Gender Ideology Proposals and its Consequences

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Abstract

For more than a decade the evolution of the notion of the term "gender" has grown in importance, both in intellectual debate and in the realm of *praxis*. Initially, the expression "gender" was used within the field of grammar in order to distinguish masculine, feminine or neuter words. However, from the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, this word has undergone a conceptual change due to its increased use in other areas and, in particular, for having substituted the classical term "sex", employed in order to designate the human sexual duality, man-woman. In this context, it can be affirmed that gender has displaced sex in contemporary anthropological, social, political and legal discourse. In addition, it has found a definitive place in academic language and in legislation. Although the word gender by itself doesn't have a positive or negative way to be understood, the problem is its interpretation. Today one of the leading interpretations is called "gender ideology".

Key words: Gender ideology, identity, equality, difference, sexual identity.

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Originally the word gender had a grammatical use that distinguished male, female or neuter. Later, the term became identified with the characteristics of femininity and masculinity, from the roles assigned by society and culture. Therefore, the word gender by itself doesn't have a positive or negative way to be understood. The problem is its interpretation. Today there are two leading interpretations of gender: "gender perspective" and "gender ideology".

Gender perspective "…is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (United Nations, "Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997", A/52/3 18 September 1997).

In fact, we don't have problems with this definition of "gender" because it is about equal rights in all spheres of the society for men and women. We could therefore say that this definition is important for the development of all societies.

On the other hand, there is another interpretation of gender called "gender ideology". This explanation of gender separates the biological sex of masculine or feminine identity in stating that far from being intrinsic to the person it is a social construction. This identity could –and must- be torn down to allow woman to reach an equality of social power with man and for the individual to choose their sexual orientation. Man-woman relations would be governed by struggle over power.

Gender ideology proposes a new way of understanding human identity under a distorted concept of freedom and equality. Its main proposal is the separation between

sex and gender (Butler, 2007). It leads to understanding sex as the biological fact of being male or female, and gender as social and cultural factors that shape male and female roles. The differences between men and women are perceived to not necessarily correspond to their nature. Instead they are viewed as mere constructions according to the roles and stereotypes that society and culture have assigned to each gender. Therefore, such ideology seeks to eliminate completely the differences between men and women, including biological differences.

This interpretation of gender creates several problems since it denies anthropological differences between the sexes, by stating that it doesn't matter whether a person is born with a biological body of man or woman, because the person can build herself/himself.

Then there would be no sexual component in the development of personality, and as a consequence there would be a plurality of genders: female, male, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, lesbian, transsexual and neuter.

To understand the origins of gender ideology and scope of the proposal, it is necessary to know the relationships between man and woman, and the roles they have played in the various historical periods of Western culture. In these relations, two models have predominated: the subordination of women to men, typical of ancient cultures, and the egalitarianism, which is a reaction to the former model (Elósegui, 2011). It is not possible to fully understand the model of egalitarianism without understanding the model of subordination, which became more radical in the second half of the twentieth century. It does not recognize any differences between male and female, giving rise to what we know as gender ideology.

As already indicated, the model of subordination that is not yet entirely overcome, is typical of ancient cultures. As a result of the sexual division of labour, which occurred -according to archaeological investigations- since prehistoric times, and taking into account the biological characteristics of man and woman, this model identifies sex with gender, giving each one their role within the community. The man performed the activities that required greater physical strength, and had to risk his life in war for the

survival of his community. As a result, patriarchy emerged along with the development of the model of subordination of women to men (Golberg, 1973). This was seen as the natural order of things, that is, from the nature of the sexes.

Other features of the model of subordination are: dependence and inferiority of women in relation to men, and the separation and opposition between the public and private sectors of society.

Regarding dependence and inferiority of women to the men, the thinkers of antiquity are for the idea that the ratio of male superiority to women is something that has always existed (Truyol y Serra, 1978). Aristotle compares men and women and considers women inferior to men, in anatomical, physiological and ethical sense (Sissa, 1991). In his analysis of the physical differences between the sexes, he concludes that they were meaningless in the reproduction and generation of new beings. In his treatises on animals, he emphasizes what is weak and defective in the female nature, regarding it as a natural malformation. She was a deficient man, capable of providing, in procreation, only foetal material, because the soul was provided by the man.

In Jewish culture, the woman lived a life of subordination and inferiority in strict compliance with the rabbinic principles. She was excluded from the main religious obligations such as the study of Torah and Talmud, which are their holy books. Her duties consisted in being a homemaker, fulfilling Jewish law and transmitting to their children traditional customs (Aubert, 1976). Since Eve led Adam to disobedience, the woman was considered unable to resist the temptations and was thought to be a minor.

Christianity brought transformation in society and customs, which consisted of mainly the recognition of the equal dignity of women and men. From this moment marriage and motherhood ceased from being the only destination for women, since celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven was also a way of life. It also defended the indissolubility of marriage, chastity and fidelity that should exist between spouses. This is because it was common practice to repudiate women, often for trivial reasons (Aubert, 1976).

Another feature of the subordination model was the separation and opposition between the public and private spheres of society. It considered the public sphere to be more important than the private sphere. The public sphere is for the man, which finds its fulfilment in the political, economic and social activities. The private sphere concerns women, and refers to family life, motherhood, parenting, and housework. This separation of spheres was even opposed to one another, because the man was not involved in the tasks associated with the private sphere and women were excluded from public activities (Goldberg, 1973). However, it is important to mention that from the spread of Christianity and specifically in the Middle Ages, this circumstance was less marked, since women enjoyed great independence, owned property and had the legal capacity to act in trade and access justice.

On the other hand, there is the model of egalitarianism, which as it was indicated is a reaction against the subordination model or Patriarchy. Its proposal is that the woman has to take the form of being male to no longer be subordinated. Equality is equated to the elimination of all kinds of differences between the sexes, including biological differences, and it is therefore believed that marriage and motherhood are the main obstacles to the empowerment of women.

Following the French Revolution of 1789, there is the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which did not include large groups of people, for example, women, non-whites and manual workers, who did not fulfil the requirements of the individualism of the Enlightenment period (Fernández, 2003). Within a non-conformist environment, a few isolated voices spoke out defending the natural equality between the sexes and demanding better education for women.

Thus there arose the first movements for the rights of women, which were in response to the discrimination that looked down upon the dignity of women. These movements claimed the ability of women to participate in educational, professional, legal and political activities. They demanded the right to vote, access to secondary and higher education, the opportunity to do the same jobs as men, economic independence and control of income and property.

The objectives of these movements were influenced by national, political and religious differences. One drawback of these movements was that they tried to match the woman with the man following the model imposed by modernity. It was felt that the only way to liberate women from their way of life would be eliminating female characteristics that made the woman subordinate to and dependent on men (Ballesteros, 2000). With these assumptions the setting up of the model of egalitarianism began, in which the difference between the sexes was undervalued.

Despite having achieved most of the objectives by the first movements for women's rights, equality, especially in employment, economic and political spheres, was far from being a reality (Elósegui, 2011). This led to the emergence of new movements for women's liberation in the sixties, influenced by new ideals such as marxism and existentialism.

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir, published her book *The Second Sex*, inspiring most of these new movements. This work has the merit of approaching reality and status of women correctly, but she failed to give the correct answer to the question of the subordination of women. The French philosopher addressed the problems of women, from an existentialist perspective and from their own point of view, which gave a certain bias in her analysis. With her famous phrase "not born a woman: one to be reached" (De Beauvoir, 1949), she expresses that the characteristics that make women subordinate, are not from the feminine nature but from culture and society. According to Beauvoir, the society had relegated women to the field of biology, while men had the ability to create culture and change the world. She argued that to achieve the liberation of women, it was necessary that they imitate the behaviour of men. Beauvoir criticizes womanhood for its passivity and dependence, and proposes a total rejection of the female body and a very negative view of motherhood.

Therefore, we could say that in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir laid the features that later formed what we call gender ideology. As:

- The requirement of a radical equality between man and woman.
- The under valuation of the private sphere and the family.

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- The separation between the concepts of sex and gender.

- Promotion of homosexuality and lesbianism as an option.

To conclude, some of gender ideology proposals and its consequences could be:

1. The demand for absolute equality between man and women, to the extreme of removing any aspect identifying them as such. Gender ideology denies the very basis of the difference, that is, human nature and biological sex. The fact that in the person matches biological sex, sexual identity and sexual orientation, simply would be a coincidence or the result of cultural conditioning. Therefore, nature would be "neuter" that is to say, no man or woman is born, instead, is only the result of a social process (Di Pietro, 2006).

2. From the foregoing, gender ideology proposes that there is a difference between sex and gender, because gender –considered as a cultural construction– is no longer understood as linked to biological sex. Consequently, such ideology offers a range of genders that come from the sexual orientation of the person: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, lesbian and transsexual.

3. To the egalitarianism between man and woman there should be equalization of heterosexuality –anthropological structure of the human being- to homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism and transsexualism. In accordance with gender ideology, sexual orientation can be freely assumed as a "choice" that people make according to their wishes and preferences. This feature causes the institutions considered as pillars of society – such as marriage and family, whose main characteristic is heterosexuality- to lose their original properties and functions when they are assimilated to other types of unions (Donati, 2003). The same applies to the legal concept of adoption, because with those arguments, the contribution of man with fatherhood and woman with motherhood in the education of children would be emptied of its meaning. It would also violate the child's right to have a father and a mother (Lacroix, 2006).

4. In the extreme the fight against biological and socio-cultural determinism brings about "liberation" of women from their biological capacity for motherhood and thereby,

removes the most representative female characteristic. To achieve this goal there arises social and legal recognition of so-called "new human rights" among which are the sexual and reproductive rights (Elósegui, 2011). These rights will allow women to avoid motherhood, also considered as a burden and the root of their historical discrimination (Aparisi, 2009).

5. The differences between man and woman -basis of heterosexual relationships- are considered by gender ideology as inevitable source of conflict and aggression (physical and psychological) from the man to the woman, in order to perpetuate the relations of dominance and subordination between the sexes, typical of patriarchy (Badinter, 2004). This ideology has not taken into account other root causes of violence such as psychological imbalances, lack of impulse control, alcoholism, drug addiction, etc. (Lacalle, 2009).

In conclusion, I would like to insist about a specific idea. Despite the lack of terminological clarity in the field of gender, we must not confuse "gender perspective" -which advocates for the differences between men and women thus promoting complimentarity between the sexes in work and family- with the radical approach that ignores and crushes the natural diversity between both sexes promoted by gender ideology (Burggraf, 2004).

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