

## **An Ideology of Gender: Dangers and Scope**

By Oscar Alzamora Revoredo

*Behind the increasingly common use of the expression “gender” instead of the word “sex”, lies an ideology which tries to eliminate the idea that human beings are divided in two sexes. This ideology aims to affirm that the differences between men and women, beyond the obvious anatomical ones, do not correspond to a fixed nature, but are products of the culture of a certain country or epoch. According to this ideology, the differences between the sexes are regarded as something conventionally attributed by society and everyone may “invent” him/herself. The distinction between what is allowed and what is prohibited in this field disappears. “Gender feminism”, or radical feminism, which produced this ideology, arose at the end of the sixties from the previous feminist movement in favor of the equality of the sexes. It is based on an analysis of history as a class struggle between oppressors and the oppressed, viewing monogamous marriage as the first antagonism between men and women. The “gender feminists” call urgently for “deconstructing” the “socially constructed roles” of men and women, because this socialization, in their opinion, affects the woman in a negative and unjust way. That is why the “gender feminists” insist on the necessity of “deconstructing” the family, not only because it makes the woman a slave according to them, but because it socially conditions the children into accepting the family, marriage and motherhood as natural. Along the same lines, the “gender feminists” consider that an essential part of their program is the promotion of “free choice” in matters related to reproduction and life style. “Free choice in reproduction” is, for them, the key expression to refer to procured abortion, while “lifestyle” aims to promote homosexuality, lesbianism and all the other forms of sexuality outside marriage. The ideology of gender is a closed system, with which there is no way of reasoning. There are many persons unaware of the dangers of this new proposal. Taking into account the central position that this perspective succeeded in taking in the North-American culture, it is a challenge that must be vigorously faced in order to avoid the dire consequences that it is already producing in the societies of developed countries and that it aims to produce in the developing ones, by means of the so-called “reproductive health”. (↗ Sexual and Reproductive Rights; Discrimination Against Women and CEDAW; Gender; Motherhood and Feminism; New Definitions of Gender; Patriarchy and Matriarchy; Free Choice; Equal Rights for Men and Women).*

### **IDEOLOGY OF GENDER: DANGERS AND SCOPE**

“Gender is a cultural construct; consequently, it is neither the causal result of sex nor as apparently fixed as sex... When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one”.<sup>1</sup>

These words that might seem taken from a science fiction story predicting a serious loss of common sense in human beings are nothing but an extract from the book *Gender Trouble:*

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<sup>1</sup> J. BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 1990, 6.

*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* of the radical feminist Judith Butler, which has been included in the curriculum of various prestigious North American universities for many years, and in which the gender perspective has been heavily promoted.

While many could consider the term “gender” as simply a polite form of saying “sex” to avoid the secondary meaning “sex” carries in English and have “gender” refer to feminine and masculine human beings, there are others who have, for many years, decided to spread a whole “new perspective” of the term. This perspective, surprisingly enough to many, refers to the term gender as “socially constructed roles”.

The Fourth World Conference of the United Nations on Women, organized in 1995 in Beijing, was the chosen setting for the promoters of the new perspective to launch a strong campaign of persuasion and diffusion. This is why, since the summit, the “gender perspective” has come to penetrate different circles not only of industrialized countries but also of developing ones.

### **DEFINITION OF THE TERM GENDER**

At the summit in Beijing many of the participating delegates who did not know this “new perspective” on the term in question, asked the principle persons proposing it for a clear definition which would shed light on the debate. Thus, the heads of the UN conference issued the following definition: “Gender refers to the relations between men and women based on the socially defined roles assigned to one sex or the other”.

This definition created confusion among the delegates at the summit, mainly among those coming from Catholic countries and the Holy See, who asked for a better explanation of the term, as it might hide an unacceptable agenda that would include the tolerance of homosexual orientations and identities, among other things. It was then that Bella Abzug, former congresswoman of the United States, intervened to complete the new interpretation of the term “gender”: “The meaning of the term “gender” has evolved, and has differentiated itself from the term “sex” in order to express the reality of the fact that the situation of the roles of women and men are social constructs subject to change”.

It thus became clear that the supporters of the gender perspective were advancing something more reckless, like, for example, “a natural man or woman does not exist, that a sum of characteristics or conduct exclusive to one sex does not exist, not even in psychological life”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, “the absence of a feminine or masculine essence allows us to reject the supposed ‘superiority’ of either sex, and to question the possibility of the existence of a ‘natural’ form of human sexuality”.<sup>3</sup>

Faced with this situation, many delegates questioned the term and its inclusion in the document. Nevertheless, the former congresswoman Abzug defended it firmly: “the concept of “gender” is

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the work of C. DELGADO, *Reporte sobre la Conferencia Regional de Mar de Plata*, Argentina, in which he records various quotations of the “gender feminists”.

<sup>3</sup> DELGADO, *Reporte sobre la Conferencia*.

embedded in contemporary social, political and legal discourse. It has been integrated into the conceptual planning, the language, the documents and programs of the systems of the United Nations... the current attempt by several Member States to expunge the word “gender” from the Platform for Action and to replace it with the word “sex” is an insulting and demeaning attempt to reverse the gains made by women, to intimidate us and to block further progress”.

Bella Abzug’s passionate effort to include the term in Beijing got the attention of many delegates. However, the fear and confusion intensified later when one of the participants spread some texts used by the gender feminists, professors in various renowned colleges and universities in the United States. In agreement with the delegate’s series of readings, the “gender feminists” defend and spread the following definitions:

-*Hegemony or hegemonic*: Ideas or concepts universally accepted as natural, but which are in reality social constructs.

-*Deconstruction*: The task of denouncing the hegemonic ideas and language (that is, those universally accepted as natural), in view of persuading the people to believe that their perceptions of reality are social constructs.

-*Patriarchy, patriarchal*: The institutionalization of the masculine control over women, children and society, perpetuating the subordinate position of women.

-*Polimorphous perversity, sexually polimorphous*: Men and women do not feel any attraction to persons of the opposite sex naturally, but due to societal conditioning. Therefore, sexual desire may be directed to anyone.

-*Mandatory heterosexuality*: People are forced to think that the world is divided in two sexes sexually attracted to one another.

-*Sexual preference or orientation*: Different forms of sexuality exist -including – homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transvestite- that are equivalent to heterosexuality.

-*Homophobia*: Fear of relations with persons of the same sex; people with prejudices against homosexuals. (The term is based on the notion that the prejudice against homosexuals has its roots in the exaltation of homosexual tendencies.)

These definitions were taken from the compulsory material of the course “Re-imagining gender” given in a prestigious North American *college*. Likewise, the following affirmations belong to the same obligatory bibliography: “Feminist theory cannot afford the luxury to simply voice a tolerance of ‘lesbianism’ as an ‘alternative lifestyle’ or to make occasional allusions to lesbians. A feminist critique of the obligatory heterosexual orientation of women has been delayed for too long”.<sup>4</sup> “An appropriate and viable strategy for the right to abortion is to inform every woman that heterosexual penetration is a rape, regardless of her contrary subjective experience”.<sup>5</sup>

The quoted affirmations may appear sufficiently revelatory of the dangerous agenda of the promoters of this “perspective”. Nevertheless, there are still other postulates that the “gender feminists” advance with greater force every time: “every child is assigned to one category or another on account of the shape and size of its genitals. Once this is done, we turn into what our culture thinks we are, man or woman. Although many believe that the men and women are a

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<sup>4</sup> A. RICH. “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, in *Blood, Bread and Poetry*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> RICH. “Compulsory Heterosexuality”, 70.

natural expression of a genetic plan, gender is a product of human culture and thought, a social construction which creates the ‘true nature’ of all individuals”.<sup>6</sup>

Thus for the gender feminists, this “implies class, and class implies inequality. Struggling to deconstruct gender will bring us to our goal faster”.<sup>7</sup>

## **GENDER FEMINISM**

But what does gender feminism consist in and what is the difference between it and what has been commonly known as feminism? In order to fully comprehend the discussion around the term “gender”, it is worthwhile to answer this question.

The term “gender feminism” was first coined by Christina Hoff Sommers in her book *Who Stole Feminism?*, aiming to distinguish the earlier equity feminism from the radical ideology that arose at the end of the sixties.

Here are the words of Hoff Sommers: “Equity feminism is simply the belief in the legal and moral equality of the sexes. An equity feminist wants for women what she wants for all: fair treatment, lack of discrimination. On the contrary, gender feminism is an ideology that pretends to include everything, according to which, the North American woman is caught in an oppressive patriarchal system. The equity feminist considers that things have improved considerably for women; the gender feminist often thinks they have worsened. They see signs of patriarchy everywhere and think the situation might get worse. But this lacks a basis in the reality of North American society. Things have never been better for women, who today comprise 55% of college students while the wage gap continues to close”.<sup>8</sup>

Apparently, this “gender feminism” had a strong presence at the Beijing conference. This is what Dale O’Leary, author of numerous essays about women and a participant in the Beijing conference, maintains. She affirms that, during the working days, these women who identified themselves as feminists lobbied persistently for the inclusion of the “gender perspective” in the text, for the definition of “gender” as “socially constructed roles” and for the use of “gender” as a substitute for woman or masculine and feminine.

So, all those persons familiar with the objectives of “gender feminism” immediately recognized the connection between the ideology mentioned and the draft of the *Platform for Action* of February 27th, which included proposals that appeared innocent and particularly ambiguous terms.

## **NEOMARXISM**

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<sup>6</sup> I. GILBER - P. WESBSTER. “The Dangers of Fertility”, in *Gender Differences: Sociology Of Biology?*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> *Gender Outlaw*, 115.

<sup>8</sup> Interview of C. HOFF SOMMERS, in *Faith and Freedom (1994)*, 2.

In the words of David O'Leary, the theory of "gender feminism" is based on a neo-marxist interpretation of history. It starts with Marx's assertion that all history is class struggle, the oppressor against the oppressed, and a battle which will end only when the latter acknowledge their situation, start a revolution and impose a dictatorship of the oppressed. Society will be totally reconstructed and a new one will emerge, classless, free of conflicts, ensuring a utopian peace and prosperity for everybody.

O'Leary adds that Frederick Engels was the one who established the basis for the union of feminism and Marxism. She cites the book *The Origin of the Family, Property and the State*, written by the German thinker in 1884, in which he points out: "The first-class antagonism in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between men and women in monogamous marriage, and the first-class oppression with that of the female sex by the male".<sup>9</sup>

According to O'Leary, the classical Marxists believed that the class system would disappear once private property was eliminated, divorce was facilitated, illegitimacy was accepted, woman's entry into the labor market was made compulsory, children were placed in day-care institutions and religion was eliminated. However, for the "gender feminists", Marxism erred by concentrating on economic solutions without directly attacking the family, which was the real cause of classes.

In this sense, feminist Shulamith Firestone affirms the necessity to destroy class differences, but even more, the differences between the sexes: "To assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of reproduction: the restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, as well as feminine control of human fertility, including both the new technology and all the social institutions of childbearing and childrearing. And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class privilege but of the economic class distinction itself, so the end goal of the feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege, but of the sex distinction itself; genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally".<sup>10</sup>

## **WHEN NATURE INTERFERES**

It is clear then, that for this new "gender perspective", the reality of an inconvenient nature is disturbing, so it has to disappear. In this respect, Shulamith Firestone herself said: "the 'natural' is not necessarily a 'human' value. Humanity has begun to outgrow nature; we can no longer justify the maintenance of a discriminatory sex class system on the grounds of its origins in Nature. Indeed, for pragmatic reasons alone it is beginning to look as if we must get rid of it".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> F. ENGELS, *The Origin of the Family, Property and the State* International Publishers, New York 1972, 65-66.

<sup>10</sup> S. FIRESTONE, *The Dialectic of Sex*, Bantam Books, New York 1970, 12.

<sup>11</sup> FIRESTONE, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 10.

For the passionate defenders of the “new perspective”, no distinctions should be made, because any difference is suspect, bad, offensive. Furthermore, they say that every difference between men and women is a social construct, and therefore must be changed. They try to establish a total equality between men and women, without taking into account the natural differences between both, especially the sexual ones; even more, they relativize the notion of sex to such an extent that, according to them, the two sexes do not exist, but rather many “sexual orientations”.

In this way, the mentioned promoters of “gender” have seen no other option than to declare war on nature and the options of women. According to O’Leary, the “gender feminists” often denigrate respect for women with the same vehemence with which they attack lack of respect, because, for them, the “enemy” is difference.

However, it is evident that not all difference is bad, much less unreal. Both men and women-created in the image and likeness of God- have their own natural particularities, that must be put at the service of the other, in order to reach a mutual enrichment. This does not mean that the personal resources of femininity are less than the masculine resources; it simply means they are different.

In this sense, if we accept the fact that men and women are different, a statistical difference between men and women taking part in a particular activity could be, more than an example of discrimination, the simple reflection of these natural differences between men and women.

Nevertheless, when faced with the evidence that these differences are natural, the supporters of the “new perspective” have not questioned their proposals, but rather attack the concept of nature.

Moreover, they consider that the differences of “gender”, that according to them exist because of social construction, force women to become dependent on men and, because of this, freedom is for women consists, not in acting without undue restrictions, but in liberating herself from “socially constructed gender roles”. In this sense, Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre affirm: “Feminists must find ways to support women’s identifying their interests with women, before her personal duties to men in the context of the family. This requires the establishment revolutionary feminist culture, self-defined by women, that can support women ideologically and materially “outside of patriarchy”. The networks of anti-hegemonic, material and cultural support can supply substitutes to women who are-identified with patriarchal sexual-affective production, that offer women greater control over their bodies, work time and self-images.”<sup>12</sup>

With this aim, Ferguson and Folbre identify four key areas of “attack”:

- 1) to demand official economic support for child care and reproductive rights;
- 2) to demand sexual freedom, including the right to sexual preferences (homosexual/lesbian rights);

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<sup>12</sup> A. FERGUSON - N. FOLBRE, “The Unhappy Marriage of Patriarch and Capitalism” in *Women and Revolution*, South End Press, Boston 1981, 80.

- 3) feminist control over ideological and cultural production (this is important because cultural production affects in the end the sense of self, the social networks and the production of educational and affective networks, friendship and social relationships);
- 4) to establish mutual support: systems of economic help for women, from networks of identification with women only, to committees of women in unions that fight for female interests in paid work.<sup>13</sup>

### **A GOOD EXCUSE: WOMEN**

After examining the strange “feminist agenda”, Dale O’Leary points out that the purpose of each point is not to improve the situation of women, but to separate women from men and to destroy the identification of their interests with those of their families. Thus, adds the expert, the primordial interest of the radical feminists has never been to directly improve the situation of women or increase their freedom. On the contrary, for the active radical feminists, improvements might impede the class revolution of sex/gender.

This assertion is confirmed by the feminist Heidi Hartmann, who radically affirms: “the women’s question has never been the ‘feminist question’.

This is directed towards the causes of inequality between men and women, the male domination of women”.<sup>14</sup>

It wasn’t in vain that, during the Beijing conference, the Canadian delegate Valerie Raymond manifested her determination that the women’s summit should be treated “not as a conference on women” but that “the themes should be seen through a gender lens”.

Thus, says O’Leary, the “new perspective” has as its objective to promote the homosexual/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual agenda, and not the interests of common, normal women.

### **SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED ROLES**

In order to discuss this point let us take the definition of “gender” from a brochure that circulated at the PrepCom meeting (Preparatory Committee for Beijing) by the supporters of the perspective in question. “Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of women and men that are socially determined. Gender is related to the way in which we are perceived and the way we are expected to think and act as women and men, according to the way society is organized and not by our biological differences”.

It should be pointed that the term “role” distorts the discussion. According to O’Leary’s study, role is primarily defined as part of a theatrical production, in which a person, specially dressed and made up, plays a part dictated by a written script. The use of the term “role” or the expression

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<sup>13</sup> FERGUSON- FOLBRE, “The Unhappy Marriage”.

<sup>14</sup> H. HARMANN, “The Unhappy Marriage Of Marxism And Feminism”, in *Women And Revolution*, 5.

“roles performed” immediately transmits the sense that something artificial is imposed on a person.

When “role” is substituted with another term -such as vocation-, it becomes clear that the term “role” affects our perception of identity. A “vocation” involves something authentic, not artificial, a calling to be what we are. We follow our vocation to fulfill our nature or develop our talents and innate capacities. In this sense, for example, O’Leary’s study highlights the feminine vocation to motherhood, as motherhood is not a “role”.

When a mother conceives a child, she establishes a life-long relationship with another human being. This relationship defines a woman, gives her certain responsibilities and affects almost every aspect of her life. She is not playing the role of mother; she *is* a mother. Culture and tradition certainly influence the way in which women fulfill the responsibilities of motherhood, but they do not create mothers, declares O’Leary.

Yet, the promoters of the “gender perspective” insist that every relationship or activity of human beings is the result of a “social construction” that grants men a superior position in society and women an inferior one. According to this perspective, the progress of women requires that all of society be free of this “social construction”, so that men and women will be equal.

The “gender feminists” point out the necessity of “deconstructing these socially constructed roles”, which can be divided in three main categories in their opinion:

*Masculinity and femininity.* They consider adult men and women to be social constructions; that, in reality, the human being is born sexually neutral and is later socialized as a man or woman. This socialization, they say, affects the woman in a negative and unjust way. Because of this, the feminists suggest that education and all means of communication be purged of all stereotypes and specific images of gender so that children may grow up without being exposed to “sex-specific” work.

*Family relationships: father, mother, husband, wife.* The feminists not only propose to substitute these “gender specific” terms for “gender neutral” ones, but also aspire to no differences in conduct and responsibility between men and women in the family. According to Dale O’Leary, this is the category of “socially constructed roles” to which feminists attribute the most importance, for they consider that the experience of “sex-specific” relations in the family is the main cause of the system of classes “sex/genders”.

*Occupations or professions.* The third type of “socially constructed roles” includes the occupations that a society assigns to each sex.

Although the three categories of “social construction” could be sufficient, the “gender feminists” repertoire includes one more: human reproduction, which, according to what they say, is also socially determined. Heidi Hartmann affirms: “the way in which the human species propagates itself is socially determined. If biologically people are sexually polymorphous and society was organized in such a way as to permit equally all forms of sexual expression, reproduction would be the result of only some sexual encounters: heterosexual ones. The strict division of labor by sex, an invention common to all known societies, creates two very separate genders and the necessity that the man and the woman unite for economic reasons. This contributes to orienting their sexual

requirements towards heterosexual realization and towards ensuring biological reproduction. In more imaginative societies biological reproduction could be ensured with the help of other techniques”.<sup>15</sup>

**THE OBJECTIVE:  
THE DECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIETY**

It is clear, then, that the goal of the promoters of the “gender perspective”, strongly present in Beijing, is to reach a society without sexual classes. To achieve this, they propose the deconstruction of language, family relations, reproduction, sexuality, education, religion, culture, among other things. In this respect, the working material of the course Re-imagining Gender says the following: “gender implies class, and class presupposes inequality. To struggle to deconstruct gender will bring us faster to our goal. Now there is a patriarchal culture and gender seems to be basic to patriarchy. After all, men would not enjoy male privilege if they weren’t men. And women would not be oppressed if such a thing as “woman” didn’t exist. To end gender is to end patriarchy and also with the many injustices perpetuated in the name of the inequality between genders”.<sup>16</sup>

In this sense, Susan Moller Okin writes an article in which she foretells what would be the “dream future without gender” for her: “there will be no presumptions about masculine or feminine roles; giving birth would be conceptually so distant from child rearing, that it would be astonishing if men and women were not equally responsible in the domestic areas, or that children would spend more time with one parent than the other. It would be a future in which men and women participate in approximately equal numbers in all the spheres of life, from child care to political roles of the highest level, including the most varied kinds of paid work. If we want to keep the most minimal loyalty to our democratic ideals it is essential to distance ourselves from gender... It seems undeniable that the dissolution of gender roles will contribute to the promotion of justice in our society, by turning the family into a place more apt for the children to develop a sense of justice”.<sup>17</sup>

For this they also propose the “deconstruction of education”, as it appears in the speech that the president of Iceland, Vigdis Finnbogadottir, delivered at a preparatory conference for the Beijing conference organized by the Council of Europe in February 1995.

For her, as for all the defenders of the “gender perspective”, it is urgent not only to deconstruct the family is not enough, but education as well. Girls must be oriented towards nontraditional areas and should not be presented images of women as wives and mothers, nor should they be involved in traditional female activities. “Education is an important strategy to change the prejudices about the roles of men and women in society. The gender perspective must be integrated into the programs. The stereotypes in school books must be eliminated and the teachers should make sure

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<sup>15</sup> HARTMANN, “The Unhappy Marriage”, 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Gender Outlaw*, 115.

<sup>17</sup> S. MOLLER OKIN, “Change the Family, Change the World”, in *Utne Reader* (March-April), 75.

that the girls and boys make informed professional choices, not ones based on traditional prejudices about gender.”<sup>18</sup>

### **FIRST TARGET, THE FAMILY**

“The end of the biological family will also eliminate the need for sexual repression. Male homosexuality, lesbianism and extra-marital sexual relations will not longer be perceived as alternative options, out of the reach of state regulations... Instead of this, even the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality will be abandoned: the same “institution of sexual relations”, in which men and women played a well defined role, will disappear. Humanity will finally be able to revert to its naturally perverse polymorphous sexuality”.<sup>19</sup>

These words of Alison Jagger, author of various books of texts used in the curricula of women’s studies in North American universities, clearly reveals the hostility of the “gender feminists” towards the family.

“The radical feminist equality means not just basic equality before the law and not even equal satisfaction of basic needs, but that women – the same as men – do not have to give birth... The destruction of the biological family that Freud never visualized, will permit the new men and women to emerge, different from those who had previously existed”.<sup>20</sup>

It seems that the main reason for the feminists’ rejection of the family is that, for them, this basic institution of society “creates and supports a system of classes sex/gender”. This is what Christine Riddiough, who writes for the magazine published for the international anti-life institution “Catholics for a Free Choice”, declares: “the family gives us the first lessons of the ideology of the dominant class, and it also imparts legitimacy to other institutions of civil society. Our families are the ones teaching us religion first, how to be good citizens... The hegemony of the dominant class and family are so complete that we are taught that this incarnates the natural order of things. It is particularly based on a relationship between men and women that represses sexuality, especially women’s sexuality”.<sup>21</sup>

For those having a Marxist vision of class differences as the cause of problems, O’Leary points out, “different” always means “unequal” and “unequal” is always “oppressive”.

In this sense, the “gender feminists” consider that, when a woman takes care of her children at home and the husband works outside the home, the responsibilities are different, thus unequal. They then see this “inequality” in the home as a cause of “inequality” in public life, as the woman, whose primary interest is the home, does not always have the time and the energy to dedicate

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<sup>18</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Equality and Democracy: Utopia or Challenge?*, Palais de l’Europe, Strasbourg, 9th-11th February 1995, 38.

<sup>19</sup> A. JAGGER, “Political Philosophies of Women’s Liberation”, in *Feminism and Philosophy*, Littlefield, Adams & Co., Totowa (New Jersey) 1977, 13.

<sup>20</sup> JAGGER, “Political Philosophies”, 14.

<sup>21</sup> C. RIDDIOUGH, “Socialism, Feminism and Gay/Lesbian Liberation”, in *Women and Revolution*, 80.

herself to public life. Therefore they affirm: “We think that no woman should have this option. No woman should be allowed to stay at home and take care of her children. Society must be totally different. Women should not have this option, because, if this option exists, too many women will choose it”.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, the “gender feminists” insist on the deconstruction of the family not just because it enslaves women, but because it socially conditions the children to accept the family, marriage and motherhood as something natural. In this respect, Nancy Chodorow affirms: “If our goal is to overcome this sexual division of labor in which women mother, we need to understand the mechanisms which reproduce it. My account points to where intervention should take place. Any strategy for change whose goal includes liberation from the constraints of an unequal social organization of gender must take account of the need for a fundamental reorganization of parenting, so that primary parenting is shared equally between men and women.”<sup>23</sup>

It remains clear that, to the “gender” supporters, the responsibilities of women in the family are supposedly inimical to her self-realization. The private context is considered secondary and less important; family and housework are a “burden” that negatively affects the “professional aims” of women.

This open attack on the family, nonetheless, contrasts notably with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the UN in 1948. In its article 16, the United Nations emphatically defends family and marriage:

- 1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
- 2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
- 3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

However, the artifices of the new “gender perspective” present in the women’s summit placed all these premises aside and, on the contrary, pointed out even then the necessity to “deconstruct” the family, marriage, motherhood and femininity itself in order for the world to be free.

On the other hand, the representatives of the principle nations engaged in the defense of life and family values who participated in Beijing, raised their voices against these types of proposals, above all, on discovering that the document of the summit arbitrarily eliminated from the vocabulary of the program the words “wife”, “husband”, “mother”, “father”. Before that, Barbara Ledeen, Director of the Independent Women Forum, an organization to protect women widely known in the United States, pointed out: “The document is inspired by ultra radical feminist theories, of an old conflicting nature and represents a direct attack of the values of family, marriage, and femininity”.

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<sup>22</sup> C. HOFF SOMMERS. *Who Stole Feminism?*, Simon & Shuster, New York 1994, 257.

<sup>23</sup> N. CHODOROW, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1978, 215.

Pope John Paul II, for his part, before the Beijing conference, had already insisted on pointing out the close connection between women and the family. During a meeting before the summit with Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of the Women's Conference, he said: "There is no answer to the themes about women that can ignore her function in the family [...] In order to respect this natural order, it is necessary to confront this mistaken concept that the function of motherhood is oppressive for women".

Sadly, the proposal of the Council of Europe for the Platform for Action in Beijing was completely outside the orientations of the Holy Father. "It is high time to make it clear that gender stereotypes are outdated: men are no longer only macho bread-winners and women not only wives and mothers. The negative psychological influence of showing stereotypes of women should not be underestimated".<sup>24</sup>

Faced with this position, O'Leary writes in her report that, if it is true that women should not be shown only as wives and mothers, many *are indeed* wives and mothers, and therefore there is nothing wrong with a positive image of women dedicating themselves solely to housework. Yet, the goal of the gender perspective is not to authentically represent the lives of women, but an opposite form of stereotyping, according to which, the women who are "only" wives and mothers never appear in a favorable light.

## **HEALTH AND SEXUAL/REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

Along the same lines, the gender feminists include, as an essential part of their agenda, the promotion of "free choice" in matters related to reproduction and lifestyle. According to O'Leary, "free choice in reproduction" is the key expression to refer to abortion; meanwhile "lifestyle" points to the promotion of homosexuality, lesbianism and other forms of sexuality outside marriage. Thus, for instance, the representatives of the Council of Europe in Beijing launched the following proposal: "The voices of young women should be heard since sexual life is not solely attached to married life. This leads to the point of the right to be different, whether in terms of lifestyle – the choice to live in a family or to live alone, with or without children – or sexual preferences. The reproductive rights of lesbian women should be recognized".<sup>25</sup>

These "rights" of the lesbians also included the "right" of lesbian parents to conceive children by means of artificial insemination, and to have their companions legally adopt their children.

But the "gender" defenders not only propose these kinds of aberrations, they also defend the "right to health", which in truth, is completely distinct from the real health of the human being. In effect, totally ignoring the right to life of every human being, they propose the right to health, which includes the right to sexual and reproductive health. Paradoxically, this "reproductive health" includes abortion and "the death" of unborn human beings.

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<sup>24</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Equality and Democracy*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Equality and Democracy*, 25.

It is not in by chance that the “gender feminists” are strong allies of the environmentalists and demographers. According to O’Leary, even if the three ideologies do not concur in all aspects, they have the project of abortion in common. On the one hand, the environmentalists and the demographers consider the strict control of fertility essential for the success of their agenda, and are willing to use the “gender perspective”. The following quote from the Division for the Advancement of Women advanced in a meeting organized together with the UN Population Fund, reveals the way of thinking of those primarily interested in there being less awareness of “gender”: “in order to be effective in the long term, family planning programs must seek not only to reduce fertility within the current gender roles, but to change the gender roles in order to reduce fertility”.<sup>26</sup>

So, the “new rights” proposed by the “gender feminists” cannot be reduced simply to rights to “reproductive health”, which, as mentioned before, promote abortion of an unborn human being, but also, require the “right” to determine one’s own sexual identity. In a flyer that circulated during the Beijing conference, the NGO International Gay And Lesbian Human Rights Commission, demanded this right in the following terms: “We, the undersigned, call all Member States to recognize the right to determine one’s own sexual identity; the right to control one’s own body, particularly in establishing intimate relationships; the right to choose when and with whom to conceive and raise children, as fundamental elements of all the human rights of all women, without any distinction as to sexual orientation”.

This is even more worrying when we take into account the fact that, for “gender feminists”, there are five sexes. Rebecca J. Cook, professor of Law at the University of Toronto and chief editor of the official report of the UN in Beijing, points out, along the same line with her companions in arms, that the masculine and feminine genders are a “construction of the social reality” which should be abolished.

Unbelievably, the document by the Canadian feminist affirms that “there are not two sexes, but five” and therefore one shouldn’t speak of men and women, but of “heterosexual women, homosexual women, heterosexual men, homosexual men and bisexuals.”

The “freedom” of the “gender” defenders, to affirm the existence of five sexes, totally contradicts scientific evidence according to which there are only two options from the genetic viewpoint: either one is a man or a woman, or there is absolutely nothing, scientifically speaking, in between.

## **ATTACKING RELIGION**

Although the “gender feminists” promote the “deconstruction” of the family, education and culture as a panacea for all problems, they put special emphasis on the “deconstruction” of religion, which, according to them, is the main cause of the oppression of women.

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<sup>26</sup> DIVISION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, *Gender Perspectives in Family Planning Programs*.

Many NGOs accredited to the UN have criticized those whom they called “fundamentalists” (Catholic Christians, Evangelicals and Orthodox, Jews and Muslims, or any person who refuses to change their religion’s doctrine so as to match the agenda of the “gender feminists”). A video promoting the NGO Forum at the Beijing conference produced by Judith Lasch observes: “Nothing has done more to restrict women than religious teachings and creeds.”

Likewise, the report of the Meeting for Global Strategies for Women contains numerous references to fundamentalism and the necessity to resist their supposed attacks against women’s rights. “All forms of fundamentalism, internationally accepted be they political, religious or cultural, exclude women from the norms of human rights and turn her into a target of extreme violence. It is a concern of the international community to eliminate these practices”.

On the other hand, the report of the preparatory meeting of the Beijing conference, organized by the Council of Europe in February 1995, includes many attacks against religion: “The rise of all forms of religious fundamentalism was seen as posing a particular threat to the enjoyment by women of their human rights and to the full participation of women in decision-making at all levels of society”.<sup>27</sup> “Women must be given the chance to determine what their cultures, religions and customs mean to them”.<sup>28</sup>

It is obvious that for “gender feminism” religion is a human invention and the main religions were invented by men to oppress women. Therefore, the radical feminists postulate the re-imagining of God as Sophia: Feminine wisdom. In this sense, the “gender feminist theologians” propose the discovery and adoration not of God, but of a Goddess. For example, Carol Christ, self-proclaimed “gender feminist theologian”, says the following: “A woman who voices the dramatic assertion of Ntosake Shange: ‘I will meet God in myself and I will love him fiercely’, is saying: “The feminine power is strong and creative”. It is saying that the divine principle, the saving and sustaining power will be in herself and she will not look up to the man or the masculine figure as a savior”.<sup>29</sup>

Equally strange are the words of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, another “gender feminist theologian”, who denies the possibility of Revelation, as one reads in the following quote: “the Biblical texts are neither a revelation of the verbal inspiration nor doctrinal principles, but historical formulations... Analogously, feminist theory insists that all the texts are the product of a patriarchal, androcentric culture and history”.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole B. Bohn, both self-proclaimed theologians of the “gender feminist school”, attack Christianity directly as promoting child abuse: “Christianity is an abusive theology glorifying suffering. Should we be surprised that there is so much abuse in modern society, when the dominant theological image in the culture is the “divine abuse of the

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<sup>27</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Equality and Democracy*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *Equality and Democracy*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> C. CHRIST, *Womanspirit Rising*, 277.

<sup>30</sup> E. SCHUSSLER FIORENZA, *In Memory of Her*, Crossroad, New York 1987, 15.

son” – God the Father who demands and causes the suffering and death of his own son? If Christianity wants to free the oppressed, it must first free itself from this theology”.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the owners of this “new perspective” promote a frontal attack against Christianity and any figure who represents it. In 1994, Rhonde Copelon and Berta Esperanza Hernández wrote a flyer for a series of working sessions of the International Conference on Population and Development, in Cairo. The flyer directly attacked Vatican for opposing their agenda which included, among other things, “reproductive health rights”, and, consequently, abortion. “This demand for elementary human rights is opposed by all types of religious fundamentalists, by the Vatican as the leader in organizing the religions opposition to reproductive health rights, even including family planning services”.<sup>32</sup>

Contrary to these positions of attack and aggression towards religion, the Church, concretely the Vatican, are the majority of women in the world who, according to O’Leary’s report, defend their religious traditions as the best protection of the rights and dignity of women. Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox and Jewish women are grateful, in particular, for the teachings of their creeds on marriage, the family, sexuality and respect for human life.

The Holy See, for its part, pointed out before the panels in Beijing, the danger of the tendency in the text proposed by the UN, to leave aside the right of women to freedom of conscience and of religion in educational institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the words of Dale O’Leary, “gender feminism” is a closed system against which there is no way to argue. There is no possibility of appealing to nature, reason, experience, or the opinions and desires of real women, because, according to the “gender feminists”, all this is “socially constructed”. It does not matter how much evidence is gathered against their ideas; they continue to insist that it is simply additional evidence of the massive patriarchal conspiracy against women.

Still, many persons exist who, due to lack of information, are not aware of the new proposal and its dangerous scope. It is worthwhile, thus, to know this “gender perspective” which, according to reliable information, is currently not only gaining strength in developed countries, but also seems to have started infiltrating our environment. It is sufficient to look at some educational materials distributed not only in the high schools of Peru, but also in prestigious universities.

Today, in the United States, the “gender feminists” have managed to place themselves in the center of the North American cultural trends. Prestigious universities and colleges in the United States openly spread this perspective. Moreover, many North American television series participate in the

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<sup>31</sup> J. CARLSON BROWN – C. B. BOHN, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> R. COPELON - B. E. HERNÁNDEZ, *Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health as Human Rights: Concepts and Strategies; An Introduction for Activists*, Human Rights Series, Cairo 1994, 3.

distribution of the following message: sexual identity can be “deconstructed” and masculinity and femininity are nothing more than “socially constructed gender roles”.

If we take into consideration that the advance of technologies has made these programs with all the new “gender perspective” arrive daily to the developing countries, mainly through cable television without ruling out the other media that exist in our times, we are faced with a new challenge that has to be tackled as soon as possible in order to avoid the serious consequences this have occurred in the First World.

This is even more true, when, in the words of O’Leary, the “deconstruction” of the family and the attack against religion, tradition and cultural values that the “gender feminists” promote in the developing countries, affects the entire world.