-domination[10] and called for civil and political equality among men. According to this interpretation, an individual could be defined as 'free' if nobody could limit his own actions. Furthermore, the republican thinkers believed in the law as a necessary non-arbitrary interference to guarantee freedom, in the notion of the republic as "*the empire of law […] not an empire of men*" and in mixed constitution where different powers served to check and balance each other in a regime of civic virtue, under which people were willing to serve in public office (Pettit 1997: 21). These principles appealed to those in the Colonies, who had protested against 'taxation without representation', imposed from a distant parliament that had arbitrary power over them.

The feminist view of republicanism harbours many doubts about the combined use of the two theories. Phillips (2000), Hirschmann (2003) and Friedman (2008) are examples of the fact that many feminist theorists have been reticent to embrace this tradition of thought because it did not recognize women as citizens and rights holders. However, more recent studies such as Vega (2002), Coffee (2012), Costa (2013) and Halldenius (2015), in considering republicanism as a way to conceive liberty, and not as a political system which excluded women, have sustained the compatibility of the use of the republican language and paradigms in support of the feminist cause. Particularly Halldenius, in her recent book *Mary Wollstonecraft and Feminist Republicanism*, makes the case for regarding the English author as a feminist republican, arguing that *"slotting Wollstonecraft into a broadly republican camp is not a terribly radical choice"* (Halldenius 2015: 2). She agrees with Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner's definition of republican liberty, as *"freedom from subordination to the arbitrary power of another"*[11], and explains why she acknowledges republicanism as a useful framework to read Wollstonecraft's feminist commitment:

[10] The concept of liberty as non-domination has been analysed in detail by Pettit (1997) and Skinner (1998).

[11] In the first chapter of her book, Halldenius strongly supports the use of neo-republican conception of liberty for feminist purposes: *"A feminist has no reason to dispute that coercion makes a person unfree, but good reason to dispute that lack of coercion is enough for freedom. Norms of good behaviour, rewards for inoffensiveness, legal insignificance and low or no pay need involve no coercion at all but still effectively disable you. If someone is in a position to restrain and coerce you without being contested, then you are in their power regardless of whether they happen to leave you be. A feminist needs a conception of freedom that recognizes struggles against such powers as struggles for freedom under conditions of unfreedom e challenge of living a moral life needs to be understood against the background of deprivation, hierarchy and powerlessness"* (Halldenius 2015: 15).

> *"The term 'feminist republicanism' does not refer to a school of thought or a hidden tradition that I claim to have uncovered. It is simply the name I give to Wollstonecraft's philosophy as I read it. I call her a feminist republican in order to say that her feminism modifies her republican commitments. Her vindication of women's rights challenges republicanism from within, without discounting the main tenets of republican political thought […] The feminist promise of republican citizenship is one upon which Wollstonecraft insists. In order to be free as a person, one has to enjoy the status of citizen in the sense of being a subject in one's own right, capable of acting independently in public and, as it were, of representing oneself to others. If you are denied that status you cannot be free—in fact, you are a slave—no matter what other allowances are made and even if no one coerces you. The relegation of the female to the domestic, and the domestic to the fringes of society, out of public sight, are functions of exactly those hierarchies and relations of power that the republican conception of freedom should serve to expose"* (Halldenius 2015: 3–4).

Although republicanism has traditionally excluded women from the full recognition of their rights, it is possible to show, through the examination of Margaret Fuller's work, that the arguments of the two theories are not irreconcilable. In fact, she employed the republican paradigms of liberty, equality and independence to develop her feminist critique of the American political system. Moreover, as well as expanding the theory to women, Fuller also enriched it with new elements such as the consideration of a further kind of interference, that of social domination[12], which she argued was derived and reinforced by a whole array of traditions, cultural values and behaviour patterns that needed to be removed in order to enable women to be really free in the republican sense.

Liberty as non-domination: A republican criticism of marriage

At the beginning of the 19th century, the dominant and entrenched mode of thinking continued to relegate woman to the domestic sphere, since she was considered naturally subordinated to man owing to her supposed innate intellectual inferiority. Furthermore, the industrial revolution which began in the late 18th century had accentuated the division between what historians[13] have defined as the 'separate spheres' of activity to which men and women were assigned, each characterized by its own specific role defined by gender. On the one hand was the male-dominated public sphere, while on the other was the private and domestic sphere, allocated to the female gender. Public and domestic life continued to diverge: women were responsible for everything that concerned home economics, such as housekeeping and the care of children and her husband, while men had the duty to financially support the household.[14]

[12] I am greatly indebted to Alan Coffee's paper *Mary Wollstonecraft, Freedom and the Enduring Power of Social Domination* (2012), which has analysed Wollstonecraft's use of the category of social domination as a restraint on freedom.

[13] See among others Kraditor (1968) and Lerner (1969), who was the first to apply this definition to women's history. For the debate on the concept of 'separate spheres' see Kerber (1997), esp. pp. 159–199.

[14] See Wayne (2007), esp. pp. 1–24; Cott (1997), esp. pp. 63–100.

In particular, in her role of mother and wife, woman had no legal status and was considered as being merely the property of a man, who therefore had full authority over her body and mind. As Nancy Isenberg (1998: 7) has pointed out, "*marriage for women implied not only economic dependence but civil death*". The legislative system of the time provided the system of *coverture* explained by Blackstone in his 1765 *Commentaries on the Laws of England*: specifically, the law stated that married women's properties, lands, money, personal objects and even children had to become a man's property.

> *"By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing and is therefore called […] a feme-covert"* (Blackstone 1893: I, 343).

Focusing on the fact that, upon marriage, women lost any right to control property, Fuller pointed out that marriage was not usually the result of a free choice but was the only possibility for a woman that "*must marry, if it be only to find a protector, and a home of her own*". Instead of being an intellectual and spiritual union, in many cases marriage turned out to be the place in which man could exercise his power over his subjugated wife, a place where woman experienced the most ruthless inequality and lived in a condition of dependence. Marriage, wrote Fuller, was the biggest mistake for a woman, because it was a contract that revealed itself to be a "*seal of degradation*", since it gave her fewer rights than those she held when she was unmarried. In wedlock, woman gave up to the right to own property, to raise children in the event of divorce and to all intents and purposes became "*an adopted child*". A married woman was an *"overgrown child"* and belonged "*to the man, instead of forming a whole with him*" (Fuller 1845: 58–59; 66; 161–162).

It is important to underline that Fuller's criticism of the *coverture* is part of a broader attempt made by the emerging American emancipationist movement, of which she represents a forerunner, to struggle against "*injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman*" (Stanton 1870: 1) through the writing of the widely known *Declaration of Sentiments*. The emancipationist demands, sponsored by, among others, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Martha Wright, were partially accepted through the following approval of the *Married Women's Property Act* in 1848 by New York State, which substantially modified the legislation by recognizing married women had the right of disposal and control over their own goods[15].

Fuller underlined also married women's inability to prevent their husbands, even when abusive, from taking away their children after the end of the marriage, defining this action as 'kidnapping'. The words she used to describe this kind of situation show her strong opposition to the inadequacy of women's rights with respect to child custody:

> *"I have known these men steal their children whom they knew they had no means to maintain, take them into dissolute company, expose them to bodily danger, to frighten the poor woman, to whom, it seems, the fact*

[15] For more information, see Baritono (2001); Hoff-Wilson (1991); Salmon (1986).

> *that she alone had borne the pangs of their birth, and nourished their infancy, does not give an equal right to them. I do believe that this mode of kidnapping, and it is frequent enough in all classes of society, will be by the next age viewed as it is by Heaven now, and that the man who avails himself of the shelter of men's laws to steal from a mother her own children, or arrogate any superior right in them, save that of superior virtue, will bear the stigma he deserves, in common with him who steals grown men from their mother land, their hopes, and their homes"* (Fuller 1845: 21–22).

In her staunch criticism of the institution of marriage, Margaret Fuller relied on what Pettit has called the republican paradigm of liberty as non-domination. This concept was not a novelty in the United States: it was actually deeply embedded in the *Declaration of Independence*, which had cited freedom as an inalienable individual right, and also in the Constitution, which declared that its purpose was to safeguard "*the Blessings of Liberty*". Republicans celebrated direct participation in the public life of the country and the pursuit of the common good as the essence of liberty. According to this theory, an individual could only be defined as 'free' in the absence of any form of power that arbitrarily limited a person's sphere of action. As Pettit (1997: 5) affirmed:

> *"Being unfree does not consist in being restrained; on the contrary, the restraint of a fair system of law—a non-arbitrary regime—does not make you unfree. Being unfree consists rather in being subject to arbitrary sway: being subject to the potentially capricious will or the potentially idiosyncratic judgement of another. Freedom involves emancipation from any such subordination, liberation from any such dependency".*

According to such a definition, free individuals were all members of the political community who acted and interacted independently of the arbitrary will of other members within the public sphere, whose laws recognized the interests of all. In the ancient world, Aristotle (1996: 139) had already stated that "*men should not think it slavery to live according to the rule of the constitution*", meaning that the state could contribute to protect, rather than limit, one's liberty.

Furthermore, the republican idea of independence was intrinsically linked to two further pillars: equality and virtue. Independent actors could indeed be considered equal if anybody was able to exert any arbitrary power on others, and each individual held the same *status* before the law. In addition, individuals had to behave virtuously, that is to say that they had to act in accordance with reason and not allow passions to interfere with striving for the common good. In order to become virtuous citizens, they needed to be independent from everybody else's arbitrary will; republican theories asserted that dependence prevented the development of rational virtue and inhibited the full exercise of individual freedom. Contrariwise, those who lived under the domination of the arbitrary will of other individuals were considered to be slaves. In this regard Pettit (1997: 32–33) has argued:

> *"the condition of liberty is explicated as the status of someone who, unlike the slave, is not subject to the arbitrary power of another: that is, someone who is not dominated by anyone else […] The republican tradition is unanimous in casting freedom as the opposite of slavery, and in seeing exposure to the arbitrary will of another, or living at the mercy of another, as the great evil. The contrary of the liber or free person in Roman, republican usage was the servus, or slave. Whereas the slave lived at the beck and call of a master, the free person enjoyed a status at the other extreme. The free person was more than a servus sine domino, a slave without a master, who might be picked upon by anyone; the liber was, of necessity, a civis, or citizen".*

In point of fact, Skinner (1998: 36) has stated: "*What it means for an individual person to suffer a loss of liberty is for that person to be made slave*".

Influenced also by the values of Enlightenment, Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, Fuller explicitly expressed her concept of liberty. She thought that individual rights were natural and inalienable[16], embedded as they were in both the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789). She explained that "*by Man*" she meant "*both man and woman*" because they were "*the two halves of one thought*". Following the theory of natural rights, she criticized its concept of liberty, affirming that *"as the principle of liberty is better understood, and more nobly interpreted, a broader protest is made in behalf of Woman"*. According to Fuller, the liberty of women had to be *"acknowledged as a right, not yielded as a concession"*, granted by men. She firmly believed in Charles Fourier's principle[17] that the development of humankind was deeply connected to that of women, since *"the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other"* (Fuller 1845: vi; 13; 26; vi):

> *"[…] she, the other half of the same thought, the other chamber of the heart of life, needs now to take her turn in the full pulsation, and […] improvement in the daughters will best aid in the reformation of the sons of this age"* (Fuller 1845: 13).

In her book, Fuller addressed women *"to ascertain what is for them the liberty of law. It is for this, and not for any, the largest, extension of partial privileges that I seek"*. Men, she stated, had still to perceive an important truth, i.e. the principle of freedom as *"the birthright of every being capable to receive it"* (Fuller 1845: 51):

[16] Pettit (1997: 101) has pointed out that actually "*when republicans spoke of natural rights, they […] generally meant to argue that certain legal rights were essential means of achieving freedom as non-domination, and that the description of such rights as natural did not have more than rhetorical significance for them*".

[17] Charles Fourier (1772–1837), French political thinker and social reformer, is well known for his criticism of the industrial system. In 1808 he stated his support for women's issues through his work *Theory of the Four Movements and the General Destinies*, building up a theory of social progress hinging on the condition of women, which influenced many 19th century thinkers, including Fuller. See also Beecher, Bienvenu (1971).

> *"My highest wish is that this truth should be distinctly and rationally apprehended, and the condition of life and freedom recognized as the same for the daughters and the sons of time"* (Fuller 1845: vi).

Women, dependence and slavery

In the revolutionary political debate, slavery had been used by Americans as a political allegory to allude to the *status* of the colonies vis-à-vis their Motherland. The theory of liberty as non-domination not only incorporated individual independence from the arbitrary interference of authoritarian governments, but also national independence from foreign powers. In accordance with this interpretation, dominated states could also be considered as 'slaves', since they lacked the republican liberty that would make them independent. After the Revolution, for those Americans who were excluded from its enjoyment (women and black people), liberty as non-domination became a new language to express and advance their demands and to question the substance of what the Constitution called "*the Blessings of Liberty*".

Fuller believed that since the United States had been able to establish a democratic system (albeit with a number of contradictions), they had the moral duty to help the nations that were dominated by foreign countries to become free, independent and democratic. Employing the republican principle, according to which physical bodies (individuals) lose and gain freedom in the same way as states (political bodies)[18], Fuller argued that if the United States could become a free and independent country, the same freedom should be enjoyed by every member of American society, including women and black people, and the same principle could be applied to every nation in the world:

> *"It is inevitable that an external freedom, an independence of the encroachments of other men, such as been achieved for the nation, should be also for every member of it. That which has once been clearly conceived in the intelligence cannot fail sooner or later to be acted out […] This law cannot fail of universal recognition"* (Fuller 1845: 15–16).

Due to the lack of any independence of woman from man, her *"lord and tutor"*, and to the resulting arbitrary power that the latter could exert on the former, Margaret Fuller compared the condition of women to that of slaves[19]: since women could be considered as subjected to men's will in every field, they could not be defined as free (Fuller 1845: 27). Recalling a reasoning that had often been used by theorists in the past, Fuller (1845: 51) affirmed that "*in slavery […] women are on a par with men. Each is a work-tool, an article of property, no more! In perfect freedom […] in the heaven where there is no marrying, nor giving in marriage, each is a purified intelligence, an enfranchised soul*". She developed an analogy between the condition of women and that of slaves:

[18] See Skinner (1998: 23–30).

[19] An author that undoubtedly influenced Fuller regarding her comparison between women and slaves was the American John Neal (1793–1876), a Benthamite journalist and supporter of black people and women's rights. See Guest (1945: 508–515); Fleischmann (2012: 247–270); Weyler (2012: 227–246).

> *"It may well be an Anti-Slavery party that pleads for woman, if we consider merely that she does not hold property on equal terms with men; so that, if a husband dies without making a will, the wife, instead of taking at once his place as head of the family, inherits only a part of his fortune, often brought him by herself, as if she were a child, or ward only, not an equal partner"* (Fuller 1845: 21).

According to Fuller, the supposed lack of rationality of both slaves and women justified man's arbitrary power over them:

> *"[It] exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling towards women as towards slaves, such as is expressed in the common phrase, 'Tell that to women and children', that the infinite soul can only work through them in already ascertained limits; that the gift of reason, man's highest prerogative, is allotted to them in much lower degree; that they must be kept from mischief and melancholy by being constantly engaged in active labor, which is to be furnished and directed by those better able to think"* (Fuller 1845: 22–23).

In so doing, Fuller extended the republican understanding of liberty and slavery to women and as Pettit (1997: 140), among others, has pointed out,[20] proved the general compatibility of the application of republican paradigms to the feminist cause:

> *"For if the main problem for women is that cultural, legal, and institutional pressures combine to put them in a position akin to that of slavery—combine to place them under the thumb of men—then the ideal for women is precisely that of being secured against arbitrary interference: being given freedom in the sense in which this connotes, not just an absence of interference, but an absence of domination".*

Underlining the common conditions of subjection, in which women and slaves lived, Fuller (1845: 15) noted that *"the warmest appeal in behalf of woman"* had been made by the Anti-Slavery party itself, because of the same political purposes it shared with women's movements, *"partly from a natural following out of principles, partly because many women have been prominent in that cause"*. She stated that equality could only be reached through the recognition of their humanity:

> *"As the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right hold another in bondage, so should the friend of woman assume that man cannot, by right, lay even well-meant restrictions on woman. If the negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appareled in flesh, to one Master only are they accountable. There is but one*

[20] Pettit (1997: 130–140).

> *law for souls, and if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as man, or son of man, but as a son of God"* (Fuller 1845: 26).

Among others, Mary Wollstonecraft herself had already compared the condition of women to that of slaves in her *Vindication*[21], and the woman-slave analogy gained importance with the start of the abolitionist movement in the 1840s. As the abolitionist orator Abby Kelley stated in 1841, women's movements and intellectuals, such as Fuller, were using the republican paradigm of slavery in order to support their emancipation from the supremacy of white men and claim their social and political rights: "*We have good cause to be grateful to the slave. In striving to strike his irons off, we found most surely, that we were manacled ourselves*" (Foner 2009: 119; Morton 1996: 108).

Fuller (1845: 153) reminds us that women engaged in the abolition movement were "*accused of boldness, because they lifted the voice in public*", but they should keep struggling because "*something effectual might be done by women*". She called for them to respond to the annexation of Texas:[22]

> *"Might not we women do something in regard to this Texas Annexation project? I have never felt that I had any call to take part in public affairs before; but this is a great moral question, and we have an obvious right to express our convictions. I should like to convene meetings of the women everywhere, and take our stand"* (Clarke, Emerson, Channing 1852, II: 141).

Social domination in the private and public spheres

The American system recognized no political rights of either slaves or women. In the same way as the ancients had established the exclusion of women from the public sphere, the republican tradition, at least until the period after the French Revolution, had institutionalized it[23]. During the 19th century, the idea of independence was largely based on gender in that autonomy was considered the prerogative of men, while dependence was women's natural destiny. Female independence was *de facto* perceived to be a negative thing, *"deprecated as a fault*" by men (Fuller 1845: 29). In addition, according to Lockean political theory, men had voting rights owing to the traditional link between political participation and ownership of property. Since women had no property rights, and thus lacked political independence, they were consequently excluded from suffrage. It is arresting to consider

[21] See Coffee (2012); Ferguson (1992).

[22] After the declaration of independence of the Republic of Texas from the Republic of Mexico in 1836, the United States decided to incorporate it as the twenty-eighth state in 1845, causing a war between the two countries. Liberal intellectuals and politicians opposed the annexation of Texas because they feared that it would expand slavery territory.

[23] Before the French Revolution, in fact, there are few texts in which it is possible to find the theoretical recognition of women's rights. Among them, a primary role is taken by the Frenchman Poulain de la Barre (1647–1726), for works such as *De l'Égalité des deux sexes, discours physique et moral où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugés* (1673), considered by many scholars as a forerunner of feminist theories and, by others, as the father of modern feminism. See Corrias (1996).

that the male-dominated civic body remained a ruling paradigm until at least 1920 (the year of the 19th Amendment's ratification and the recognition of women's political rights), when it was more than 70 years earlier that Margaret Fuller had been criticizing 19th century-gendered political definitions of citizenship.

Fuller's ultimate aim was to put an end to what Alan Coffee has called 'social domination',[24] i.e. a social system based on cultural values and traditions that represented a source of arbitrary power. It was women's supposed physical and intellectual inferiority that justified this restraint on freedom, their consequent exclusion from social, political and working life and their relegation to the role of family carers. Women's independence was then a necessary tool to achieve gender equality:

> *"I have urged on woman independence of man, not that I do not think the sexes mutually needed by one another, but because in woman this fact has led to an excessive devotion, which has cooled love, degraded marriage, and prevented either sex from being what it should be to itself or the other"* (Fuller 1845: 161).

Fuller underlined the contradictions of men and women's codes of conduct and values that American 19th century society provided:

> *"As to marriage it has been inculcated on women for centuries, that men have not only stronger passions than they, but of a sort that it would be shameful for them to share or even understand. That, therefore, they must 'confide in their husbands,' i.e., submit implicitly to their will. That the least appearance of coldness or withdrawal, from whatever cause, in the wife is wicked, because liable to turn her husband's thoughts to illicit indulgence; for a man is so constituted that he must indulge his passions or die!"* (Fuller 1845: 137).

[24] "*Domination may be legal or political, such as where individuals are treated unequally under the law or lack important constitutional rights and representation. As we shall see, Wollstonecraft shows that domination may also be social. Insofar as individuals' social environment represents arbitrary restrictive force – where norms and customs are not required to reflect their interests and perspectives, inhibiting and diminishing the effectiveness of their voices and reducing their ability to act as agents in their own right – they are dominated irrespective of their legal standing […] Where Wollstonecraft's diagnosis differs from her predecessors', as I shall show, is that she takes social oppression to inhibit freedom for the same reasons as the denial of legal or political rights: women are under a form of arbitrary rule, are excluded from having their interests and perspectives considered, and are unable to contest their treatment in any 'court of public opinion.' While the traditional focus of republican argument had been on preventing arbitrary interference by rulers (who might, for example, dominate via taxation without representation or the royal prerogative), or on discouraging the accumulation of political and economic power in the hands of a few, Wollstonecraft demonstrates that, as far as women were concerned, these measures would never bring freedom without a simultaneous change in the cultural attitudes and patterns of behavior (both male and female) that prevented women from becoming independent*" (Coffee 2012: 118–119).

Fuller revealed what was evidently a 'double standard' which ascribed divergent acceptable values to women and men that were patently more favourable to the latter and were indeed values that began life right at the moment of birth. When a boy was born, "*a sort of glory swells at this thought the heart of the mother*" because "*she has given a citizen, a defender to her country. To her husband an heir of his name, to herself a protector*". If the baby was a daughter, there was usually a "*slight degree of regret*" and the mother identified herself with the "*weakness*" of her young daughter, "*so deeply rooted is the idea of the superiority of man in happiness and dignity*".

Furthermore, social domination subordinated women to a position of *real* inferiority to men because it denied them the access to the same kind of education and prevented their intellectual development. Since man "*educated woman more as a servant than a daughter*", she was not considered as a rational creature and lacked self-determination, so much so that she was not even supposed to have the necessary traits of a civic-minded citizen and was therefore excluded from public life (Fuller 1845: 145–146; 156).

Fuller (1845: 14) recognized the historical importance of the French Revolution,[25] which "*bore witness in favor of woman*", although it maintained the traditional distinction between private and public spheres and did not allow women to enter the public arena: *"its idea of happiness did not rise beyond outward enjoyment, unobstructed by the tyranny of the others […] The Goddess of Liberty was impure"*. As Catherine Larrère (2002: 150) has pointed out, women's exclusion from public life was a necessary condition for the recognition of men's rights: "*the inequality of the sexes was the condition of political freedom and equality: there had to be women so that men could be citizens*".

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller (1845: 18) underlined the traditional belief that if women took part in the activities of the public sphere, i.e. if they were to "*vote at polls, and preach from a pulpit*", they could not have attended "*to those of her own sphere*". In analysing the rhetoric traditionally used to exclude women from suffrage, she recalled some of the arguments that William Thompson himself had pointed out in his *Appeal*[26] against James Mill: because "*men are privately influenced by women*", it was not necessary to allow women the right to vote. Since each man was inside a relationship with a woman (as a wife, sister, or female friend), it was impossible that he would fail to represent their interests. The concession of the vote would bring disastrous consequences: "*the beauty of home would be destroyed, the delicacy of the sex be violated, the dignity of halls of legislation degraded*". Exercising the right to vote was considered to be in contrast, and in no way compatible, with the duties of a mother and a wife.

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[25] During the French Revolution, women took active part in the vindication of their rights as citizens. The most important works, which have been benchmarks for subsequent authors, were *Sur l'Admission des Femmes au Droit de Citè* (1790) by the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794), the *Déclaration de Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne* (1791) by the revolutionary Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), and the book of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Both Condorcet and de Gouges, advocating for women's civil and political rights, died for their ideas during the Revolution.

[26] William Thompson (1775–1833) published his pamphlet against the famous Utilitarian James Mill's *Essay on Government* (1820) and his refusal to recognize women's political rights. James Mill (1773–1836) had written: "*One thing is pretty clear, that all those individuals whose interests are indisputably included in those other individuals, may be struck off without inconvenience. In this light may be viewed all children, up to a certain age, whose interests are involved in those of their parents. In this light, also, women may be regarded, the interests of almost all of whom are involved either in that of their fathers or in that of their husbands*" (Mill 1825: 21). For more information on Thompson's life, see Pankhurst (1991); on his political thought, see Falchi (2015).

According to Fuller, this was the reason for the existence of "*ludicrous pictures of ladies in hysterics at the polls, and senate chambers filled with cradles*". Since the belief that woman was created to please men's pleasures was commonly accepted within society, it was legitimate to doubt that men were acting on behalf of, and intended to do justice to, women. According to the thinker, *"if there* is *a misfortune in woman's lot, it is in obstacles being interposed by men"*: it was necessary to throw down "*every arbitrary barrier*" which impeded gender equality and to "*have every path laid open to woman as freely as to men*". Since *"man, as at present instructed, will not help this work, because they also are under the slavery of habit […] women must leave off asking them and being influenced by them"* (Fuller 1845: 23; 37; 26; 107).

Social domination, according to Fuller, was kept alive through the construction of stereotypical characteristics of male and female roles, to which everybody had to adapt. Actually, she wrote, *"male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another"*. By saying that *"there is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman"*, she aimed to deconstruct traditional gender roles, highlighting that they were historically and socially constructed. Furthermore, Fuller argued that *"the faculties have not been given pure to either, but only in preponderance. There are also exceptions in great number, such as men of far more beauty than power, and the reverse"* (Fuller 1845: 103; 155). Scientists had in vain tried to make a rule for the division of what is male and what is female, because

> *"Nature provides exceptions to every rule. She sends women to battle, and sets Hercules spinning; she enables women to bear immense burdens, cold, and frost; she enables the man, who feels maternal love, to nourish his infant like a mother. Of late she plays still gayer pranks. Not only she deprives organizations, but organs, of a necessary end. She enables people to read with the top of the head, and see with the pit of the stomach. Presently she will make a female Newton, and a male Syren"* (Fuller 1845: 103).

In contrast with dominant 19th century ideas that separated male and female traits, and considered those who crossed these rules as deviants, she believed in gender fluidity, which means that each soul exhibited at the same time characteristics of both the sexes in proportions that varied from soul to soul: *"every life has, in its sphere, a totality or wholeness of the animating powers of the other spheres; having only, as its own characteristic, a predominance of some one power"* (Fuller 1845: 105). According to Fuller, since the boundaries between the two gender identities were very fluid, and every male had in himself female elements, and vice versa, the traditional rhetorical arguments that recognized civil and political rights just to half of the American population revealed themselves lacking any theoretical foundation.

Fuller emphasized that social domination was visible in the language used by men in regard to women. When men *"admired any woman they were inclined to speak of her as 'above her sex'"*, or as a *"manly woman"*, or they commented that she had *"a masculine mind"* and had surpassed her sex. She also underlined that men did not encourage women to believe in their own capabilities and tried always to minimize what they did. One example is when women decided to join the army during the revolutions in favour of liberty, as the countess Emily Plater did in Poland. In this case, men were inclined to talk *"of the*

delicacy of her sex" and they *"advised her to withdraw from perils and dangers"* because of the belief that the supposed gentleness of women was incompatible with the cruelty and violence of war, a male prerogative (Fuller 1845: 30–31; 34).

Only a cultural shift could help to dismantle social domination and create the prerequisites for the full recognition of women's rights. Since both women and men were responsible for perpetuating it, Fuller put the blame not only on men but also on women, who taught their sons to become strong heads of the family and their daughters to be pretty and submissive wives: *"Women of my country!"* and *"the mothers of our own revolution: have you nothing to do with this? […] This cause is your own"*. Women had the potential to help break down the barriers of social domination by teaching their children gender equality and democratic values and could thus be protagonists of a great cultural change (Fuller 1845: 152–153).

In Fuller's view, self-determination and independence from men were the instruments required to emancipate women from domestic slavery and, in the republican sense, to give them the full enjoyment of their rights to freedom and equality:

> *"With so much talk about virtue and freedom, must be mingled some desire for them; that it cannot be in vain that such have become the common topics of conversation among men […] We have waited here long in the dust; we are tired and hungry, but the triumphal procession must appear at last"* (Fuller 1845: 15).

Legal protection would be needed to battle against the subjection of women, although she was aware that this was not the only solution: *"Could you clear away all the bad forms of society, it is vain, unless the individual begin[s] to be ready for better. There must be a parallel movement in these two branches of life"* (Fuller 1845: 65).

> *"Men must soon see that, on their own ground, that woman is the weaker party, she ought to have legal protection, which would make such oppression impossible. But […] if principles could be established, particulars would adjust themselves aright. Ascertain the true destiny of woman, give her legitimate hopes, and a standard within herself; marriage and all other relations would by degrees be harmonized with these" (Fuller 1845: 22).*

Since the problem was cultural, the change had first to be made "*in the minds of men*" and women (Fuller 1845: 22). Education must have the central role as a social improver and as a way to emancipate women because, as Fuller (1845: 65) stated, "*their liberty must be the liberty of law and knowledge*".

Education as a right and instrument in a free republic

The role of education in the construction of the American republic had evolved over the years. As Tiffany K. Wayne (2007: 72) has pointed out, during the American Revolution

women's education had helped the new Republic's interests, because women had served as the first educators of future citizens:

> *"Whereas boys needed education as career training, the primary goal for early nineteenth-century parents sending their daughters to female seminaries or academies was […] that education prepare young women for roles as wives and mothers".*

While fathers worked outside the home, mothers had the duty to supervise both sons and daughters in their early years, and to transmit republican values to them. Women's education revolved around their assigned roles and was limited to the household affairs and other subjects related to the care of their families. Nevertheless, it was during the first half of the 19th century that the paradigm of Republican Motherhood gradually began to become less prominent. In fact, in the post-Revolutionary era, women's colleges were founded in response to the need for more advanced education for women. The opening of new all-female academies, seminaries, and then colleges, which expanded their *curricula*, had a great impact on women's life choices, and engendered a new debate about the importance of women's education not as a concession, granted to the educators of future citizens, but as a right[27]. As more women received an education, they were more likely to live outside their traditional domestic sphere and to marry later, in order to dedicate a part of their life to public careers as teachers or reformers. Advocates of women's education in the 1830s and 1840s believed that it would enhance and stabilize society. Indeed, early 19th century women's education came to have a prominent role as a social developer because it "*created the first generation of formally educated young women, women with expanded expectations about their duties not only to their families, but to society at large*" (Wayne 2007: 74–75).

Fuller had experienced the emancipatory power of education during the years between 1836 and 1838, when she worked as a teacher for young girls and boys, as well as in the period between 1839 and 1844, when she created the project *Conversations for women*, which aimed to make adult women aware of their conditions through encouraging freethinking and dialogue. At that time, she noticed that, thanks to improvements in education, many women were realizing their subordinate position: *"Many women are considering within themselves, what they need that they have not, and what they can have, if they find they need it"*. In addition, wrote Fuller, *"good books are allowed […] they have time to think […] Their employments are more favorable to meditation than those of men"* (Fuller 1845: 19; 96–97). While she recognized that the American educational system had been experiencing improvements, both in quality and quantity, a basic problem remained: although the time dedicated to education had increased, women received only a superficial education in all-girls' schools. As she had observed in 1839 during one of her *Conversations*,

> *"Women now are taught all that men are—Is it so? Or is it not that they run over superficially even more studies—without being really taught*

[27] See Wayne (2007), esp. pp. 72–97. "*Female education in a republic was significant for what it might achieve for the men and the children of that republic, not as a means of fulfilment for women themselves*" (Rendall 1985: 40).

> *any thing. Thus when they come to the business of life & the application of knowledge they find that they are inferior—& all their studies have not given them that practical good sense"* (Simmons 1994: 203).

Fuller saw this as the essential difference between women's and men's ways of learning:

> *"Men are called on from a very early period to reproduce all that they learn—First their college exercises—their political duties—the exercises of professional study—the very first action of life in any direction—calls upon them for reproduction of what they have learnt.—This is what is most neglected in the education of women—they learn without any attempt to reproduce"* (Simmons 1994: 203).

Despite the concern for women's education in the post-Revolutionary era, cultured women were still considered as a destabilizing element in society: *"If she knows too much, she will never find a husband; superior women hardly ever can"* (Fuller 1845: 107).

As part of the first generation of educated women, Fuller strived in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* to address the tensions in the *status* of a republican woman as both a mother and a citizen. She argued that women's education had to be aimed at their intellectual development *per se*, and not at their educational role as mothers, as "*better companions and mothers for men*". According to the American thinker, the best way for women to gain room to manoeuvre within society was being educated not by a male teacher, who would only perpetuate the myth of women's inferiority, but by a female instructor, because of their similarity of needs and interests:

> *"The influence has been such, that the aim certainly is, now, in arranging school instruction for girls, to give them as fair a field as boys. As yet, indeed, these arrangements are made with little judgment or reflection; […] now the improvement in the education of girls is to be made by giving them young men as teachers, who only teach what has been taught themselves at college, while methods and topics need revision for these new subjects, which could better be made by those who had experienced the same wants"* (Fuller 1845: 83).

American women, she tells us, had to struggle for the recognition of full equality with men, starting from the demand for higher levels of education so that "*the idea of […] self-dependence [could] be established in them, […] the weakening habit of dependence on others [could] be broken up*" because "*the development of the one cannot be effected without that of the other; […] twin exponents of a divine thought*" (Fuller 1845: 82–84; 105; vi).

Conclusion

The *antebellum* rhetoric around American democracy displayed two contradictory discourses with regard to the principle of equality. On the one hand, it promoted equality among all men based on a philosophy of natural and inalienable rights; on the other hand, its legal system and cultural constructs continued to subordinate women. During the 1830s and the 1840s, the critique advanced by political thinkers such as Margaret Fuller challenged the pattern of 'separate spheres' and questioned the understanding of female citizenship in the Republic.

As a daughter of the new America built on the republican ideals of freedom, equality and independence, Fuller based her reasoning on republican paradigms, defining women as slaves due to their lack of any liberty in the sense of non-domination. However, while republicans identified only two threats to liberty, namely private domination (over individuals, controllable under the protection of the law) and public domination (the state over its citizens, avoidable through a mixed constitution), Fuller recognized a third kind of domination that covered both the private and public sphere. Aware that no political change could be effective without a cultural transformation in society, she took republicanism a step further with the analysis of social domination as a form of interference derived from traditions, cultural values and behaviour patterns, which needed to be removed through education in order to allow women to really be free in the republican sense. In this way, the thinker developed a more inclusive and egalitarian model of republican liberty that embraced women.

The innovation of Fuller's thought can be found specifically in the ways she used to denounce the fact that the rights of half of humankind were not recognized in a republic that proclaimed the principles of freedom and equality as its cornerstone. As Wollstonecraft had done before her in England, the thinker deconstructed American republican models, which she deeply supported, and highlighted the contradictions and problems by challenging the assumptions derived from the theories themselves. In short, Fuller issued a feminist challenge to republicanism, which can offer new food for thought to the contemporary academic debate on the compatibility between republicanism and feminism.

> *"This country is as surely destined to elucidate a great moral law, as Europe was to promote the mental culture of Man. Though the national independence be blurred by the servility of individuals; though freedom and equality have been proclaimed only to leave room for a monstrous display of slave-dealing and slave-keeping […] Still it is not vain that the verbal statement has been made, 'All men are born free and equal'"* (Fuller 1845: 15).

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