

# Refoundation of the equality agenda from the philosophy of caring

## Refundación de la agenda de igualdad desde la filosofía del cuidar

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**Abstract:** Gender equality agenda has experienced a growing normalization and institutionalization both in Spain and internationally. However, this process is paradoxically parallel to another simultaneous and progressive process of depoliticization of the equality agenda. The causes of this loss of transformative efficacy are complex. In this article, without intending to be exhaustive in its aetiology, the main concurring factors are pointed out. Likewise, in the second part of the article, a proposal to refund the equality agenda from the ethics of care and the construction of new masculinities is presented. An equality that goes beyond the public sphere to contemplate the still invisible spaces of the house and the world of care. An equality that implies evolution and change in the way-of-being-in-the-world of men, and not only of women.

**Key words:** equality, gender, ethic of care, feminism, masculinities.

**Resumen:** La agenda de igualdad de género ha experimentado una creciente normalización e institucionalización tanto en España como a nivel internacional. Sin embargo, este proceso es paradójicamente paralelo a otro proceso simultáneo y progresivo de despolitización de la agenda de igualdad. Las causas de esta pérdida de eficacia transformativa son complejas. En el presente artículo, sin pretender ser exhaustivos en su etiología, se señalan los principales factores participantes. Asimismo, se presenta una propuesta de refundación de la agenda de igualdad desde la ética del cuidado y la construcción de nuevas masculinidades. Una igualdad que va más allá de la esfera pública para contemplar los espacios todavía invisibilizados de lo privado y del mundo de los cuidados. Una igualdad que implica evolución y cambio en el modo-de-ser-en-el-mundo de los hombres, y no sólo de las mujeres.

**Palabras clave:** igualdad, género, ética del cuidado, feminismo, masculinidades.



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Well in the XXI century, we witness a curious paradox in the agenda of gender equality. On one side, the language of gender equality and women's empowerment has acquired broad normalization. As pointed out by Sonia Reverter-Bañón (2020: 201), we may say "we live the success of feminist proclaims because they have been incorporated into the policies of democratic governments around the globe". Hence, for example, time ago UN incorporated, via diverse resolutions, gender perspective into development indicators and their goals; it is the case of the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which comprises gender equality as one of its 17 goals to meet by 2030.

On one side, in parallel to their normalization and institutionalization, the transformative efficacy of concepts such as *gender equality* and *women empowerment* has dwindled. These concepts have been gradually stripped of the conceptual and political commitments they should convey (Reverter-Bañón, 2017). Somehow, we may say, the agenda for the equality and women empowerment has been depoliticized by means of its institutionalization (Reverter-Bañón, 2011).

The reasons for such loss of transformative efficacy of the gender equality agenda are complex; in the present article, without the intention of being exhaustive regarding the etiology of this phenomenon, we will review some factors involved and also present a proposal to restate the equality agenda from the ethics of care and by building new masculinities.

### Gender equality: a depoliticized concept?

We may define the *depoliticization* of feminism as "the de-substantiation of the conflicts of interests feminism has put forward; that is to say, the erasing of the feminist agenda as a political agenda that intends to transform societies" (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 199). "The successful incorporation of feminism in media and institutional discourses at all levels —from the World Bank to UN, and governments as well— can only be explained, if we understand there has been an effective deactivation of the political and transforming nature of feminism" (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 204). Various elements in interaction have contributed with such depoliticization of feminism. In this article, we will pay attention, according to their relevance,

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to three factors. In the first place, the assimilation of feminism into neoliberalism and its transformation into an object of consumption in the market society. Secondly, the increasing individualism and the psychologizing of equality, which place the responsibility of empowerment on individuals, not on society. Finally, the mainly assistentialist and disciplining perspective of gender equality public policies, which leave aside the main goal of feminism: i.e., social transformation.

### *Neoliberalism and the marketing of gender equality*

In recent years, feminism has been so popular that it has been assimilated by capitalism, which has reified and “coopted” it (Reverter-Bañón, 2017: 306), transforming it into an object of consumption, visible in a myriad of products with reasserting and revolutionary slogans (Reverter-Bañón and Medina-Vicent, 2020). Although the visualization of feminism is positive, its *commodification*, beyond contributing to the generation of certain sensitization of public opinion, does not contribute to the actual change or transformation of society. Turned into an object of consumption, feminism is at the risk of losing its transforming power. The tendency seems to be “taking the proposal that feminism is the aspiration to the equality between men and women for granted, and remaining in such an ideal [...] but without actually transforming the reality” (Reverter-Bañón and Medina-Vicent, 2020: 14).

The concept *genderwashing* refers to the way, in which mainly the market, but many other organizations as well, have assimilated gender equality. An incorporation subject to economic criteria and to the desire of keeping the reputation of a brand, beyond any ethical or feminist criterion (Fox-Kirk *et al.*, 2020). Even though genderwashing practices promote the idea of gender equality inside organizations, they do so in the absence of measures that significantly address gender inequalities in the workplace.

Genderwashing expresses as an imbalance between the organizational rhetoric on inequality and the actual experiences in the workplace (Fox-Kirk *et al.*, 2020: 2-3). The myth of gender equality is created, while individuals in the organization continue experiencing gender discrimination. An instance of genderwashing is the use of confidentiality agreements by large firms and organizations; American doctor Larry Nassar was able to abuse the gymnasts under his care for many years because *US Gymnastics* silenced the victims by means of Confidentiality

Agreements (Fox-Kirk *et al.*, 2020: 6). They help preserve the organization's reputation, at once, however, the cases of harassment and gender violence in the workplace are perpetuated. That is the problem with genderwashing: it produces the illusion of equality and thus blocks the structural change that may lead to authentic advance toward equality.

Moreover, various studies (Fraser, 1989; Bexell, 2012; Kabeer, 2016) point out the way in which neoliberal globalization "threatens the advances in gender equality" (Reverter-Bañón, 2017: 302). Even if with globalization, we apparently advance toward equality, it is necessary to maintain a critical stance, as it is usual to find discourses of international institutions such as the World Bank, for example, that advocate for the incorporation of women into the world of labor, but do not say a word about the load of unpaid work women perform at home. The empowerment of women is promoted as long as it is efficacious for the logic of the market and productivity, but not based on gender justice criteria. "The identity of women, in their roles of caregivers, mothers, wives and daughters is thus conveniently immobilized in the gender equality discourse of international organizations" (Reverter-Bañón, 2017: 311). In this way, international institutions, influenced by neoliberal interests, perpetuate "an essentialist vision of women that withholds them in their role of caregivers, disseminating with this a restricted and poor comprehension of gender equality" (Reverter-Bañón, 2017: 303).

### *The increasing subjectivation and psychologizing of gender equality*

In spite of the advance in equality we find at legislative level in most developed countries, and the dissemination of feminism as a global level fashion, the social reality does not show actual equality. Despite the system tries to convince us, very frequently, that women have reached equality, a quick look makes us easily realize it is not so. As pointed out by Sonia Reverter-Bañón and María Medina-Vicent (2020: 28):

In recent decades women have been told we are what we want to be and if we are not so, it is not because of lack of a structure that enables this –i.e., rights, systems, etc.– but because of myself. [...] This psychologizing of equality (and inequality) entails [...] the depoliticization of social problems and the very subject of feminism.

This phenomenon is part of the *victim blaming* process, an expression coined by sociologist William Ryan (1976) to identify, and denounce, the tendency to blame the victims of being responsible for their own situation. It would be the case, for instance, of stating that poverty is the result of the

behavior of the poor instead of their social structural factors. The process of blaming the victim —William Ryan pointed out— is at the service of the interests of the system, which tries to avoid responsibilities in this way. “We might broaden this thesis stating that the process of blaming the victim is at the service of those in power, which manipulate the notion of victim in a process of stigmatization of the individual character” (Comins-Mingol, 2016: 137). Reducing gender equality, or inequality, to a mere individual experience supposes a drastic depoliticization of a phenomenon that is inherently political and social.

In this subjectivation process, the system has a great capacity to absorb and re-signify traditionally emancipatory and feminist concepts into concepts that serve the status quo. Let us see, as an example, “empowerment”, which has been conceptualized as a substitute for “entrepreneurship” in two meanings. Firstly, it is not a multifaceted empowerment, but one mainly reduced to the economic and labor sphere. And secondly, because such empowerment is thought to be dependent on the entrepreneurial effort and willingness of women themselves, disregarding the influence of the context. The fallacy of this argument is that “neither effort nor individual psychological will are able to overcome structural situations of inequality” (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 207).

As critically Byung-Chul Han (2012: 25) points out, we live in the “achievement society” where the subjects “are entrepreneurs of themselves”; this analysis, which even though Byung-Chul Han does not carry out from a feminist standpoint, is clearly visible in the coopting of “gender equality” neoliberalism makes. In present-day world “both human beings and society are transforming into autistic performance-machines” (Han, 2012: 64). The “excessive I-tiredness” Byung-Chul Han refers to is blatant in women. The subjects harm themselves to reach success and the expected returns. This lifestyle is at the service of super-production and profit, generating silent violence expressed as wearing-out and I-tiredness. In the case of women, this is two-fold: they have to meet the standards of success and performance; that is, labor and family. Performance society, according to philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2012: 72), ends up being a society of tiredness; tiredness that isolates, divides and atomizes the individuals, absorbed and worn-out by such a lifestyle. Which from a feminist standpoint turns into the political deactivation of feminism, for many women are tired and isolated in their respective professional and familial performance careers.

The growing tendency to interpret social and political problems as individual psychological problems is, as Nancy Fraser (1989: 155) stated, one of the greatest challenges contemporary feminism has to face.

### *The bureaucratization of assistentialist and/or disciplining interventions*

Closely linked to the psychologizing above, another factor of the increasing depoliticization of feminism are public policies; in particular, those assistentialist, which in spite of being necessary, should not make us forget that the main goal of feminism is social transformation. The problem arises when States address:

Only what it considers “extreme situations” or “social pathologies” such as violence against women, which is deemed a pathologic condition, or an individual psychological problem rather than an expression or “usual” consequence of women’s subordination (Reverter-Bañón, 2012: 219; 2011: 226).

The assistentialism of equality public policies should not distract us from the fact that the main objective of the equality agenda as a whole is transformation. Otherwise, we turn women into “mere clients, users or consumers” (Reverter-Bañón, 2012: 226) of a service, when the purpose of feminism “is not to save an identity (that of being a woman), but to transgress the ordering and identity-allotment structures” (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 195).

In this way, in the institutional sphere, the concept of gender, as well as the concept of equality, is depoliticized, reduced to a merely descriptive term, to an individual category, a self-referential category synonymous with “man”, “woman” or other identities beyond this binarism, displacing the original meaning of the concept of gender as a critique and questioning to power relations and the constructed character of sexual inequality (García-Granero, 2020: 204). More often than not, gender perspective has just “added” women, neglecting or ignoring “a reality of subordination and oppression that is not wanted to be seen as such” (Oliva Portolés, 2005: 14).

In like manner, the concept of equality is also depoliticized in the neoliberal system. “Women, it is understood, have to enjoy equality as an option to choose in the market, in equal conditions with men” (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 202). A conception of equality that entails an essentialist conception of what it is to be a woman and a man, dissociated from the idea of liberty and emancipation. In this way, the system has incorporated a great deal of feminist language, but depoliticized, stripping it of its transformative capacity (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 205). Depoliticized feminism is but “a

formal integration of women into the system of rights, and also a material integration into the global pauperization system" (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 206). That is, in words by Nancy Fraser, "having recognition without redistribution" (Reverter-Bañón, 2020: 206).

Due to the increasing commodification, psychologizing and bureaucratization of feminism, the radical one is increasingly a liquid feminism —resorting to Bauman's terminology— a feminism that has lost solidity in the agenda of equality (Reverter-Bañón, 2012; 2020: 207). Of course, recognizing the bureaucratization, technification and depoliticization of these policies does not imply that it is desirable to totally refuse them, "rejecting these policies leaves us in an even more precarious situation, since we lose such strategic help from the State" (Reverter-Bañón, 2011: 227). What is necessary is a critical and permanent interpellation and interlocution endeavor.

### **Toward radical equality: beyond the public sphere**

Reinforcing the transformative efficacy of the gender equality agenda needs to overcome the *public space–private space* dichotomy. Spaces we have to understand not in a binary manner but as a *continuum* (Velasco Ortiz, 2000: 147). Unfortunately, the public space is still the privileged space to analyze the social and the political, the criteria to measure, apply and assess equality. The private space, for its part, despite the famous slogan uttered by Kate Millett half a century ago, *the personal is political*, is still invisible.

Hence, for example, the gradual incorporation of women into the public sphere as of the 1970's has not been accompanied by a fair "incorporation" of men into domestic work and care practices in the private sphere. As a consequence, on too many occasions, gender equality has been accomplished not only in favor of, but also at the expense of women. Phenomena such as the second shift, the dual presence-absence, the endless working day, or the glass ceiling are consequences of "such" equality. An equality built, largely, on the back of women, who have to combine the two activities or to externalize caregiving to other women, pauperized or migrant. Although it is not the object of study in this article, we cannot obviate that the uneven distribution of caregiving between men and women has a counterpart in the global sphere, where there is unfair and oppressive feminization of caregiving against women (Robinson, 2011).

It is the case, for example, of the phenomenon of *global care chains*, a concept coined by Arlie Hochschild (2000), which refers to the informal

and devaluated caregiving posts taken by migrant women in precarious conditions, and quite frequently at the expense of *neglecting* their own households and families. In this way, the care crisis in the Global North is largely covered with cares provided by migrant women, exploiting global inequality.

When we refer to care, we mean the set of activities that are necessary to support daily life and health. Devaluated, invisible and feminized activities that we are able to classify into two typologies: what Joan Tronto (2013) calls practical care (caring for) and emotional care (caring about); the former is also known as *instrumental* or *indirect care* —linked to what we call domestic work— and the latter, *care for people* or *direct care* —linked to the emotional aspects of care— (Carrasco *et al.*, 2011: 71). In these two instances, the paid or unpaid task of caregivers has been traditionally allotted to women, up to the point that women carry out “two thirds of paid caregiving and three quarters of the unpaid at global level” (The Care Collective, 2021: 20).

With a view to attaining the common goal of affective equality we have to begin by depatriarchalizing equality. As we know, patriarchy, as a system, identifies men as a model of being a human and the public space as reference space. We have to build radical equality from a human being model that considers both the legacy of know-hows and values that men have historically developed in their experiences and the legacy of know-hows and values women have historically developed in their own experiences. An equality that goes beyond the public sphere, which broadens to encompass private and caregiving spaces still invisible. Equality that implies evolution and change in the mode-of-being-in-the-world by men, not only by women.<sup>2</sup>

In this equality, which comprises both the public and private spheres, the philosophy of care has a lot to offer.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, by virtue of the feminist efforts to advance the visualization and revalorization of care, there is an incipient appearance of caregiving policies; that is, public

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2 Heidegger's expression mode-of-being-in-the-world refers to a situated condition, and in relation to the world, of human existence.

3 The philosophy of care is inspired by the ethics of care developed by Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice*, 1982, in which she analyzed the different moral development experienced by women due to the uneven distribution of responsibilities between them and men. The philosophy of care starts from such ethics, and produces an anthropologic and pedagogic reflection in favor of *de-gendering* and generalizing care as a human value (Comins Mingol, 2009b).

policies that facilitate, for example, labor and family co-responsibility of men and women. Regrettably, however, without a change in mentalities such measures have little transformative capability. “The moral obligation regarding care is unevenly distributed between men and women” (Comas-d’Argemir, 2017: 28).

Coeducation in caring is necessary to build depatriarchalized equality, in which care is understood as a human value, not as a gender role. It is fundamental to de-gendering care if we want to contribute to equality. As pointed out by Fiona Robinson (2011), there is a direct relation between the hegemonic masculinity and the feminization of care; the former links femininity with care and self-sacrifice.

As long as care is provided by means of family obligations, unpaid and compulsorily assigned to women, not men, gender equality will not be accomplished, neither will it be possible to build a sustainable citizen system. Commitment is necessary, both at individual and social level (Comas-d’Argemir, 2017: 28).

Care is necessary to support everyday life and addresses the vulnerability of human beings, both intrinsic (natural, i.e., human fragility over the life cycle [birth, disease, old age]) and extrinsic (acquired, i.e., social and structural inequalities). Therefore, care cannot remain invisible, devaluated or only assigned to one side of humanity, it is essential to reinforce the co-responsibility of care.

This indispensable and pressing co-responsibility has been called the “diamond of care” (Razavi, 2007, in Keller Garganté, 2017), in reference to the necessary redistribution of care between the four actors —as the intersections— namely: State, market, family and community. Paraphrasing Nancy Fraser, we can affirm that it is fundamental to work in parallel with the *redistribution* of care between these four actors of the “diamond of care” and with the social *recognition* of care, by means of visualizing and valorizing care.

### **Anthropologic fundaments of care; care as *factum***

Unlike other living beings, humans are born helpless; we are born without the characteristics that define us as a species —at birth, we are not bipedal, do not have manual dexterity nor do we know how to speak—, which renders us particularly dependent on our fellow humans to survive. In this way, “each human individual starts to be in reality as *someone in need*” (Pintos Peñaranda, 1999: 197). Not only at birth, however, but over our entire life cycle the degree of human beings’

dependence and vulnerability makes care an essential anthropologic element. Hence, we may state, as pointed out by Heidegger (1971: 216), care is the “fundamental ontological-existential phenomenon”.

A great deal of pieces of evidence from evolutionary psychology, anthropology, archeology or primatology, among other fields, are shedding new light on the concept of human nature and the important role of care in the evolutionary development of human beings (Comins-Mingol and Jiménez-Arenas, 2019: 82-99). The bioarcheology of care provides us with “paleoanthropological and archeologic evidence of the presence of care since the dawn of humankind” (Comins-Mingol and Jiménez-Arenas, 2019: 90), up to the point that the evolutionary success of human species has been possible only because of the existence of *cooperative caregivers* (Comins-Mingol and Jiménez-Arenas, 2019: 94). The development of care defines us as a species and differentiates us from other primates because of the heavy dependency of humans at birth.

“Because of *our own biology*, we are already in an attitude of linking experience that is natural and spontaneous” (Pintos Peñaranda, 2010: 55). Human beings are born with pre-gendered capabilities for empathy, emotions and tolerance; these are biological abilities, consubstantial to the set of mammals, which facilitate survival and besides, in the case of human beings, are necessary for the exercise of care. “All of us with no exception, but pathological ones, come into the world with these three adaptive strategies: we start existing with them and keep them during our entire adult life” (Pintos Peñaranda, 2010: 66).

As pointed out by María Luz Pintos Peñaranda (2010: 68), “careful attention is pre-gendered by its own origin”, pre-symbolical and pre-cultural, there is no intervention of somewhat called “feminine” culture, but the natural-biological drive. In this way, the voice of care, the one patriarchy associated with the feminine, is however, a radically human voice. Then, the big question we have to ask ourselves is —as pointed out by Carol Gilligan (2014)—: How do we lose that ability for care? What inhibits our capacity to empathize with others?

What takes place is that usually women are allowed, or forced, to “cultivate” (not to “invent”!) the ‘harmonizing’ biological strategies, and even such strategies are culturally linked to the *role* of the “feminine”, while on the contrary, men are taught not to let such strategies to act in them as much as they have them and as much as these always work in the experience of otherness, and regardless they want this or not (Pintos Peñaranda, 2010: 69).

It is culture what prevents “the harmonizing adaptive abilities or strategies inherent to our biologic corporality from working” (Pintos Peñaranda, 2010: 70). In this way, not only is care the original *factum*, but also *telos* to rebuild and to head toward (Comins-Mingol, 2010: 75).

### **New masculinities for a new humanism; care as *telos***

Recent reflections on care have included masculinities (Robinson, 2011), as it is unavoidable carrying out a critical reflection on them on the way toward equality. It is fundamental to broaden the subject of analysis to include “the male abuser, the promiscuous male, and the male free-rider on female care” (Kershaw *et al.*, 2008: 186). We could hardly advance toward gender equality if we do not disclose and contest the cultural practices and norms that separate care from most of the social conventions that define masculinity (Kershaw *et al.*, 2008: 197).

In the collective effort to reach radical equality—in the public and private spheres—, we have to “rebuild new forms of being men” (Martínez Guzmán, 2010: 291), new more ethical and healthier *masculinities*, alternative to the *hegemonic* or *toxic masculinity* (García-Granero, 2020: 218). To do so, it is fundamental to approach and value the contributions produced in the field of new masculinities. “Contributing to the feminist agenda and the agency of women, in this moment, entails carrying out studies on the masculine condition” (Tena, 2014: 21).

As pointed out by Marina García-Granero (2020: 219), the task is:

To elucidate which of the values considered feminine or masculine are worth preserving and cultivating, and giving universality to the virtues the patriarchy has considered only masculine or feminine, reflecting on what we want to consider valuable for XXI-century human beings.

And one of the values, which due to its relevance, we must place in the center is care. “The effort to be a good human should mean nothing more than the desire to be a decent individual, while admirable characteristics should not be restricted to a single sex” (García-Granero, 2020: 218-219).

Studies on new masculinities have disclosed the way patriarchy and its privileges entail heavy expenses for men as well. As noticed by Bourdieu (2007: 69), virility “is fundamentally a burden”. It is the case of the uneven distribution of caregiving responsibilities between men and women, which not only produces social injustice and various sorts of difficulties in women’s lives, and also lack of self-realization or loss of vital sense, as well as dependence and lack of autonomy in men’s lives.

The fact that men are not taught to manage autonomous and domestic care tasks is frequently source of frustration, impotence and poor quality of life (Comins-Mingol, 2009a: 88). As noted by Rosa García Ruiz (2017: 84 and 95), men, in patriarchy, become individuals unskilled in selfcare, that is to say, *social dependents*. The fact of growing up isolated from the socialization and practice of care often renders them illiterate in life sustainability and their own selfcare, thus they become dependent (García Ruiz, 2017).

This dissociation between hegemonic masculinity and care work negatively affects men's life expectancy and health. As pointed out by Juan Guillermo Figueroa Perea (2018), the hegemonic masculinity model is a risk factor for men's health. On one side, because they do not develop the necessary selfcare skills for wellbeing and life sustenance, and on the other, because this sort of masculinity is identified, more often than not, with risk practices such as the consumption of alcohol and other harmful substances and/or with dangerous or violent behaviors. It turns into "violence men exercise on one another as they do not recognize the legitimacy of selfcare" (Figueroa Perea, 2018: 130). In this way, the emancipating potential of sharing care tasks between men and women over their lives is not exclusively restricted for women —regarding distributive justice and equal opportunities— but it also encompasses men as regards self-realization, health and happiness accomplishments (Comins-Mingol, 2009a: 98-99).

Moreover, it entails the reduction of components of heteronomy in the vital projects of men and women. So that men and women enjoy liberty and autonomy, both in labor life and private life and in the sphere of care. Thus, breaking the dependency relations between women and the labor life of men, on one side, and men and caregiving and attention tasks of women, on the other (Comins-Mingol, 2009a: 99).

Dependency, that of men regarding women's care tasks, is one of the roots of domestic violence, which is frequently strategic to ensure the allotment of domestic work to women (Comins-Mingol, 2020; García Ruiz, 2017: 95).

In the goal of overcoming the figure of the patriarchal dependent man, the *unruliness of care* by women is also important (Esteban, 2011), so that men can develop their selfcare and inter-care competences. Recognizing the selfcare capability in other individuals not only is recognizing them as individuals, but also a strategy to change present-day socialization. It is fundamental to transgress the perverse accommodations in which patriarchy has socialized us: the *patriarchal-submissive-woman* who takes

the tasks of others<sup>4</sup> and the *patriarchal-dominating-man* who leaves his own selfcare to others (García Ruiz, 2017: 102). Unlearn this sexist model broadens the possibilities for every individual.

Fortunately, increasingly more men do not want to be the *mushroom man* [*hombre champiñón*] (Pérez Orozco 2014), that healthy, well-fed, clean man, emotionally supported, always on point for the market, who ignores or neglects the care activities that have supported him. The man who, as the mushroom, seems to come from out of nowhere, who is not aware –or does not want to recognize– that he is able to do his job because of a series of invisible cares he receives over his life.

Fortunately, as we argue, more men are becoming aware of this phenomenon; however, the shadow of patriarchy is still long and hard to erase. Patriarchy as cultural violence<sup>5</sup> characterizes by being able to “change the moral color of our actions” (Martínez Guzmán, 2010: 295). As pointed out by Vicent Martínez Guzmán (2010: 296), “the opacity of cultural violence obscures the comprehension of situations of domination, mainly, those in the dominating position”, though it can also blind those dominated. So subtle is cultural violence that makes us blind to the proposal of alternatives. On occasion, people who have their certainties and securities threatened by new languages, such as that of new masculinities, close their minds in something known as *scotoma* (Martínez Guzmán, 2010: 296-297) —from Greek *skόtos* which means darkness, obscurity, blindness or ignorance—. “This is an aberration of comprehension that blocks our understanding, in this case, of relationships between human beings in different ways” (Martínez Guzmán, 2010: 297). From this closemindedness, new forms of understanding masculinities are rejected “because our current standpoints and behaviors are contested and understanding them would make us revise them” (Martínez Guzmán, 2010: 297).

Seeing this, two unavoidable tasks are stated. On one side, it is necessary to search for therapies that help us cure from the scotoma of the patriarchy’s cultural violence. And on the other, it is fundamental to visualize male

4 It is legitimate to speak, in this regard, of the need to build not only new masculinities, but also new femininities.

5 It is Galtung’s (2003) tripartite classification of violence: direct, structural, and cultural. Direct violence is the direct actions of aggression against the other; structural refers to the uneven and unfair structures we create and which cause marginalization, exploitation and misery; and cultural violence refers to the legitimization discourses for structural and direct violences.

caregivers, since this disclosure may contribute to break the stereotypes and build more flexible, egalitarian and free masculinity models, with a multiplying effect on other men. While women who enter the public space become visible due to the visibility of the public space, and other women may inspire in them, men who “enter” the private space have lesser visibility, due to the invisibility of the private space, which makes social impact difficult; though they are visible for their children who grow up alien to traditional stereotypes and are the embryo of future egalitarian families in which men and women share labor and household responsibilities equitably (Frank and Livingston, 2000). Beyond the clear and positive effect on the children of this sort of family, it is important, nevertheless to normalize such practices in order to reproduce them. Not only does the invisibility of the private space prevent these new masculinities from being seen, these are non-hegemonic practices that are often carried out in concealment, coerced and repressed (Boscán Leal, 2008: 94).

In every society there are multiple masculinities and in all of them there is the same tendency to exalt a model of masculinity above the rest; one that “intends to be hegemonically imposed on all the men who belong in the group” (Boscán Leal, 2008: 94). A hegemonic model that is sexist and homophobic (Boscán Leal, 2008: 94), embodied in a heterosexual, strong and autonomous man, who stereotypically holds public, labor and power spaces.

The equality agenda is not a feasible endeavor if we not deconstruct such hegemonic masculinity model and move toward new more flexible and versatile masculinity models. “Some new antisexist, antiracist, antihomophobic masculinities, promoters of living an ample and diversified, plural and open masculinity” (Boscán Leal, 2008: 101). Masculinities in which the “competitiveness and rivalry of the past have to make room for solidarity, cooperativism, and love” (Boscán Leal, 2008: 99).

As pointed out by Antonio Boscán (2008: 102), the construction of new masculinities will only “be accomplished on the basis of a relational approach”. This alternative needs to assume fragility and acknowledge the need for interrelation, emphasizing *relationality* as a basic characteristic of human beings (Martínez Guzmán, 2010: 301). When we refer to the revaluing of care “it is not for it to remain as an exclusive load for women, in which case they would be still discriminated, but to generalize such values and practices for all society, including men, as everyone is responsible for ‘caring’ for one another” (Pérez Tapias, 2018: 103).

We may define patriarchy as a “pathology of civilization” (Pérez Tapias, 2018: 94), which produces inequality, individual suffering, and social injustice, producing “*vidas dañadas*” [damaged lives] (Pérez Tapias, 2018: 94). Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider (2018: 5), in their book *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?*, point out the way patriarchy shapes and instills in our minds. The authors above define patriarchy as a powerful force able to turn what seems natural and good such as feelings of love and tender compassion into something shameful and inappropriate in the eyes of the world. One of the dangers of patriarchy is its capability to camouflage itself and its dual cultural and psychologic impact; that is to say, while in the cultural sphere, it entails a set of regulations, values that define the way men and women shall act or be in the world, in the private sphere, patriarchy shapes our thinking and feelings, how we judge ourselves, our desires, our relationships and the world we live in (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 6). These two dimensions of patriarchy —cultural and psychologic— may be opposing: “we can unconsciously absorb and reify a framework that we consciously and actively oppose” (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 7), as our mindsets might hinder progress toward equality, producing social injustice and personal unhappiness.

In this sense, according to Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider (2018: 6), patriarchy has three main characteristics:

1. It makes us consider human capabilities “masculine” or “feminine”, and privilege the masculine ones.
2. It raises some men above others and places all men over women.
3. It forces a conceptualization of men as *beings-for-themselves*, while women as *beings-for-others*, thus reinforcing the *I* in men, and the relational dimension in women.

“In essence, patriarchy harms both men and women by forcing men to act as if they don’t have or need relationships and women to act as if they don’t have or need a self” (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 6). In adolescence, femininity is associated with the silencing of the *I*, while masculinity with the shielding of *relationality* and sensibility, the two sides of the coin (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 22). As pointed out Michael Kimmel (1997: 54 and 58):

Admitting weakness, frailty or fragility means to be seen as a weakling, effeminate, not as a real man. But, according to whom? Other men: we are under the careful and constant scrutiny of other men [...] As adolescents, we learn that our peers are a sort of gender police, constantly threatening to reveal we are effeminate, not manly enough.

The codes of masculinity, learnt by boys, are basically two: suppressing empathy and hiding vulnerabilities. “Boys are sacrificing relationship in order to have relationships”, Judy Chu (2014: 206) points out in *When Boys Become Boys*. In this way, paradoxically, boys suppress their relational capability in order to have “relationships”, that is to say, to be accepted by their peers. Many boys grow up convinced that if they express what they feel and think, and reveal their emotional sensibility and vulnerability, other boys would not want to be with them because they would not be perceived as real boys (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 21). Regrettably, the construction of identity is binarily reinforced in adolescence so that intimacy and vulnerability have a gender, feminine, whereas being a man implies to be emotionally stoic and independent (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 22; Gilligan, 2014: 94).

Judy Chu (2014) identifies this process even at earlier ages; children between four and five years of age, who were attentive, authentic and direct in their relationships with one another, start a process of separation and inauthenticity. According to Chu (2014), it is not that the boys’ relational capabilities are lost, but socialization with a view to culturally building masculinity, which is defined in opposition to femininity, seems to reinforce a division between what boys know and what they show.

The suppression of relationality and having to constantly display the *condition of man* exposes men to important health care problems, not only physical but emotional (Figueroa Perea, 2018). A significant fact is that “men commit suicide three times more frequently than women” (Kimmel, 1997: 59).<sup>6</sup> Men’s sacrifice of love as a human value is not without a cost, speech, attention and learning disorders are prevalent in boys, as well as suicide and violence among adolescents (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 40-41). The sacrifice of love as a human value —betray our capacity to love— causes *moral damage* in men (Gilligan, 2014: 90).

We heard signs of *moral damage* in the voices of adolescents when, in the search for the spirit of masculinity, they were forced to betray what they considered correct —intimacy, expression of affection and sensibility— a betrayal that is considered appropriate up to the point that we have associated the betrayal of love with growth and maturation (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 36). In the history of occidental thinking, we find symbolic and extreme narrations about this betrayal to affection

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6 On care as a source of resilience, see Comins-Mingol, Irene (2015a). By means of self-care we provide our own life with meaning and ourselves with dignity, while we create bonds with other individuals.

and intimacy in those of Agamemnon or Abraham. The ethics of care as one focused on life and its sustainability may guide us to prevent such betrayal and moral damage; it might help us re-signify the concept of human being, beyond any binary or dichotomic conception of genders and to transgress violent identity constructions.

In this way, by and large, we may define with Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider (2018) patriarchy as the sacrifice of love. It involves a suppression of the relational and worldly dimension of caregiving by men with important consequences: not only does it turn them into *dependent patriarchal men*, illiterate as regards care and selfcare know-hows, but it is also source of personal unhappiness and social injustice.

In spite of recent advancement in the gender equality agenda, patriarchy persists in contemporary societies (Gilligan and Snider, 2018). Several and complex are the factors that sustain it, but we notice a common transversal element: the one related to the limitation in expressing and practicing care and its uneven distribution in function of gender.

- a) In the first place, patriarchy persists because of the economic benefits that it produces for some groups. In this way, as denounced from the field of feminist economy, with the uneven distribution of care, capitalism externalizes the cost of maintaining labor force to the family, due to the gratuitous nature of reproduction and maintenance of human life by women. Capitalism thus makes use the sexual division of labor, exploiting the hours of work women devote to life sustenance (García Ruiz, 2017: 56-57). The system reduces costs externalizing caregiving and life reproduction to the *submissive-patriarchal-woman*.
- b) Secondly, patriarchy persists because it is necessary to uphold power hierarchies and to justify inequality (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 13). In this sense, patriarchy is built upon the necessary limitation of the expression and practice of care; since, “feelings of empathy and tender compassion for another’s suffering or humanity make it difficult to maintain or justify inequality” (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 12). The sacrifice of love is the fingerprint of patriarchy (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 33), a sacrifice that paves the road for the establishment and maintenance of hierarchy. “Patriarchy is an order of living that privileges some men over other men (straight over gay, rich over poor, white over black, father over sons, this religion over that religion, this caste over the others) and all men over women” (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 33). The policy of patriarchy

is the policy of domination; one that is possible because patriarchy drives all men to bury their emotional sensibility, especially the expression of tenderness, empathy, and vulnerability (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 33). The policy of domination and rationalization of hierarchies needs the loss of empathy by those at the top and loss of self-confidence by those below (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 44).

- c) In the third place, adding to economic and sociopolitical reasons, patriarchy also persists owing to a myriad of psychological factors. For example, the imagination that “the sacrifice of love is a refuge against loss” (Gilligan and Snider, 2018: 33) has been culturally built. Mistakenly, patriarchy thinks it protects against the vulnerability of love, a defense against loss, by means of detachment. However, our humanity resides in the acceptance of our common vulnerability and in fostering and developing our capacity for love.

The introduction of care work in the lives of men is fundamental in the road toward gender equality; it is necessary to build fair and equitable relationships between men and women, as a source of self-realization and wellbeing for everyone. Though, additionally, it is the road toward the construction of peacemaking cultures, the road to authentically democratic, plural societies, critical to inequalities, justification of hierarchies and domination.

The socialization of care is a socialization in empathy and compassion, places us on the side of the most vulnerable, and makes us work in favor of reducing human and natural suffering. Rescuing and reconstructing what Leonardo Boff (2002) calls the *way-of-being-cared-for* is the antidote against indifference and neglecting otherness, it is the *way-of-being-in-the-world* that rescues our most essential humanity

In the face of the codes of hegemonic masculinity (suppression of empathy and hiding of vulnerabilities), the philosophy of care speaks about the importance of relationships, empathy, and recognition of our common vulnerability and intrinsic interdependence. It is fundamental for the equality agenda to advance toward new masculinities, liberating for everyone; “the main transformation has to take place in the lifestyles of men” (Hathaway and Boff, 2014: 117).

## Conclusions

The ethics of care with its commitment to relationships, love and democratic citizenship is also the ethics of resistance to *moral damage*, to the scotoma of patriarchy. The Care Collective (2021: 56) puts forward the concept of a “promiscuous care”, one not reduced to cares traditionally assigned to women, or at the borders of family care, but which encompasses broader parenthoods and more collective or community forms of life. There is need to reinvent, and mainly broaden, the limits of care (Comins-Mingol, 2015: 159-178). An ethics of promiscuous care encourages to multiply the number of people we are able to care, care more and indiscriminately—not only caring for family and relatives, but also strangers—and urges us to look for creative forms of care (The Care Collective, 2021: 57). Promiscuous care “recognizes that we all have the capacity to care, not only mothers and not only women, and that all our lives improve when we care for ourselves, are cared for and care for ourselves together” (The Care Collective, 2021: 70). As humans, we need to care and feel cared for, being interconnected, so we recognize our common humanity. Caring for human beings and nature is moreover an example of citizen practice (Tronto, 2013).

Regenerating the transformative efficacy of the gender equality agenda at present requires to place care in the center of analysis. The perspective of care helps us understand the reasons to perpetuate patriarchy and problematize the roots of feminism deactivation:

1. The reductionist assimilation of feminism by neoliberalism and market society which do not contest the uneven distribution of care.
2. The psychologizing of equality, which places responsibility for change on people, not on society, individualizing the problem that needs a change in the way-of-being of men, not only women.
3. The assistentialist standpoint of public policies which, despite necessary, leave aside the main objective of feminism: the social transformation and transgression of the traditional allotment of identities.

We cannot relegate any longer the public debate on care and the new masculinities it needs. Care is not a private topic nor a women’s topic, but a social and political issue that is our responsibility as a society and besides fundamental for the future of democracy. The private and public spaces are simultaneously rebuilt in mutual coexistence. As Gilligan (2013) points out, the ethics of care is an ethics of injustice and inequality

resistance, ethics that promotes social empathy and concern for the welfare of everyone and nature. A feminist ethics that fights to liberate democracy from patriarchy (Gilligan, 2013: 175). A truly transforming gender equality agenda shall contemplate this challenge, “it cannot act only on the effects of the current social organization of cares, but it has to propose to change the cultural roots that support it” (Keller Garganté, 2017: 7-8).

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