



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 December 2014
English
Original: Spanish

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Association mondiale de psychanalyse du champ freudien, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women's empowerment and psychoanalysis

Among the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), proclaimed by the United Nations in 2000, the third is to promote gender equality and “empower” women — which means ensuring women have equal access to the means of production.

In the 2012 Report, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon recognized this MDG as one of the hardest to achieve, noting that “...The goal of gender equality also remains unfulfilled (...) achieving the MDGs depends so much on women's empowerment and equal access by women to education, work, health care and decision-making.”

In this context, UN Women, which was created in 2010, defined seven Women's Empowerment Principles as a way to enable women to gain access to the same conditions as men.

Psychoanalysis has always advocated on behalf of women's rights, ever since its beginnings in a Victorian society characterized by patriarchal and repressive attitudes. This process began with the study of the hysterical symptoms that “denounced” such repression and made it possible for neurosis to give voice to the unsayable, seeking to bring into discourse what was being repressed in the symptoms: it thus gave a voice to women, the mentally deranged, and children.

Hysteria led Freud to study femininity in terms of the girl child's passage through infantile amorous identifications and sexual choices — known as the Oedipus complex — which then mark their lives and determine a mode of satisfaction — referred to as “pulsions” that is very different to that of men.

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan furthered this research, demonstrating a fundamental difference in the mode of pulsional satisfaction — referred to as “jouissance” — between individuals who identify with men and those who identify with women.

He also established the difference, evoked in some gender studies, between gender or “sexual identification” — and “sexuation”:

- Gender: definitions of masculine or feminine change from one era to another, so infantile sexual identifications differ according to how society defines them. Thus, the changes that culture, families or language impose on what is defined as man or woman, will have consequences for modes of subjectivization: a patriarchal society will produce one specific role for women, and matriarchal society will produce another, and a democratic society yet another.
- Sexuation: Lacan discovered a different mode of jouissance for the feminine and masculine. For men he situated it in relation to the phallic mode of jouissance, which implies the union of jouissance with the “symbolic”: language transmits from generation to generation a whole series of determinations, unconscious desires, ideals and traditions, which have a patriarchal orientation. This phallic jouissance is paternally oriented and has specific characteristics: it is measurable, quantifiable, located in one part of

the body, and governed by a law that indicates what is possible and what is impossible.

In women, he situated it in relation to two modes of jouissance. One is also phallic, but there is also a different mode called “Other jouissance”, with different characteristics: it is opaque, unspeakable, and neither quantifiable nor localizable. From time immemorial, this jouissance has embodied what was known as the “mystery of femininity”.

Lacan showed that the incomprehensible aspect of the jouissance of others is the start of segregation: a majority, who see their own jouissance as universal, normal and appropriate, segregate a minority that have another mode of jouissance. This is the origin women’s segregation: the mystery of femininity that embodies the “Other jouissance” was rejected in every society, from east to west.

It is a mystery not only for the man, but also for the woman, because it is enigmatic to the woman herself and is also rejected by her. This explains women’s historical acceptance of that segregation.

As that jouissance is unsayable, Lacan argued that it can only be cursed: because one always errs when trying to put it into words, but it is also cursed, and is rejected. That segregation is in the origin of gender violence, ranging from its concealed social forms to criminal forms.

How is this useful for women’s empowerment?

Psychoanalysis investigates the differences that men and women display in their mode of bonding with others and functioning in society: working, holding positions of leadership, studying, dealing with colleagues, superiors, subordinates, with the family, politics, affective ties, etc.

By distinguishing gender (modifiable according to social identifications) from sexuation (modes of jouissance and their consequences), psychoanalysis investigates how women’s access to the means of production changes something that used to be essentially patriarchal. Miller called this “the feminization of the world”: the other mode of jouissance alters the social mode.

This is determined by the demise of patriarchal society — the all-and-exception logic — based on a regime of One distinct being and all others equal: the figure of God, chief, father, was changed by the emergence of science and the democratic revolutions. Lacan called this the “decline of the father figure”, invoking the twilight or waning of that figure.

This involves a risk, however: the demise of the father figure does not imply progress for women, but greater homogenization, a blurring of the difference in modes of jouissance. This does not cede space to the feminine, but leads it either to identify with the masculine, or else to entrench its position in what Lacan called an “iron-clad order”.

In so far as its other jouissance is not determined by traditions and ideals that imply phallic jouissance, femininity has its own psychological consequences, which psychoanalysis investigates. These are not fixed; they vary from one woman to another, but they function as an orientation:

- more flexibility in relation to the faces of power;
- less need for equilibrium and homeostasis, less tendency towards routine;
- less tendency towards uniformity and group identification;
- greater observation of detail;
- prevalence of affective ties, greater respect for differences;
- democratic use of authority;
- greater dependence on belongings and positions;
- more intrepidity: capacity to take risks without fear of losing;
- creative capacity, less subjection to traditional or pre-established norms;
- reference to individual, less off-the-shelf, ideals;
- tenacious defence of what is theirs: children, family.

These show that psychoanalytical research into the consequences of female jouissance could be relevant for empowering women. Gender equality could benefit greatly if these differences were accommodated. Otherwise there is a risk that women's desire to identify with men crushes their mode of jouissance, as in fact happens in many societies. The result is the "phallic woman", with all the traits that this implies: solidification of their masculine characters, difficulties in amorous relations, loss of creativity, corporal symptoms, undue competitiveness, etc.

Achieving equality, while respecting those differences, would be a way of proposing what the Seven UN Women Principles describes as: "Equality means business", because differentiating gender equality and diversity shows how women's access to the means of production changes the way they function: "Gender diversity can help firms demonstrate that individual and collective interests are reconcilable". While continuing to pursue equality, psychoanalysis places the emphasis on gender diversity, causing changes in the social domain.

In conclusion, psychoanalytical studies can contribute to women's empowerment, by bringing to the fore the distinctive features of femininity, and how this changes and enriches modes of production.

This then, is our proposal for UN Women: to jointly investigate how the feminine mode of jouissance affects the ways women form bonds and position themselves in the firm, with the aim of empowering women while respecting their differences.
