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Maciej Bernasiewicz

University of Silesia (Poland)

## The sexual/gender differentiation—are the boundaries of gender struggle?

**ABSTRACT.** The author is discussing issues concerning gender differentiation in the sphere of economy, social roles and its cultural and biological roots. The anti-essentialist gender discourse is shown as emanation of two old ideas: the Marxist paradigm and gnostic concepts. Author indicate that the triumph of freedom in the culture of late modernity is not only the victory of culture over nature, but also, paradoxically for this culture, a simultaneous threat.

**KEYWORDS:** gender study, social roles, the conflict theory of the society

### The gender differentiation and the social roles<sup>1</sup>

Today, the natural sexual differentiation of the human nature is becoming less and less important for the economic sphere. However, sexual/gender distinctions on the labour market are still noticeable, and they will be present as long as nursery school teachers and miners stay hermetic professional groups. One of the most outstanding anthropologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Margaret Mead, noted that

in every known society, mankind has elaborated the biological division of labour into forms often very remotely related to the original biological differences that provided the original clues. (...) But we always find the patterning. We know of no culture that has said, articulately, that there is no difference between men and women except in the way they contribute to the creation of the next generation; (...) We find no culture in which it has been thought that all identified traits—stupidity and brilliance, beauty and ugliness, friendliness and hostility, initiative and responsiveness, courage and patience and industry—are merely human traits (Mead, 1958, p. 16–17).

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<sup>1</sup> I have already written about in: M. Bernasiewicz, M. Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, *Family Life and Crime. Contemporary Research and Essays*. Katowice 2017, p. 26–36.

However, perhaps we are witnessing the first stage of formation of the society, which, in the name of egalitarianism, is trying to annihilate sexual differentiation. An aversion to differentiation, which is globally fostered by the popularity of gender studies, is so strong that the very speaking of differences seems to be discrimination today. Hence, some countries have decided that it would be better not to enter into their citizens' documents information on their mothers and fathers, but only to number the parents. On the level of legal restrictions and social ostracism towards any attempts at determining separate social roles for women and men, an unprecedented civilization process is taking place, which process consists in combating any sexual privileges in the two major spheres of our life, i.e. on the labour market and in the sphere of family life.

The policy of gender equality, although rightful in terms of levelling of remuneration for the same jobs or promoting of the awareness of interchangeability and equality as regards the selection of professional roles and those performed in a household, turns out to be a kind of a dangerous distortion when it is used to negate any differences between masculine and feminine attributes. Even the popular observance of children playing shows that boys demonstrate an uncontrollable tendency to arrange battles and skirmishes (they produce a number of sounds, manipulating miniature toy soldiers positioned on the floor of their rooms), and girls, irrespectively of whether they use the same toy soldiers or other toys, arrange various communication situations, which reveal their greater tendency to engage in peaceful dialogue and more sophisticated games. As early as several dozen years ago, Mead was right to notice that "in our current Western theorizing, it has been too often ignored that envy of the male role can come as much from an undervaluation of the role of wife and mother as from an overvaluation of public aspects of achievement that have been reserved for men." (Mead, 1958, p. 77). We still notice the social tendency to demonstrate unjustified envy of men's roles and depreciation and masculinisation of women's roles, which was described by Mead. In practice, the levelling of sexual differences and the policy of equality means combating feminine elements and promoting men's roles. When taking notice of how many legislative initiatives are undertaken in Europe, for example, in the field of election parity and how much neglect and passiveness accompanies the showing of appreciation for the roles of wives and mothers (and this happens in the days of a drop in the birth rate!), one may come to a con-

clusion that the findings of Margaret Mead are still up-to-date. Simultaneously, we observe the lack of political courage to introduce solutions which would recognise and appreciate the domestic role of women, which women, in fact, go into irrespectively of whether the supporters of equality like it or not. After all, the majority of women still affirm a lifestyle based on motherhood and housework. Such women would definitely enthusiastically accept courageous legislative proposals that nobody introduces in Europe. The proposals in question refer to the ideas related to remunerating women for work undertaken in the privacy of their homes for the benefit of their families, which are taken up from time to time. A clear articulation of such an idea can be found in the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, who noted that:

There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women's access to public functions. On the other hand the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions (John Paul II, 1981, paragraph 23).

The present-day freedom (confusion) as regards women's and men's social roles in the western culture is the result of liberation from biology. Today, the slogan which is the most politically correct is the one that biology is not important. What matters is the personal and freely taken decision. More and more circles, and not only the leftist ones, are promoting the view that people "have the right to be who they want". This is, of course, connected with the process of individualisation of human biography, which has been taking place for at least 300 years now (Bernasiewicz, 2010, p. 203–209). The western countries have undergone a long-term process of social evolution. The primitive societies, which have already gone into the pass, but also those which have survived are still, above all, of a collective nature. In these societies, the sexual identity is acquired from the earliest years of people's life. The shape of this identity is determined by individual's anatomy. In primitive societies, roles performed by women and men are a simple derivative of their biological sex. Having a penis makes you predestined for active roles, and not having a penis means that a girl will certainly become a mother. Based on her research on seven Pacific peoples, Mead notices that

To the small naked children, running lightly in the sun beneath the palm-trees, the little girl's sex membership is as clear as her brother's (...). Her

femininity is concealed deep within her, nothing she can touch and see, depend upon or flaunt. (...) The small boy struts, sometimes with emphasis on his penis, more often carrying hatchet, knife, stick, pole, in upward positions as he marches, parries, performs. His behaviour, however symbolic, is to the extent that it is male a concentrated phallic exaggeration, while his sister's is more diffuse and involves the whole body (Mead, 1958, p. 72).

In the western civilization, more than by nature we are influenced by culture, and, to be more precise, by specific social and economic tendencies observed both in America and in Europe. The progress in the field of technology and human rights, changes on the labour market, revolution of women's awareness and individualisation of the course of human life provoke changes in family and marital life, such as decline of patriarchy, decrease in the number of children in a family, looking after children rather than bringing them up, increasing role of the recreational function of the family and the declining procreative function of the family. The family changes when interacting with the outside world (*external forces*), but a lot of changes, as noted by Sheila Mclsaak Cooper, are of an internal nature, *caused by the development of its individual members* (1999, p. 13). Manuel Castells states that at the turn of the century, the patriarchal family, the milestone of patriarchalism, is being questioned by interrelated processes of women's work and women's awareness transformation. The mass inclusion of women into the world of paid work has increased their bargaining power in relation to men as breadwinners. In addition, it has imposed an unbearable burden on women's life in the form of four-shift work (paid work, housekeeping, bringing up children, night shift for husbands). Contraception, followed by in-vitro fertilisation and the prospect of using genetic manipulation enable women and the society to control the time and the frequency of childbearing to a greater and greater extent (Castells, 2004, chapter 4).

The growth of financial independence and the level of education among women have diminished the stability of the institution of marriage. For centuries, financially dependent women with low aspirations in life resulting from their level of education, which was lower than the men's, lived at the mercy of their male carers. Nowadays, making a decision on ending a relationship by a woman does not mean as unpleasant economic consequences for her as it used to be in the past. Barbara M. Kaja refers to research according to which one of the factors of the risk of divorce is precisely the growth of financial independence of women (2013, p. 128). The growth of financial independence and the level of

education, which has opened up new non-domestic vistas for women, has put to the test of survival not only the institution of marriage.

The increase of the level of women's education also diminishes women's pro-family attitude. It can be even stated that the desire of motherhood is inversely proportional to the level of women's education (Badinter, 2013, p. 171). It turns out that the satisfaction derived from work and education (including its continuous supplementation) fully compensates women for the lack of a family and, at least, justifies the unwillingness to start it. It is even reported that if the tendency of excellently educated and high-earning women to resign from motherhood continues, we are going to live in a society in which being a mother will be a privilege of women representing low social status, as well as the most ideologically engaged conservative women (Badinter, 2013, p. 173). In order to be honest, it should be noted that a large number of women undertake professional activity not for personal satisfaction, but because they are forced to earn their living. Therefore, they do not treat their careers as liberation from the yoke of patriarchal oppression, but as a material necessity. Too many men in the western culture earn too little to support their families on their own. Stanisław Kawula straightforwardly states that women who are mothers have been relegated to the role of employees, due to which families have been robbed of a value which is very precious for the young generation, i.e. time devoted to family and children (Kawula, 2006, p. 64). In this situation, men have had to take over the housework, which is traditionally reserved for women, thanks to which many of them have discovered in themselves the features of a sensitive caregiver for their children. Over time, being a father has simply become a way of life (a conscious choice related to organisation of one's own everyday life focused on care of children), and its has been even legitimated in the form of the so-called paternity leave. This phenomenon has been deemed by Margaret Mead as a total novelty in the history of civilization, as "fathers" care of very small children is something that has not been promoted by any civilization among educated men burdened with responsibility for their families (Mead, 2013, p. 26).

### **Gender resources or gender struggle?**

The present-day popularity of gender studies is the reflection of two currents of thought, which have been strongly present in the history of Europe. Apart from the whole cultural context of the emergence of the

anti-essentialist gender discourse—sexual revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, professionalisation and egalitarianisation of women—it is worth directing our reflection on where the thinking of the supporters of the anti-essentialist concept has its roots, which we are often not aware of. This concept can be surmised to have its sources in the Marxist thought and gnostic concepts. The history and circulation of human thought, its intermingling and evolution are a fascinating issue, which is sometimes surprising for those who again and again discover new versions and emanations of old ideas in new forms.

Thinking in the categories of the oppressive ones and oppressed ones, and oppression and revolution necessary for restoring equality in economic relations has evolved, as a result of which old conflicts have been joined by new ones. Analogously to the classical Marxist standpoint, the social injustice was and is still surmised to have its beginnings in unequal access to means of production, and contemporary gender studies are, in fact, an opposition to new oppression, i.e. injustice in access to certain family privileges and asymmetry of social roles. The conflict of social classes has been replaced with gender conflict. The conflict is not about means of production but personal autonomy. The class conflict has made room for gender struggle. The natural differentiation between men and women has become an urgent social issue, the resolution of which is demanded by various political and civic circles. The promoted term *gender* and the proving of the cultural nature of sex has begun to supersede the *sex* category. The negation of the traditionally perceived duality of human nature is being observed more and more often. Thus, a new anthropology has emerged. *Gender studies* have caused that, instead of two sexes and the privileged role of family life as the basic dimension of human life, there are at least five genders (masculine, feminine, homosexual, lesbian and transgender) and the diversity of partnerships (consensual relationships) is affirmed. The Marxist paradigm, i.e. the conflict theory of the society, appeared originally as inequality in the field of economy (Karl Marx), followed by inequality in the field of educational system (Pierre Bourdieu), and the contemporary version of the emancipation metanarration is the family inequality discourse (Elisabeth Badinter).

The version of the Marxist paradigm described appears to be a new field, in which the probability of success is significantly higher than in the field of the class social structure, which has proved to be unreconstructed. After all, the economic inequality is still increasing, both in the

northern and southern hemisphere of our globe. In 2014, the number of millionaires was double the number of millionaires recorded during the economic crisis in 2008. In the meantime, the gender conflict has been diminishing, as women have gained equality of rights in the majority of spheres of life, and the achievement of full rights by sexual minorities seems to be a matter of time. The triumph of equality of rights is proved by hard facts, as noted by Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton, and it consists, among others, in the fact that the previously restrictive societies grant greater sexual freedom to men and women. There is also a general tendency to extend the children's rights and growing acceptance for same-sex relationships (Giddens & Sutton, 2014, chapter 6). This optimism is not shared by those for whom this means a simultaneous crisis of the traditional family, which has been sanctioned over centuries; moreover, this means even greater popularisation of divorce and the growing number of emotionally neglected children, who are brought up in continuously reconstructed and fluid relationships. The progressive conservative circles' point is not to deny anybody the option of living in a same-sex relationship and, all the more, to question anyone's freedom and dignity, but the lack of consent to state (legal) equality of such relationships, as recognition of the right to freedom, affirmation of democracy and pluralism does not mean, in the opinion of moderate conservatives, the simultaneous equality of privileges for all forms of sexual life. In western societies, which are experiencing a drop in the birth rate, homosexual relationships are less advantageous than heterosexual ones, as they do not lead to biological reproduction. Therefore, these societies have no interest in granting to them the same status as in the case of heterosexual relationships. All the more, they have no interest in promoting them. The more so as it is highly probable that an increase in commonness and popularity of such relationships may have a limiting influence on the number of heterosexual relationships. Equality of privileges and promotion of same-sex relationships may trigger a change in the proportion of the number of homosexual and heterosexual relationships. As a consequence, the further decline of fertility in the western civilization may be expected. A rapid decline of fertility, resulting from the reluctance to have children demonstrated by the citizens of the West, i.e. individualism and hyper-consumption, work-life conflicts, getting married at an increasingly later age etc., may be intensified by another factor, but this time not of a volitional but biological nature. This biological factor, intensifying the demographic crisis, shall be the obvi-

ous inability of the growing number of homosexual couples to give birth to their offspring. As a result of feedback and the process of modelling taking place, the growing number of children brought up in same-sex relationships shall result in the growing number of consecutive generations of people representing homosexual preferences, and, thereby, incapable of biological reproduction. Children brought up in same-sex families will experience greater difficulties in finding a pattern of love different from the one implemented in their homes. These concerns are best and most universally expressed by the Catholic church discourse, in which the civilization of wrongly affirmed freedom (unrestrained pleasure, including sexual one, and practical materialism) is contrasted with the civilization of love and “responsible parenthood”:

responsible fatherhood and motherhood directly concern the moment in which a man and a woman, uniting themselves “in one flesh”, can become parents. (...) Utilitarianism is a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of “things” and not of “persons”, a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used. In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for man, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members. (...) The contemporary family, like families in every age, is searching for “fairest love”. A love which is not “fairest”, but reduced only to the satisfaction of concupiscence (cf. 1 Jn 2:16), or to a man's and a woman's mutual “use” of each other, makes persons slaves to their weaknesses. (...) The civilization of love evokes joy: joy, among other things, for the fact that a man has come into the world (cf. Jn 16:21), and consequently because spouses have become parents (Gratissimam Sane. Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II).

The civilization of utilitarianism leads not only to frequent reconstruction of sexual relationships and a decline in fertility, but it also destroys the social environment. This notion was used by Pope Francis, who noted that:

This revolution of customs and morals has often waved “the flag of freedom”, but it has, in reality, brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. It is ever more evident that the decline of the culture of marriage is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills that disproportionately affect women, children and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis. The crisis of the family has produced a human ecological crisis, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection. (...)



It is therefore essential that we foster a new human ecology and make it move forward. (...) Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's growth and emotional development (Pope Francis: 2014).

Today, the procreative function of sexual relationships, as an element of the civilization of opening to new life, is questioned also due to a certain atmosphere of nihilism, for which the world given to us, embroiled in the tragedy of war, poverty and natural disasters, is not a good place to live. From the viewpoint of nihilism, elimination of procreation from the sphere of sexuality is simply a favour done to unborn generations. In gnostic currents of thought, the material and the external world experienced by us empirically are something bad, which limits our freedom, which, in turn, results from our spiritual nature. Our body is also bad, as it is a prison for our soul. Consequently, sexual differentiation is diminishing in importance. Distinction of sexes is contrary to the spiritual nature of human beings. According to gnostic thinkers living in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century everything that is different than the spirit needs to be absorbed back by it; the masculine-female polarity itself shall be abolished. The feminine shall become the masculine. Nothing could be more contradictory to the subtlety of the bonds connecting souls than physical procreation (Brown, 2008, chapter 5).

In the contemporary discourse of equality of homo- and heterosexual relationships, and obliteration of differences between the masculine and the feminine, as well as in the promotion of contraception, one can notice the contemporary affirmation of the spiritual sphere and romantic love, which ignores sex division and biopsychical consequences of a sexual act. It is a discourse and outlook for which the spiritual closeness and privileged value of freedom lifts any bodily limitations and ethical dilemmas. In the contemporary discourse of gender studies one will find the above-mentioned analogies to the gnostic way of thinking. The body is of no importance, and the material is a burden which interferes with the unhampered expression of the human spirit. Only the gnostic disapproval of sexual activity has not gained appropriate recognition today, as the pansexualisation of the reality and affirmation of sexual freedom, which are common these days, clash with the gnostic depreciation of the sexual sphere of human life. However, any forms of infertile sex, preferred by the gnostic thinkers, and strongly condemned in the Judeo-Christian culture as contrary to the Creator's will, are fully justified and

confirmed in the contemporary discourse of liberation. The practices of contraception, abortion or homosexuality or voluntary childlessness of contemporary couples, which are common in the West, to a great extent converge with the continuously living idea of the threatening and constraining material. It is worth emphasizing one more time that it is only the pleasure derived from sex, which is so hedonistically promoted and validated today, that makes us distinguish gender studies from the gnostic way of thinking.

The triumph of freedom in the culture of late modernity is undoubtedly an intrinsic value. However, we should not forget about some vigilance, as an increase of freedom is not only the victory of culture over nature, but also, paradoxically for this culture, a simultaneous threat. In the opinion of the first Polish sociologist, Florian Znaniecki, freedom was one of the most valuable achievements of the civilization. At the same time, he perceived freedom as the origin for manifestation of the power of nature:

We have worked for centuries to liberate people from the bonds of former external discipline, which we inherited from the civilization of the past, as we rightly understood that people need to be free to be really creative, and that the highest forms of life need to be freely selected and supported. (...) But free creativity requires self-discipline, which is not weaker but stronger than the one which may be imposed by the natural conditions or social and political, economic and religious institutions. By way of giving to the human spirit this freedom, which is needed by it for its development, we have also loosened the bonds of the human beast, but we were not able to create the means of controlling it quickly enough, which should have replaced the former violence (Znaniecki, 2013, p. 78-79).

The consequences of the liberation of nature from the influence of culture (religious, ethical and moral norms) are particularly harmful for family life. In many cases, the free sexual expression, ignoring of traditionally approved forms of family life and full democratisation of alternative forms of family life prove to be the triumph of whimsicality and lust (the nature) over the mind and responsibility (the culture). The contemporary image of family in the times of its crisis proves that modern people, rejecting religion and tradition, have not developed any substitute mechanism of "self-discipline", to which Znaniecki referred, and which would protect them against themselves. Modern people have not developed "new measures of controlling" the nature or the

“human beast” as Znaniecki called the impulsive and emotional part of human personality, which was described by Emil Durkheim in the following way:

When perceived as itself, separately from any authority regulating it from inside, our concupiscence is a bottomless abyss that nothing can fill. (...) A desire that cannot be satisfied is a continuous torture. (...) Only the society, whether directly and in its entirety, or whether through one of its organs, is able to play this regulating role, as it is the only moral authority superior to an individual and individuals recognise this superiority. Only the society is endowed with the necessary esteem to make law and specify the limits that should not be exceeded (Cited in Szacki, 1964, p. 180–183).

From the viewpoint of the anthropology referred to, the contemporary progressive discourses making all (any) choices in the field of starting a family and sexual activity equal seem to be excessively optimistic, as the increasing freedom turns out to be an even stronger surrender of human beings to the power of nature.

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