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*Erasmus*

**Is Gender a Global Conspiracy?**

**Origin and Arguments of the Gender Ideology Strategy**

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## List of Acronyms

EU	European Union
GI	Gender Ideology
ICDP	United Nations International Conference on Population and Development
LATAM	Latin America
LGBT+	Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals and more
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia]
PP	Partido Popular [People's Party – Spain]
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party]
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	Universidad de la Defensa Nacional de Argentina [National Defense University]
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization

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## **Abstract**

Gender Ideology has been used by right-wing parties and religious groups to contest proposed changes in sexuality education and other initiatives regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights around the world. The work of Norbert Elias focused on understanding long-term processes, is proposed to analyze the arguments and logic of religious leaders and opinion-makers in this opposition. This research has found that Gender Ideology is a transnational strategy that mobilizes people using well-established fears in societies. In Latin America and Spain, right-wing groups have linked the gender mainstreaming approach used by UN agencies with pedophilia, incest, and rape. Moreover, the messages, concealed under a mask of secularism and scientific thought, are spread via public conferences accessible on YouTube, as well as incendiary posts shared in social media. This reactionary outcome follows patterns of old strategies and has unified both Catholics and Evangelicals in the controversy.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This work is mostly directed to people working in sexuality education and/or promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. These sectors have been the target of attacks coming from right-wing groups opposing gender with arguments that deny social injustice or exclusion. It is also an attempt to propose an interpretation of Norbert Elias to Development Studies, especially to understand phenomena associated with sexuality, emotions and mentalities, International Relations, and religion.

## **Keywords**

Gender Ideology, Norbert Elias, Sexuality and Gender, Right-Wing Populism, Social Media., Religion

# Chapter 1

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, societies around the world have agreed to adjust their steering codes of conduct regarding sexuality and Gender. Delegates from different countries concluded that the combination of elements such as: “[sustainable] development; education [...] for girls; gender equity and equality; infant, child and maternal mortality reduction; and the provision of universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health” (UNFPA 1994: 9) are the cornerstone to achieve peace and happiness. Consequently, these delegations have committed to implement the Gender Mainstreaming approach

“[to recognize] the women who paved the way [and to promote] women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power” (UNFPA 1995 2).

Nevertheless, Gender Mainstreaming as a tool to transform human relationships has created resistance in conservative groups that consequently have targeted gender in public policies as the enemy of traditional values. The result is a configuration based on opposition. For one side, the essentialist point of view, an Aristotelian and Kantian interpretation of sexuality held by religion that sees sexuality as natural or God-given; in the other side, the constructivists ‘[emphasizing] the culturally and linguistically constructed characteristics of sexual identities and meanings, and the embeddedness of sex taxonomies and practices in the power at play in institutional and social discourses (Correa & Jolly 2008: 22). This paper is intended to understand the arguments of the first group, represented here by a specific type of conservative groups. They have coined the term Gender Ideology [GI] to disseminate misinformation, based on contradictory messages of frightening scenarios and channeled through public figures with an apparent secular interpretation of sexuality. With their rhetoric, they have been successful at mobilizing communities in the politic arena in Latin American [LATAM] countries and Spain. What are the conditions of possibility for the emergence of GI and what are their arguments? How is this connected with more significant changes occurring in the world? Is GI part of a conscious strategy of religious groups? Norbert Elias’ (1897-1990) processual understanding of society offers an opportunity to examine the individual and social tensions leading this reaction by simultaneously analyzing the contents and purposes of GI and the social tensions fuelling the controversy.

### 1.1 Organization of the paper

The paper is organized into three specific sections. The first part includes the introduction to the problem and the lenses and methods that have been adopted to assess the topic. Chapter three introduces the case of GI in Colombia as an illustration of how these debates are transformed into political action. Chapter four is the exposition and simultaneous analysis of the argumentation used by right-wing intellectuals in public scenarios in Spain and LATAM; additionally, a synthesis of the main religious features in the two regions helps to understand the interdependence in this configuration. Chapter five analyses the events that set the conditions for the religious opposition. Finally, a synthesis presenting coincidences on how gender in academia and homosexuality in society, were contested in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century using arguments also held by GI. Chapter six answers the questions guiding this research and offers a reflection over the scope and limitations of the paper.



## 1.2 Literature review and context

GI appear associated the political arena in 2016. In academic papers, the term was used before to talk about gender issues, and before 2016, GI was mostly a positive term. As a recent phenomenon, most of the literature comes from the press; focused in specific national (Marcos 2016; Encarnación 2017; Kitson 2018; Prandini & Ogando 2018; Roose 2019 and more) or regional cases (Corrales 2018 for The New York Times; Reid for The Economist 2017; Kane 2018 for The Guardian); these notes highlight similar patterns: religious groups highly engaged in politics protesting against the imposition of GI in their societies.

The scholarly studies have been produced in the last two years; this section considers their main findings, highlighting the representations constructed by right-wing groups, aiming to illustrate further connections in this configuration. Corredor examines “antigender campaigns as palpable transnational counter-movements” that employ GI as a “counterstrategies against feminist and LGBT+ social movements” (2019: 614). Focused in the intersection of gender and far-right politics in Europe, Köttig et al. (2016) examine the involvement on women in right-wing extremism where GI is instrumentalized combining race and nationalism with a biblical understanding of sex:

“The CNFE [National Circle of European Woman in France] and the RNF [Circle of Nationalist Women in Germany] propagate essentialist gender stereotypes, pretending that ‘nature’ has provided men and women with special genetic characteristics, faculties and duties [...] the Holy Bible stipulates a polarized and hierarchical gender order, embodied by Adam and Eve” (Dubsclaff in Köttig et al 2016: 164)

In addition, Kováts coins the term *anti-gender movements* to engulf the mobilizations opposing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights [SRHR] rights in Spain, same-sex marriage in Croatia, France and Slovenia, gender policies in Poland or progressive sexual education in Germany, Croatia and Poland. She identifies that conservative groups have targeted different actors as *gender ideologist* or *genderists*: “liberal, green or leftist politicians, women’s rights activists, gender policy officers of public administrations, and gender studies scholars” are among those to blame for GI. European GI campaigns were also directing resentments against foreign organizations, especially UN agencies, for allegedly threatening western values (in Köttig 2016: 175/76). Additionally, Barbara Rosenkranz, a member of the right-wing Austrian Parliament, ties gender with deconstruction and mainstreaming with imposition to suggests that certain wealthy elites including homosexuals, feminist, Marxists, capitalist, the EU, and the media are colluded to impose GI with the purpose of achieving a genderless society (En in Köttig 2016: 235).

Kuhar and Paternotte write an extensive exposition on GI campaigns and movements in European countries. They observe that these campaigns “share discourses, strategies, and modes of action across borders; observe what each other is doing, and are increasingly connected transnationally” (2017: 2) This statement corroborates Corredor’s observation about the ‘transnational circularity’ strategy of the right-wing group (2019: 614). The book also examines the ideas of Marguerite Peeters linking GI with indoctrination, hyper-sexualization of children, and paedophilia (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017: 5). Kuhar and Paternotte also find that homophobia is one of the triggers of the European mobilizations. Religious groups, often Catholic and/or connected with the American Christian Right, create and feed the idea of a “gender agenda” threatening mankind and Western family values. They have named Judith Butler as the incarnation of GI. She is the last link of a long chain of names, including John Money, Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Monique Wittig, Germain Greer, Margaret Sanger, Alfred Kinsey, Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Engels (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017: 5). Gender as a global conspiracy is also a repetitive representation in this configuration, German sociologist and converted Catholic Gabriele

Kuby argues that Gender Mainstreaming links political organizations like UN with a *cultural revolution* aiming to change people's minds in a totalitarian way, in a conspiracy, *more dangerous* than Marxism and Fascism; however, she presents GI as "a new leftist ideology, emerging from the ashes of communism" (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017: 6). In sum, European right-wing groups have targeted gender as an enemy of Western values. At the same time, they have adopted heterogeneous connections of fearful conspiracies to explain gender and attack gender-based policies.

In LATAM Evangelicals are the most powerful actors in the anti-gender campaigns (Corrales 2015), the author measures visible progress in the region and identifies Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay as *high achiever countries* for implementing laws of inclusion and protection for LGBT+ communities. At the same time, while contrasting his data with the low favourability of LGBT+ rights among religious groups, he connects the latter as the cause of this opposition (Corrales 2015: 4-9). In Brazil, GI is one of the components in the tension between socialist and conservatives; the latter is represented by Pentecostal churches and right-wing politicians. This coalition advances the argument that communism eliminates religion freedom and can establish a gay dictatorship (Dos Santos 2018: 54). In Colombia, GI has been studied in relation with the failure of the Referendum in 2016, where political actors and Pentecostal leaders disseminated messages suggesting that the Gender component in the Peace Agreement with the guerrilla FARC was associated with *social ills* like atheists, communists, homosexuals and feminists (Beltran 2018). About the same event, Rondon introduces GI as moral panics and made explicit how "complex political and emotional [...] actively participates in the production of citizen subjectivities" (2017: 142).

In the US, Gender has been a preferred target of the Alt-Right, using media to disseminate a patriarchal understanding of gender roles). Consequently, GI has been subsumed in the debate of Post-Modern Neo-Marxism promoted by religious think-thanks presenting Gender as a Marxist conspiracy (Fielitz et al. 2018: 16). Organizations such as Mass Resistance, A pro-family group providing "information and guidance to people [...] to confront assaults on the traditional family, school children, and the moral foundation of society" (masresistance.org), and The Heritage Foundation focused in "[promoting] conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defence" (Heritage.org), are highly engaged in this debate. On YouTube, they have posted hundreds of videos arguing against gender issues. The most popular lecturer in their Channel is the Canadian psychologist and entrepreneur Jordan Peterson, who coined the terms Post-Modern Neo-Marxism; he is the author of the best-seller *12 Rules of Life: An Antidote to Chaos* that has been adopted by white supremacists and the self-identify *Incels*, that follow him on YouTube around the globe (O'Connor 2019; Burston 2019: 1). He gained fame in 2016 when he opposed a Federal Government's regulating the use of gender pronouns in the classroom (O'Connor 2019). Briefly, his thesis is that after the 'catastrophic failure of Marxism' in the 20th Century, the post-modernist, who were 'all Marxists', decided to stop 'pitting the proletariat against the bourgeoisie' and starting 'to pit the oppressed against the oppressor.' He leads his complaining towards scholars that have been paid to 'demolishing the fundamental substructure of Western Civilization'; he also criticizes empathy and accuses these scholars of focussing on identities and in that way 'control most low to mid-level bureaucratic structures and many governments'; he identifies the women studies and activists as the 'top offenders'. Basically, he argues against the idea of a historic male-dominant culture, which he sees as a 'radical oversimplification.' He thinks that men were as oppressed as women in the past due to the poor conditions (Ruminante 2017). At the same time, he accuses postmodern scholars of instigating the decline of human sciences across the globe (Burston 2019: 1). His aggressive thesis has caused heated debates in social media platform where he is often prone to engage

in debates. Along with men like Ben Shapiro, Jordan Peterson represents the right-wing intellectuals that, by appealing to science, target Marxism and, *therefore*, gender. This paper shows how the LATAM version of GI has elements of both: the American and the European Gender opposition.

### 1.3 Research Objective and Questions

The objective of this paper is to use the processual logic proposed by Norbert Elias to understand the emergence and workings of GI as a pejorative term in the public arena.

The main question is: What were the conditions under which this opposition emerged in the political arena, and what are its main arguments and differences?

The subquestions leading this paper are:

Who are the main actors in this configuration? How are these messages presented in social media? What is the intellectual lineage that upholds this reaction? What are the specific features of GI in LATAM?

### 1.4 Methodology and Methods

Several methods can be used to apply a process-oriented methodology focus on change (Baur and Ernst 2011). Bibliography research and social media ethnography were used to build this case. The reason behind this selection is due to social media, and YouTube has been the leading platform where GI messages have been spread in recent years. At the same time religious conferences and communicates, as well as news, are assumed as historical documents to build a Case Study, including the observation, reconstruction, and analysis of GI (Hamel et al. 1993: 2). This reconstruction is intended to observe changes and patterns in the Gender debate, but also in religion groups.

#### 1.4.1 YouTube as a Source

Since the first prospects into the topic, it was evident that the most relevant material for the LATAM context was on YouTube, primarily conferences and interviews. YouTube is understood here in a twofold way: as a place to exchange and acquire knowledge and a source of ethnographic work. I read these conferences as a text, open to primary source criticism, located in a specific place, and directed to a broad audience (Brundage 2013). These videos are made to be seen and spread; the videos are hosted in personal or religious channels; both promote the content and stimulate their audiences to share and comment (Mohr 2014). It is implicit that the content in YouTube channels is intended to be socialized; this information is public and accessible to anyone with a computer and an internet connection, and the YouTubers do not just agree with the reproduction of their image and messages, they encourage it.

The videos that are part of this research are also analyzed following the evaluation for measuring engagement proposes by Desai et al. (2013): views, likes, and comments. I will also add a fifth category: subscribers. The subscribers are those users engaged with the content of the channel wanting to receive every new video on their main page. This is an effective way to maintain people updated with the content. For this research were selected videos with a high number of views, comments and/or hosted by channels with numerous subscribers. There is another crucial element behind the election of YouTube: the most popular videos about Gender [*género*] in LATAM tend to be content presenting gender as unfavourable, explaining like something terrible or making jokes about the topic.

### 1.4.2 Bibliography Research

Most of the archives used in this research are considered Grey Literature: “produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers” (Anderson 2001: 82). This literature includes documents, conferences, news, and other sources that are understood here as historical archives following the criteria set by the International Council on Archives (ICA): Authenticity, Reliability, Integrity, and usability. In that order, the selected archives are recorded on place or written/published intended to promote or create a reaction. All the documents assess GI or religion. All the literature collected were considered in their totality, extracting the main arguments. All the data is available on-line, in databases or public libraries. The literature was selected after an exhaustive search of the term “gender ideology” since 1990s, with the conferences that lead to Gender Mainstreaming. The information was organized chronologically, observing the evolution and meanings of GI. The primary sources used in this research are produced in the Spanish language, except news and secondary data like books and articles. The translation was done by the author, and whenever the use or specific terminology is presented as a challenge, the clarification is made in a footnote.

### 1.4.3 Social Media as a Fieldwork

Finally, since social media has been the preferred means for distributing messages, it was necessary to consider specific pages on Twitter and Facebook to extract comments and reactions. Social media is seen as a “fieldwork environment that is social, experiential and mobile”, a place where the ‘human necessity of being updated’ and to share information leads to exploration (Postil and Pink 2012: 125-9); this exploration is nurture by our innate predisposition of sharing intentionally (Tomasello 2008). Web interaction reflects societies’ fears and passions, where people tend to engage in discussions. At the same time, these interactions nurture a system that is programmed to create highly engaged consumers of content (Stokel-Walker 2019). In twitter share is vital, and this includes the calling for attention of third parties via *tagging* with the @ symbol, when someone is *tagged* to call for reaction; tagging works the same for other social networks (Thelwall 2018). Nevertheless, for this paper not personal/individual accounts were scrutinized, just public figures and a news portal. Finally, web sources were examined following this pattern: name of the page, examination of the content, mission of the organization; if the source was not clear about its purpose, it was not included.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

Right-wing groups have focused on attacking SRHR issues such as Sexuality Education, feminist claims for equality, LGBT+ rights, safe and legal abortion, and more (Kane 2018) relying on an essentialist view of sexuality whereas downplaying the role of culture. This epistemological antagonism deserves attention. Norbert Elias<sup>1</sup> offers an opportunity to “empirically verify something that contradicts what is believed” (Weiler 2008: 811), a problem that is at the core of this antagonism: a part of the population does not agree with the constructivist explanation of sexuality; consequently they wield strategies to convince and convene others. Gender as way to explain humanity can be compared with the Copernican turn in this sense:

“If this change in human knowledge is understood only in narrow scientific terms as a theory which agreed better than the antecedent theory [...] one misses the emotional significance of this change: one overlooks its impact on people’s image of themselves and their place in the universe” (Elias 1898c: 68)

Gender implies questions about constitutive elements of the human organization in the world that has created a reaction. This paper focus on understanding the religious-based reaction against gender following the processual logic of Elias “understanding the human psyche as always changing through the simultaneous reorganization of thought and language” (Weiler 2012: 519). The empirical data in this paper have been produced by conservative intellectuals have been analysed by a combination of systematic observation and reflection as a method to acquire knowledge” (Elias 1989c: 63) given that understanding worthwhile

### 2.1 The human as a process

For Elias, the process of the organization of human mind starts anew in every member born in a given society and continues the process in their pursuit of autonomy, always dependent on the other members of the species (Elias 1991: 16/9). This interpretation is a proper tool to understand social institutions, not just as creators and promoters of social rules and morals but also as institutions changing and facing challenges for their existence and relevance in what they considered their role in the long process of humanity. In the *Process of Civilization* [first published in 1939], Elias presents the foundations of his theory. Civilization is a process of “change of human conduct and sentiment” (1978: 229), is the growing control over emotions in the course of human history that takes place in every new member of the species: “the regulation of the whole instinctual and affective life by steady self-control becomes more and more stable, more all-embracing” (Elias 1978: 230). This process is not unidirectional, not planned, and not rational and is presented in every human society since emotive control is the first requirement for conviviality: “there is no human being without civilization” (Goudsblom 2003: 35). Concerned as he was with the situation of Germany in 1930s, Elias studies the way European societies change to observe both civilizing and decivilizing trends, focusing on the interaction between emotional self-control and state formation (Fletcher 1997). Elias analyses manners books written with the purpose of setting out “the standards of acceptable behavior by people in society” (Mennell 1989: 36), these books were mostly produced by religious groups concern to direct the steering codes of conduct in their societies towards a more self-restrained behavior (Elias 1978: 230). An additional element of humanity as a process is meaning, outlined by Elias but better elaborated by Dux as the human tendency to act, learn and organize the world pragmatically, the result of this process

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<sup>1</sup> For critique on Elias see Appendix 1

is a logic world created by the individual “[this] constructed process did not occur behind the backs of the actors [...] it occurred by means of the actors” (Dux 2006: 21-35).

### 2.1.1 Sexuality Education as manners

The relation between the gradual self-imposed pacification and the gradual monopoly of violence in the hands of a centralized state is vastly investigated by Elias. Sexuality has been one the central topics in the posterior research using his concepts, especially Wouters who coined the term informalization to illustrate how moral conducts: “have tended to become less status-ridden, less stiff and rigid, and have moved towards more informal, lenient, and flexible codes of manners” (Wouters and Dunning 2019: 3). However, phenomena like GI show how this interpretation of Elias is only possible in specific locations. On the contrary, the efforts to direct people’s sexuality is still a heated debate in international fora.

Recent human developments like Comprehensive Sexuality Education can be taken as a form to direct expected changes in human relations. However, these are proposed mostly by secular and political institutions using sharper interpretation tools from specialized sectors of different societies. The emergence of complex and comprehensive elements of conduct like the Declaration of Human Rights; the advances in Women Rights, LGBT+ Rights, Children Rights, and SRHR among others, have changed the way a vast portion of the species understand human sexuality, including aspects of it like gender, sexual diversity, contraception, pleasure or abortion.

Additionally, analyzing international Conferences and their results as conscious efforts to direct the codes of conduct of the species allows seeing GI as an outcome of the process of opposition to the implementation of Gender in the 1990s. Furthermore, these Conferences reveals the connection between development and what Elias understands by civilization; in the new introduction to the Civilizing Process, he writes:

“Whether we are concerned with the development of European countries, which has lasted for centuries, or with the so-called ‘developing countries’ in other parts of the world, we are constantly confronted by observations which give rise to the following question: how and why, in the course of the overall transformations of society which take place over long time spans and in a particular direction-**for which the term ‘development’ has been adopted**- is the affectivity of human behaviour and experience, the control of individual affects by external and internal constraints, and in this sense the structure of all forms of human expression altered in a particular direction?” (Elias 1978a: 221 Emphasis added).

Accordingly, Gender Mainstreaming was a conscious way to control individual constraints to affect a global issue. It is essential to notice how these two developments are connected. Elias is critical to binary oppositions and egocentric explanations. This is well represented in his understanding about the link between the individual and the society: “individual human beings are bound to each other in a plurality, that is, a society” (Elias 1991: VIII) this link is called interdependence and: “it determines the way ‘objects’ act upon ‘subjects’, ‘subjects’ upon ‘objects’, non-human nature upon humans, humans upon non-human nature [...] it is an ontological, an existential interdependence” (Elias 1987a: 348). The foundation is a simple and clear observation that there is no possibility for humans to survive if others do not take care of them. As societies transform, the chains of interdependence tend to be longer, that lead to increase individuality, the idea of being independent entities (Elias 1991: 152), this individuality is one of the key ingredients in the Gender debate, including the variable of identity politics, one of the targets of GI.

## 2.2 Established and Outsiders

GI has unified a massive array of arguments and intellectuals aiming to create a unified right-wing front. This phenomenon is considered by looking the balance of tensions between the established and outsiders, where the first are: “Members of groups which are, in terms of power, stronger than other interdependent groups, [or] think of themselves in human terms as *better* than the other”(Elias 1994[1965]), this approach is used here to examine the religious-based argumentation. Following his foundational idea of interdependence, Elias critiques the charismatic leader category, a human able to dominate a configuration (1983: 22) however, he creates the concept of group charisma, communities with high levels of self-image and gathering people “with the the same sensibilities [...] strengthening the common front against outsiders” (Elias 1994: 155). In this configuration, the defenders of an essentialist view of sexuality are the established group, and the outsiders are those groups that they have targeted as deviant, criminal, or authoritarians.

The point of confluence of this group is the right-wing of politics: intellectuals, liberals and/or conservatives, politicians, and religious leaders conformed this configuration. In the last years the right-wing have connected with populism, this configuration receives a synthetic definition that is clearly connected with the objectives of this paper: “In line with the anti-pluralism of its conception of the people, right-wing populists refuse the give and take of political compromise and demand radical solutions concerning their core issues” (Greven 2016: 1), *the people* in Greven is a synonym for the established in this paper, and the anti-pluralism is at the core of GI, especially when right-wingers associated plurality with social ills.

## 2.3 Emotional contents

This strategy used by right-wing populist are large consisted in: “personal attacks on other people -instead of the content of their argument- that has nothing to do with the truth of the target’s statements” (Blassnig 2018: 108) is notorious in the emergence of GI in LATAM and Colombia; media comments are based on suppositions and personal attacks intended to create illogical connections of causality. GI promoters see Gender as a threat. They do not agree with social issued that gender made visible like oppression, discrimination or inequality. Gender has been an excellent tool to understand these problems, and for Elias “new ways of speaking and thinking never develop without conflict with older and more familiar ones” (1978b: 20), in that sense, this opposition was logical, as is also logic the decision to use fearful connections to attack gender:

“We often like to think that elements of fantasy, which plays an important part in directing group’s common actions towards its goals, is [...] nothing more than an alluring, exciting mask of propaganda. We imagine that cunning leaders use it to conceal their boldly-conceived aims which in terms of their ‘own interests’ are highly ‘rational’ or ‘realistic’ [...] when we use the concept of ‘reason’ [...] we help to reinforce the widespread idea that rational, objective or realistic considerations are usually the main ones when groups of people quarrel” (Elias 1978b: 28)

Fantasies are effective because they appeal to shared emotions in large groups, and it is an effective way to gather people around a project. For Elias these emotions are not imposed onto people because of the specificity of human emotions (in Van Krieken 2014: 37). The balance between learning and unlearning emotions are different in every society because “no emotion of a grown-up human person is ever an entirely unlearned, genetically fixated reaction pattern” (Elias 1987a: 352). It is a combined process of learning and unlearning. Unlearned emotions are those that can be called instinctive. The learning process starts with

every newly born and is organized by the language that integrates her into a specific human group (Elias 1987a: 349). It is impossible to study emotions without describing the place, and the function of these emotions “unlearned emotional impulses are always related to a person’s learned self-regulation, more specifically to learned control of emotions” (Elias 1987: 360). We learn to fear, hate or repulse specific aspects of human experience. Emotions are always changing in the simultaneous reorganization of thought and language: “without changes in knowledge, including language changes, social development would not be possible” (Elias 1987b: 290). Tomasello’s work about cooperation and altruism can be considered unlearned behavior. He shows how unkind behavior appears in children later in their lives, in the interaction with the world “As children transform themselves into public persons with their own identities in early childhood, they become concerned with their public reputations, and they are eager to follow and even enforce social norms (2009: 40-5). In this fashion, societal phenomena strictly attached to our emotionalities like homophobia or gender roles are learned. Moreover, when this emotionality is merged with other learned fears the result are concepts that provoke fear and uncertainty: “to fulfill their function as means of communication and orientation, [concepts] must be comprehensible not only by a single person but by a language community” (Elias 1991: 160), the strategy of right-wing intellectuals is to connect gender with undesirable social ills.

## 2.4 Gender and Ideology

One of the outcomes on this opposition is that the term Gender Ideology has been charged negatively, linking it with “destructive [and] even diabolical” (Butler 2019) powers; this is the reason why this paper uses the term and not a reformulation of the opposition. It is assumed that gender is not an ideology but rather “an invitation to think critically about how the meanings of sexed bodies are produced in relation to one another, how these meanings are deployed and changed [and to focus on] the construction of sexual difference itself” (Scott 2010: 10). Gender has shown a great level of plasticity as a concept and has been used with scientific rigour by scholars and activists. Is needed to understand gender in continuous flux: “the evolve in one direction or another, either towards greater approximation to reality and object-adequacy, or towards an intensified character as expressions of human affects and fantasies, or, again, they evolve towards a greater or lesser degree of synthesis” (Elias 1992: 132). In the last decades, gender has shifted to the latter

In contrast, the GI controversy is full of fantasies with emotional significance. Elias insists on taking the emotional contents seriously, not just as irrational propaganda opposed to logic: “It is not very difficult to see the great extent to which both realistic and fantasy-laden ideas pervade the conception of ‘group interest’” (Elias 1978a: 28). The element of fantasy means that it is erroneous to observe ideologies as rational structures. For Elias, Rationality is “the calculation of the balance between short-term desires and emotional inclinations and the long-term consequences of human action” (In Lemmings and Brooks 2016: 24). Right-Wings arguments in favour of science, morality, truth, and more are not as rational as they want to present them; the main purpose in these arguments is to maintain their established position and, in that manner, right-wing argumentation is more likely to be considered as an ideology than gender.

## 2.5 Involvement and Detachment

Being GI, a controversial topic in which I found myself involved, I need to be clear about my position in this research. I will combine Harding when she states that: “standpoint theory is a kind of organic epistemology, methodology, philosophy of science, and social theory that



can arise whenever oppressed peoples gain public voice” (Harding 2004: 3), and Elias insight on the double-bind process between involvement and detachment as a model “to scape from the circularity of the movement which, from knowledge an believes with a strongly emotional fantasy-content, leads to a low ability to control the dangers that humans constitute to each other”( Elias 1987c: 72). This section is my elaboration about to locate myself in a research aiming to create a cognitive-valuable experience.

I belong to the millions of dispossessed people resulted from the unequal distribution and the disregard for human lives in the Colombian society. I am also part of the LGBT+ community. I was raised a Catholic, and during my childhood, the possibility to go to hell for being gay was real. Moreover, in the communities where I lived, magic and religion were integrated into daily life. But religion was painful, and I replaced it for a different understanding of the world. Consequently, I quit religion and became an atheist.

I just had access to formal education late in my life, thanks to the National University of Colombia. In the History Department, I found a place and a family. There, I had the opportunity to combine topics that had dragged my attention for years: psychology, sociology, and psychoanalysis. Happily, those topics turned out to be necessary for the psychogenetic theory of history, a tool to “to incorporate within [the] understanding of the world an understanding of ourselves as species” (Dux 2011: 15). We read the work of experts in many fields, from evolutionary and developmental psychology to neuroscience and to the history of mentalities. Norbert Elias was somewhere; his writing captivated a small group, and we decided to create a group to study and control his ideas. His project seemed too appealing for us, eager as we were to grasp some of the profound contradictions in our society.

By the moment GI appeared in Colombia [Chapter 3], we used to have weekly meetings. There, we talked about the topic in some sessions. The term and its political use took us by surprise, especially after the loud failure of the Referendum intended to put an end to the 50 years conflict with the Marxist Guerrilla FARC. We read WhatsApp messages that had been shared in religious groups stating that GI was against religion. We listened to some Sermons of both Catholic and Protestant Churches where they argued that the gender perspective included in the Peace Agreement was a plan to turn people gay. For us, GI argumentation was only possible in our society.

When I decided to research the topic, this experience came back to me and forced me to reflect on my own life. My main concern was that I saw myself extremely involved, and that could blur my research. However, during the process, I realized that I had an advantaged position that allowed me to navigate through those worlds with relative familiarity, after all, I have been there. Therefore, I propose a journey in the third person while being present; because this paper is also my life experience.

## Chapter 3 Gender Ideology in Colombia

GI appeared in the Colombian context in 2016. It was used to stop the plans of the Ministry of Education to re-formulate sexuality education. The decision for these changes had its roots in the case of Sergio Urrego, a teenager who in 2014 jumped to his death in a famous shopping mall in Bogotá. Later it was known that he had been the constant target of homophobic remarks by the staff and directors of his school. The case was mediatic and escalated in some sectors of the society that demanded actions to prevent further tragedies (Guerrero, 2016). The revision of how educational institutions approach sexual diversity and discrimination was part of the government's answer. However, this proposal created a configuration where conservative groups, social media, religion, and politics were entangled in a heated debate. This chapter is going to investigate the twitter thread that fuelled this. In addition, some images are going to be described to substantiate the materialization of this virtual interaction.

On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a local news portal from Barranquilla, Colombia posted this headline in its Twitter account: "Indignation for the gender brochures with impropriety<sup>2</sup> in schools." The most visible on the news was the drawing of, what it seems, two male teenagers showing affection to each other<sup>3</sup>. The post received almost 400 comments and replies. In the subsequent hours, other sources reacted to the note pointing out that the news was fake, and the image belonged to a completely different context [the comic 'In bed with David & Jonathan', by Belgian illustrator Tom Bouden, published in 2006], but the attention had already shifted on the work of the Ministry of Education and its program to teach Sexuality in schools (Marcos 2016). The portal suggested that the Ministry of Education had the intention to distribute these booklets in public schools all over the country. Immediately the Minister denied that the image would be a part of any of their publications. However, she accepted that indeed there was a project to publish and distribute a manual to prevent child abuse, using images to teach children how to differentiate ways of abuse and discrimination. Despite the clarification, public demonstrations against sex education were summoned in different cities (El Tiempo 2016). After the scandal, the project was canceled.

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<sup>2</sup> The original word used was "morbosidad" which in some regions in Colombia has a connotation of something that is going against morality. The English cognates "Morbidity/morbid" are associated with sickness.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2

Figure 1 We reject GI in Schools" - August 2016



Source: Semana.com

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, public demonstrations were held across the country. There, people carried banners with the term Gender Ideology. One of the videos posted that day has a clear title: "March Against the imposition of GI in Colombia." The video was posted on the YouTube channel Espiritualidad Católica<sup>4</sup> [Catholic Spirituality]. There it is possible to see hundreds of people chanting "Christ is present" or yelling "Quit!" to the Minister of Education. Furthermore, people carry banners with pictures of boys and girls with dialogue callouts stating: "I am a girl" or "I am a boy." Other messages include a clear rejection of different kinds of sexual orientation (figure 2). Another message says: "no to GI. No to the manipulation to our children". People even wear shirts with messages like: "In favor of the original design," a reference to a creationist view of sexuality.

Figure 2 March Against GI in Bogota



Source: youtube.com

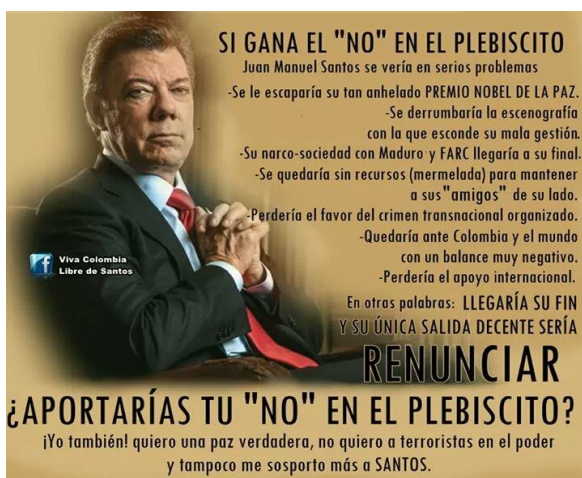
<sup>4</sup> The channel was created in the same year and is dedicated mostly to religious content, it has more than 46.000 subscribers in 2019, some of their videos have reached more than 190.000 views.

Several videos and newspapers show the massive attendance of the protests. It was known that religious groups with explicit knowledge about media management were behind the demonstrations. In some of these videos, it is possible to see several other people recording the event, among them a multi-mediatic organization ascribed to the Catholic Church: *Cristovision*. However, the most prominent actors in these protests were the evangelical churches; they took full advantage of the momentum gained by the scandal and mobilized thousands of people. It was especially dominant the role of the International Charismatic Mission Church, which was colluded with the Right-Wing party *Centro Democrático*, led by the former president Alvaro Uribe Velez (Castellanos 2018: 63-65). In the original Twitter post, Uribe was consistently tagged in the replies of several users calling him to act against the Ministry of Education. The fact that Uribe was an opponent of the Colombian Peace Agreement with the Marxist Guerrilla FARC was key for the twist in the following events.

Right-wing parties used the commotion to promote their own agenda. The Peace Process with the guerrilla FARC and the Gender perspective included in the Peace Agreement was put on the spotlight. It is possible to see how these political actors with a high position of relative power gradually appeared tagged in some replies in the original tweet. Some commentators are concerned about the children: *Ministry of Education is this true? Is this possible with our children?* Writes a woman while tagging the personal and the public accounts of the Attorney General were to call for the attention of the regulatory entities of the State. One man responds to this: *And do you ask @ginaparody? She is the protagonist*. Gina Parody was the Minister of Education, and the comment is related to the fact that she presents herself as a lesbian woman, and the comic had homosexual innuendo. Another replier says *More than enough to demand the resignation of the Minister of Education [...] @JuanManSantos do not mess with the children*. Juan Manuel Santos was the president of the country, and this was a clear call for the resignation of his Minister. Right next to these replies, someone even calls for a more significant presence: The Pope. The reply says: *@ginaparody first excommunicated for @Pontifex\_es*. There is no right to play with the children in this way. Excommunication is the act of being officially excluded from the catholic church, or any other cult and @Pontifex\_es is the official Spanish account of the Pope.

The progressive association between this scandal and the Peace Agreement came with a Facebook image attached to a reply in the same trend, again the Attorney General was tagged. The message says:

Figure 3 “If the ‘NO’ wins the Referendum.”



If the “no” wins in the plebiscite Juan Manuel Santos would be in serious trouble.

- His longed Nobel Peace Prize would run away.
- The scenography with which his bad mandate is hidden would fall.
- His *Narco* association with Maduro and FARC would come to an end.
- He would run out of resources to keep his “friends” by his side.
- He would lose the favour of the transnational organized crime.
- He would be in front of Colombia and the world with a very negative balance.

In other words: he would come to his end and his only way out would be his resignation. Would you contribute with your “no” in the plebiscite?

I also want a real peace; I do not want terrorists in power, and I cannot stand Santos anymore

Source: Twitter

The image originated in a Facebook profile that no longer exists, which belonged to a group called *Colombia free of Santos*. This could be an explanation for the tone of the message. It is a

personal vendetta to the President. During the Referendum Campaign for the Peace Agreement people used Facebook as a political arena with two clear actors: college students aiming for a positive result in the vote, creating Facebook groups with thousands of *likers*, and using them to share memes and severe information to promote the Yes. And on the other side, with an aggressive campaign via WhatsApp message chains and with several Facebook pages, religious groups were actively posting and disseminating aggressive messages against the Peace Agreement. Today most of those groups have disappeared or have shifted their purpose. The repercussions of this campaign are impossible to measure. The clearest outcome was that the booklets were cancelled, the Minister of Education resignation and the right-wing opposition gaining a tool to counterbalance the peace process.

Some authors and journalists linked the failure of the referendum to the aggressive campaign initiated by the right-wing parties using GI to spread homophobic messages (Serrano 2018; Corredor 2019; Corrales 2019, Butler 2019 ). Although it is not possible to measure the role of GI in the elections, the Colombian case shows how these debates can jump out from the internet and have consequences in the political arena: a Twitter post, from a small newspaper in a medium city, created a snowball through tagging, commenting and sharing. In 2016 many people thought that GI was a local invention, but later it was known that it was being used in countries like Brazil and Argentina in a similar manner. That lead to questions: How did this concept appear in the public arena? Whom are the actors leading this outrage? What is the logical edifice holding this backlash? It is a good idea to reconstruct the events that end up here.

## Chapter 4 Gender Ideology in Spain and LATAM

The Colombian case was one more on a long chain of events that present similar patterns. However, it is important to understand the logic behind GI and why it is so effective. This chapter is focused on Spain and LATAM, two regions where GI opposition had been steady.

During the first decade of the 21st Century, GI controversy was almost exclusively set in Spain. Right-wing groups allied with the Catholic Church gathered millions around their opposition to SRHR. In 2006, a religious web-page denounced that the country had adopted GI described as: “a type of ultra-radical feminism, which promotes, not the equality of women but a model of alternative society where socially valuable institutions such as marriage, fatherhood and motherhood, the family, are considered as adversaries of women's equality” (ForumLibertas 2006), the article was opposing to a new legislation on SRHR. They also mention other acts considered as furiously genderist: The law against Gender Violence; the Assisted Fertilization Law; the Homosexual Marriage Law; the Equality Law; and the *automatic favourability* towards the mother in the divorce cases, referring to these laws as totalitarian and “contrary to the interests of the group that claims to defend” (ForumLibertas 2006). These laws are in line with the implementation in Spain of Gender Mainstreaming and the consequent expansion of rights for historically marginalized groups (Kitson 2019). Consequently, Gender became a target for right-wingers:

“The social and ecclesial right has coined a term with which they designate the current social evils and which they call “the dangerous GI” that is permeating current laws. The think-tanks of ultraconservative thinking produce documents, books, and articles with a common argument [...] the traditional family is the source of all happiness and outside it there is only loneliness and social conflict” (Caballero 2009)

This quote shows two things: the coalition of the Catholic Church with the political right-wing, and the presence in Spain of think-tanks concerned with Gender. The article also remarks on the initiative to separate these groups from the name of the church to coat the protest with “a social and not a religious connotation” (Caballero 2009). The outcomes of these efforts can be registered in different conferences where GI was the topic of discussion.

### 4.1 Gender Ideology as a Conspiracy

In April 2016, in a conference titled *Gender Ideology. Objective: demolish Christianity*, Spanish historian Alberto Bárcena gave his interpretation about GI. The 62 minutes video, with almost 200.000 views on YouTube, has this description:

“[GI] there is an international project ratified and planned in different world summits [...] sponsored by the UN, that pursues, under a blanket of progressivism and modernity, to suppress values not only Christians but natural values that undermine the dignity of man and the family [...] GI is [an] Anti-Christian social engineering, accepted by political parties of different sign that obey slogans, and tries to impose a unique thought based on creating a new model of family [...] all skilfully framed in a supposed but pernicious human benefit that it is none other than the reduction of the population at the expense of a diabolic sustainable development, for which degrading and unnatural laws are injected into the governments of the nations” (Bárcena 2016)

his vision is completely religious. He links GI with a masonic conspiracy theory, and with satanism, being both synonyms. Moreover, GI is a social engineering project destined to demolish western society, Christianity, and the family. He traces back the formalization of



this conspiracy in the 1990s when the conferences held by the UN set the conditions for implementing the conspiracy above the States. It is always useful to have in mind that in his logic, there is a will, a project, an intention hovering outside people's desires guiding this plan. He emphasizes this aspect of power outside the state. For him, all these reforms would not pass in local governments. This would be the reason behind the lack of media exposure about these topics in the 1990s. He presents the Catholic Church as the only organization opposing these debates and condemning them to failure. He obviously sees this as a triumph. Following his logic, the US and specifically the Clinton administration proposed Gender in Cairo to prevent population growth. After the first failure, the same ideas were proposed by the European Union [EU] in Beijing, and so on. He presents a wide array of motivations for promoting Gender to prevent population growth; the most controversial could be this:

“The industrial progress of the developed countries will not extend to those of the third world, so the development process is polluting, the demographic factor also acts according to them as a polluting factor [...] is intolerable that the poor, who will be the most in the future, damage the world's ecosystems by trying to develop at any cost” (Bárcena 2016: 00:35:29)

According to Bárcena, this statement was written in the preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1992. To control the accuracy of his claims is almost impossible because he ensures having access to classified papers. Anyway, his theory is packed with assumptions of a global masonic/satanic elite using GI to control the population, preventing poor countries from development, and putting an end to Catholicism. Certainly, he sees himself and the audience as the last bastion fighting this battle, and he demands more action to prevent the advance of this conspiracy.

Similarly, Cesar Vidal, a religious radio host from Spain, defends the idea of a Conspiracy against family and Christianity. In the Ibero-American Congress for Life and Family held in Panama in February 2019. The video has almost 450.000 views and 10.000 likes. Vidal opens his Conference with this sentence: “If somebody thinks that behind GI lies the desire of recognizing the homosexual community rights, I have to praise his absolute innocence and his enormous ingenuity because there is no such thing” (Vidal 2019 00:00:50). He based this statement on the belief that the LGBT+ population is not relevant in numbers. His theory is that GI obeys to supranational powers above the parties: “a globalist agenda for worldwide domination” (Vidal 2019 00:06:30). Broadly, his argument is built this way: George Soros and the Open Society have a list of reliable countries to help. To be in the list countries must be either favorable to implement GI, being favorable to let Muslims in the EU or both. Soon enough, Masonic groups or powerful families appear in his argument linked to a project to impose a supranational government. He says that GI is “perhaps the most dangerous and harmful” tool to achieve this goal (Vidal 2019 00:10:20), and it would be used to reduce the global population in dramatic proportions and turn them docile. He uses the word *Ovejuniización*<sup>5</sup> which is “the elimination of three *obstacles*: cultural identities, natural families and Christianity” (UltimaHora 2017), this is achieved by policies such as sexual identities and safe abortion; the latter is presented as “a mass murder tool to reduce population” (Vidal 2019 00:23:37) and claiming that abortion laws have killed 1.4 billion children in few years. Vidal is the only GI promoter who does not link the phenomenon with homosexuality. For him, all the historically marginalized communities are instrumental for this globalist agenda.

In contrast, Rubén Navarro a Spaniard lobbyist for the Catholic Church in the UN, does not fight against this conspiracy theory. Instead, he redirects the focus against the LGBT+ community and especially the *Yogyakarta Principles*<sup>6</sup>: “They are not binding [and because of

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<sup>5</sup> Literally: to become sheep

<sup>6</sup> The Yogyakarta Principles as “the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity” (2007)

that] they are not important” (Navarro 2018: 00:07:01). His videos are not as popular as the others, but it is relevant due to Navarro's relative position of power. As a delegate of the Holy See in the UN, he has the possibility to influence leaders around the world against what he calls the *LGBT agenda* (Navarro 2018: 00:18:35). He defends the family as the “Natural and fundamental element of society in charge of caring and educating its dependent children” (Navarro 2018: 00:05:02), he sees this status under threat by non-elected people trying to change societies. These non-elected people are the specialists gathered in international conferences promoting SRHR, for Navarro all tantamount to GI. Consequently, topics like same-sex marriage are part of this agenda. He thinks that religion is losing the battle, and he calls his audience for action and resources to defend their beliefs:

“It has happened in the Catholic church and in other churches, that the pastors thought they had everything under control [...] that nobody was going to change the population and they did not realize that the service was only one hour a week and the television is watched it 4 hours a day” (Navarro 2018: 00:28:00)

He perceives that these changes are spread by media. By doing so, he does not reject the idea of conspiratorial powers behind GI, whereas he presents a legalist argument against LGBT+ rights.

## 4.2 Religion and Politics in Spain

Conspiracies aside, the fact that the Spaniard opposition is centered in the Catholic Church is explained by the considerable role the church has played in the long process of state formation. Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Opus Dei, an ultra-conservative branch of the Church, was a powerful ally during Francoism in spheres like gender roles, education (Morcillo 2000 & 2008) Economics (Pilapil 1971), and politics (Brassloff 1998). Morcillo argues that during the Franco regime, women were trained as mothers and carers but also as patriots and consumers. She states that the Church and the Franco regime shared similarities in the way of treating sexuality and gender roles, and both focused the attention on creating two separate educational systems for each sex. However, with the return of Democracy and the ascension of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), the role of the Catholic church was relegated to the opposition, exacerbated by PSOE politics like Sex Education and Contraception in the 1990s (Brassloff 1998: 122). GI in Spain is just a reflection of more significant tensions in the political arena in Spain, that have produced far right-wing parties like VOX.

Navarro, Bárcena, and Vidal represent the Gender opposition in this political tension. Although Navarro's argumentation is legalistic and does not include directly fantastic elements, he is talking on behalf of the Catholic Church, tilting his quarrel towards the religious domain. He draws the opposition associating Gender to undesirable outcomes illustrated by scandalous news. Finally, In the three conferences, the speakers are continuously referring to Agustín Laje, the most visible exponent of GI in LATAM. His arguments present evident contrasts with the Spaniard version.

## 4.3 Agustín Laje: The ‘Secular’ Turn in LATAM

The arguments behind GI can be accommodative enough to gather a broad range of the population. Most of these contents, often contradictory, superficial, religious and pseudo-scientific are present in Agustín Laje [Cordoba, Argentina 1989], an political scientist who wrote a book in 2016 arguing against the new left in LATAM. In 2013 he won a scholarship at the National Defence University to study Counter-Terrorism Tactic in 2013 (Elman 2018),



and that was the beginning of his career. He has published four more books and has participated as a commentator in conservative publications such as the news portal *Infobae*. He is also the founder and director of the *Fundación Centro de Estudios Libre*, a right-wing liberal think-tank that seeks to “be protagonist in the cultural battle that is unfolding in the West, in order to counteract the hegemonic progressive ideology and the empire of the politically correct, and promote the ideals of individual freedom, responsibility and republicanism” ([fundacionlibre.org.ar](http://fundacionlibre.org.ar)). Laje had gained fame in the region as a Gender oppositor. A brief internet search shows him as the only intellectual facing GI, *telling the truth* or the only one *destroying* feminist. On his YouTube Channel, he has almost 300.000 subscribers, with almost 22 million views in total. He has been producing content since 2011. His most-watched video [1.5 million views] is infamously titled “Agustin Laje destroys Malena Pichot...XD.”

He is the continuation of the “Argentinian Neo-conservatives intellectuals,” located in Buenos Aires and Cordoba, and aligned in opposition to SRHR during the 1990s (Moran 2019: 33-34). Moran also identifies the work of Cristina Fernandez de Delgado, also from Cordoba, a long-term neoconservative activist allied with the Catholic Church, questioning the Gender Agenda since the middle 1990s. She and her group of collaborators critiques gender because: “not only questions the naturalness of conventional masculine/feminine roles [but also] heterosexuality and the anatomical difference between men and women by confronting cultural and biological aspects” (Moran 2019: 411), another preferred target for the group was Marxism.

#### 4.3.1 The Intellectual Lineage of GI in Laje

Laje also attacks Marxism. The title of his book gives little room to misinterpretation: *The Black Book of the New Left. GI or cultural subversion*. The cover of the book shows the famous image of Ernesto Guevara wearing red lipstick with a rainbow flag as a background. The book is written with Nicolas Marquez, the mentor of Laje; in an interview, Laje remembers one of their first meeting: “[Marquez] told him that he was on his way to be a militant, but that the Right already had militants: what they needed were intellectuals” (Elman 2018). Both Marquez and Laje, disagree with everything that looks progressive: feminism, LGBT+ movement, and abortion are the preferred topics.

The book is a compilation of their quarrels, and the language makes the book difficult to digest. Marquez spills homophobia in every one of his paragraphs and can reduce the book to a pamphlet of right-wing anger. Laje’s chapters, although concealed under pseudo-intellectual argument, it is packed with prejudices and misinterpretations of different feminists, his whole purpose is to reduce their arguments to mere rhetoric without scientific foundations. The book has been highly promoted in social media in the region, and a free pdf version is readily available. Broadly, the argument of the book is that after the failure of the Soviet Union and Communism, the left shifted from class struggle and redistribution to a greater variety of topics from indigenous communities to LGBT movements, all Marxists:

“The left thus replaced the guerrilla bullets with electoral ballots, supplanted its class discourse with egalitarian aphorisms that filled the vast cultural territory, stopped recruiting “exploited workers” and began to capture tormented or marginal souls in order to program them and launch them into the provocation of conflicts under excuses of noble appearance [...] indigenism, environmentalism, human-law, abolitionism and GI (the latter subdivided by feminism, abortism and cultural homosexuality)” (Marquez and Laje 2016: 9)

This is the foundation of all, the understanding of Marxism as a religion with a unified core and purpose and the reduction of any claim for social justice as part of an authoritarian plan with Stalinist features. The narrative shares commonalities with Jordan Peterson’s Post-Modern Neo-Marxism basically is the same but adapted to LATAM. In Laje’s book cohabit

without a problem all the left politicians of South America, the LGBT movement, scholars and universities, cocaine money produced in Colombia by guerrillas, feminist movements, UN agencies, mass media, Hollywood, the music industry, and Planned Parenthood. They see this as a dictatorship and themselves as the only warriors facing the problem.

In the chapter dedicated to GI, Laje writes a historic reconstruction of feminism [Monique Wittig, Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Green, Eisenstein, Money, Reich, Kinsey, Foucault, and Judith Butler] observing three waves: the enlightened, liberal and suffragist feminism located in US and UK; the Soviet feminism; and the gender feminism, being the latter the radical version. He shows favourability with the first feminism because: “it was mainly characterized by the emphasis placed on equality before the law, vindicating civic and political rights for the female sex” (Laje 2016: 36).

The second wave of feminism is based in Engels and his book on the origin of the family; Laje critiques the idea of collective marriages and matriarchy, for him men have always been the natural leaders due to the power embedded in their “physical strength” (Laje 2016: 39); In his argument, sexual traits has been designed with a purpose, unconnected with any social interaction. Consequently, hierarchy is a given based on the assumption that men are stronger than women and by doing so, he denies oppression and patriarchy. The ideas of Engels lands in the Soviet Union and creates a project for the liberation of women, but the only outcome is sexual liberation and paedophilia. Laje presents various examples of sexual abuse including pedophilia, rape and a variety of aggressions against women to substantiate his claim that Marxism is terrible. He is impervious to the idea that Marxism was implemented in a given society, with a previous vision about how men and women behave and interact. For him the shocking stories he presents are a direct product of a steady ideology that remains the same in every individual and has similar outcomes in every society.

In his third wave of feminism, he distinguishes a succession of intellectuals adding something to GI: starting with Simone de Beauvoir and her quote “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” that for Laje marks the *discursive separation* between biology and culture blended with Marxism: “When feminism assumes a cultural strategy and shakes hands with Marxism in its crusade against capitalist society, the result is one of the various legs that support what we have called Neo-Marxism or cultural Marxism; (Laje 2016: 58-9). Notwithstanding Laje’s adherence to Peterson’s conclusions, in Laje *The West* is irrelevant, that is reasonable given that the term has little meaning in LA societies. In the rest of the chapter he extracts the parts where his authors explain sexuality in cultural terms; he pays especially highlights the parts where Firestone describes the future families after her proposed revolution and shows herself in favor of sexual interaction between adults and children or between relatives. For him, pedophilia is an outcome of GI: “The process of destruction of the family cannot occur from one moment to another, but it entails gradual changes, which even involve pedophilia” (Laje 2016: 59-60). The use of these fearful images of the destruction of moral boundaries is always present in his production: his writing, conferences, and social media interactions are abundant in these contents.

This is a strategy to build a negative connection; he takes a random case that can quickly produce an emotional response like disgust, anger or fear and present it as consequence of GI. These associations are not innocent; neither ideas nor emotions are located outside the individual. Elia’s understanding of learned emotions as “as a product of [societies] shared experiences, a reflection of those experiences rather than something that creates them” (Smith 1998: 79) helps to understand how dangerous these connections are. Indeed, fear can be constructed. In their empirical research Marek and Sah use the example of Albert, a child with a pet rat that learn to fear the animal because every time he wanted to play with it “the experimenter played an unpleasant auditory sound” (2018: 36), additionally, the authors show that fear is a product of extinction, a response triggered by a conditioned stimulus that

follows this pattern: first, the subject learns to fear *something* that is not new; second, this *something* is presented in context, and, third subsequent exposure to this *something* can lead to emotional responses like fear and anxiety (Marek and Sah 2018: 36/7). Extinction is a simile of learned emotion in Elias. Is not the exposure to something new that tackles emotional responses; it is the repetitive association made with the intention to create a malicious link in people's brain. In this case, is not that people do not know or have an opinion about rape or paedophilia; it is the connection made, the learned emotion, of rape and pedophilia with GI, and via association all the groups: radical feminist, LGBT+, Marxism and more. The intention to create a link between gender with fear is clearly observed in Laje's conferences.

### 4.3.2 Conferences

The Conference analyzed here is called "The Danger of False Rights, Deconstructing Radical Feminism, GI and Abortion," and during the time of this research, the 82 minutes YouTube video summed more than 100.000 views [from 135.590 to 279.998] and has a high ratio of definite *likes* [1:19]. The channel hosting the video belongs to a Mexican religious leader; the conference took place in the city of Queretaro, Mexico, in July 2019. The general quality of this video and the fact that while Laje talks, it is possible to watch the presentation he is sharing with his audience, made the video the best option for this analysis. During the conference, Laje looks confident, approachable; he makes people laugh and always remarks about the presence of women and the press. This conference is one of the many he has held in the region in the last years, and the content is similar everywhere.

The conference is a continuation of the book, but he adds examples in a section that he calls *casuistry*. Firstly, he presents what he calls gender feminism to connect it with GI: "Philosophically speaking, the GI depends on what we call gender feminism. There have been many Feminisms in history [...but...] I will go directly to contemporary feminism" (Laje 2019: 00:06:35). He introduces other arguments against radical feminism and Marxism, especially the character of oppression faced by women, he sees heterosexuality as one of the pillars of Capitalism, and for that reason, feminist Marxism aims to destroy both. An almost similar complaint is going to wield against Monique Wittig; her argument regarding the non-existence of sex but instead, just oppression is problematic for Laje: "Wittig wants to destroy man and woman" (Laje 2019: 00:015:00). He sees the connection between the personal and political as dangerous, although he never explains why; however, following his logic of a world without patriarchy and oppression, giving rights to more people would be unnecessary.

In the book he reduces Judith Butler to the affirmation that *sex always was gender* and emphasizes that the alleged consequence of this affirmation is that "breaks the coherence between sex, gender and desire (Laje 2016: 69) immediately gives the example of a man who thinks he is a woman, and who wishes to have sexual relations with minors. For him, Butler's argumentation and pedophilia are connected. In the conference he dedicates wider space to Butler; moreover, he presents her as a summary of what it is GI and expands his argument:

*"Sex was always gendered; it means that when we are talking about sexuality we can, and we must prescind completely off the sex variable. This means ignore the idea that our sexuality has natural conditions of existence [...] because it is gender that tells us about our demanding cultural conditions, and it is gender that will monopolize the explanation of human sexuality"* (Laje 2019: 00:25:00).

He does not show any interest in understanding Butler or her work; he just needs a quote that can cause a reaction in his audience. He is a performer more than an intellectual, and everything around him is created to create an emotional response. He erects himself as the only one explaining gender to the masses, but in the end, he is the trigger that activates

reactionary behavior. After his genealogy, he defines what GI is, and his conclusion is as reactionary as his argumentation:

“We have seen a deconstructive process of our sexual nature [...] how this ideology has been radicalized according to the assumption that our nature has nothing to tell us in terms of our sexuality, that our sexuality can be reduced to a single explanatory variable that is the cultural variable of gender. So [...] what is GI? It is a set of anti-scientific ideas that, with authoritarian political purposes, uproot human nature from our sexuality, reducing it to culture” (Laje 2019: 00:31:26).

Laje positioned Gender as a well-oiled engine able to colonize brains, hearts, and behaviors aiming to impose a dictatorship. The message is simple proof to his point; he presents the *Casuistry* of the conspiratorial strategies followed by this project.

### ***3.3.3 Alleged strategies and counterstrategies***

Although in the context of LA, Laje is the only one whom adventures and explanation of this opposition and tries to validate his claims with an intellectual effort, he cannot avoid falling into the conspiracy field. Although he makes clarifications demarcating his arguments from religion when he starts explaining the *strategies to impose the dictatorship of gender*, he lands into a similar justification. The *strategies* are eight:

- *Modification of thought through language*: he argues that language is a way of manipulation and attacks the inclusive language in the Spanish language if public domains like schools or television.
- *Silencing the opposition*: He refers here to laws against hate speech and openly defends men and organizations that have been repeatedly accused of using hate language in the region as the Argentinian radio announcer Baby Etchecopar; the Peruvian journalist Phillip Butters, and the political campaign *Hazte Oir* [make yourself heard] carrying hate speech against trans community.
- *Trivialization of debates*: He states that campaigns using celebrities are paid by Planned Parenthood and wealthy businessmen and are intended to transform gender into a trend.
- *Spiral of silence*: a political concept used to force people to keep their opinions out of the dominant discourse, especially if these are *controversial*. He argues that this strategy has been used in the heated debate over abortion in Argentina to silence the Pro-Life movement.
- *The artificial creation of Conflicts*: For Laje, debates like the use of the bathroom or sexist attitude in sports are just artificial conflicts where GI is offered as a solution.
- *Developing a progressive agenda*: For Laje, a progressive agenda is solely related to the approval of laws accepting pedophilia, and sex with animals, corpses, or relatives. He argues that with gender: “our sexuality lacks any limit because what you limit in this life is nature is not culture [...] this opens the prospects to a multiplicity of paraphilias and perversions that can be legitimized easily through this ideology.” (Laje 2019 60:01:47)
- *Violating the right of the parents to educate their children*. This is a direct attack on Sexuality Education.
- *Financing*. GI uses money from governments, private sectors like planned parenthood and Open Society, wealthy businessmen like Soros, Buffet, and Gates; and Organizations like Amnesty International and the UN.

The way he illustrates these strategies is triggering: news and cases collected from the internet, most of them real. However, the problem is not whether the images are authentic, is the learned emotion that stimulates. His audience watches how the Argentinian television is changing their language; how public figures or *good people* are losing their jobs for their opinions; how some institutions do not use the words father, mother, man or women anymore to avoid exclusion; how international stars like Scarlett Johansson or Miley Cyrus publicly express themselves in favor of Planned Parenthood; how the green handkerchief, symbol of the pro-abortion campaign in Argentina, appears in a full-page ad in *The New York Times* while at the same time Netflix also shows support to the movement, and thousands of teenagers wear the garment. Images of people being beaten for showing support to the pro-life movement are also shown.

Laje aligns himself to the argument that the LGBT+ population is irrelevant in numbers and establishes that: “GI uses money from our taxes to support the claims of a minority” (Laje 2019: 58:00:26). Logically, he represents this minority deceitfully. At least 15 images replicate the vision of trans women as predatory males raping women in jails or competing in female tournaments. He also uses the juxtaposition of the LGBT+ community with mental disorders. GI is also linked with pedophilia with at least 8 mentions, zoophilia appears once and boys wearing women clothes in schools, twice. All these to make the connection with gender avoiding any other explanation. He insists the veracity of his information and encourages people to research. And is true, most of his *Casuistry* is there; I followed the news of a 69 years old Dutchman wanting to change his age to 48 to gain popularity in Tinder; the man that wants to live as an 8 years old girl; a woman who had sex with his father in the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, the *New York Times* article defending pedophilia, and more, there is not a single mention of gender in the articles whatsoever. Although, he continually posts news and links in his social media accounts reiterating the message.

Having built his controversy, Laje, as the other speakers considered here, calls for action in a scheme aiming to create a stronger resistance. First, he asks to create a political formation convinced that is the way to stop GI. He asks people to read; he says that watching videos on YouTube is good but not enough: “to debate well you need to go back to reading and to study this accurately” (Laje 2019: 01:06:00). Necessary for this paper: he asks for creating a *secular discourse and argument*: “we have to be able to offer arguments, which are potentially accepted by all, regardless of their religious beliefs” (Laje 2019: 01:06:00). He then appeals to build a rebellious character and cultivate and maintain a militant commitment, he wants his audience to impact public opinion and politics, and remain involved, to go to public demonstrations and not stay at home.

#### **4.3.4 Social Media**

Laje is aware of the power of social media. In his Facebook account, he announces his conferences and interviews. With this information, it is possible to observe his popularity, in 2019 he has given at least 50 conferences in Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica, New York, Dominican Republic, Argentina, and Chile; along with dozens of interviews and explanatory videos. He is highly active and uses his profiles to promote his career, but also to reinforce the messages as well as to engage in public debates.

During the conferences, he encourages his audience to use social media by replicating hashtags that he traces fervently, like *#NoALaIdeologiaDeGenero* or *#NoaLaDictaduraDeGenero* that reached the top 10 *trends* on twitter. Besides self-promotion, he repeatedly reposts news against abortion and the dangers of GI as well as images and posts iterating his arguments. For instance, on May 25, 2019 he presents Comprehensive Sexuality Education as a mechanism of social engineering compared with the totalitarian Nazi regime, or with communism, a term that alone produces rejection in large parts of the population as an

outcome of the painful disruption of US in the region (Loaeza 2013). The connections between GI and any kind of event that results shocking for people are part of his preferred publications, the most negative, the better. Additionally, he also attacks specific individuals by exposing their names, so people can attack them directly. This practice is known in Argentina as *Escrache* or *Escrachar*. “Put in evidence whomever the society considers guilty of some crime,” it emerged during the last dictatorship and in recent years has been reappeared in social media, especially in debates about abortion or Gender (Chientaroli 2013). Sometimes the scope of the *Escrache* is considerable, given that some publications reached thousands of comments, shares, and reactions, most of them using the angry face<sup>7</sup>. He also uses this strategy to attack the Pro-Life and Pro-Abortion factions in the heated debate for Abortion in Argentina.

Laje’s message is wide enough to fit in any possible fearful scenario in the LA context. Even though his reconstruction of radical feminist is proper, he conferred these authors with a sole purpose: destroy the order in society. He separates himself from any religious argumentation, whereas he talks in religious forums demanding them to build and maintain a secular discussion. In the last three years he has gathered a fanbase of followers in social media, where he reinforces his messages and exhorts his audience into political action. Most of his audience belongs to evangelical groups that have gained ground in the region. Therefore, this configuration needs a closer examination.

## 4.4 Catholic and Evangelical

LATAM was colonized by the Spaniards in a time where the Crown and the Catholic Church were substantially integrated. This religious view of the world was first imposed and then integrated into different levels not without tensions or confrontation. There is no homogeneity in Catholicism or Christianity along the region. Every country has different levels of assimilation, profoundly interrelated with gender, language, race, class and the construction of the Nation-State (Somma et al. 2017: 119). Arguably, the first evangelical groups started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but the power of the Catholic church controlled its proliferation after the constitutional shift to democracy guaranteeing religious freedom opened the gates to the dramatic growth of Anti-Communist Evangelical groups mostly coming from the US, that by 1990 counted 46 million adherents (Sigmund 1999: 50-380) taking advantage of the crisis of credibility of the Catholic Church has made people moved to other options including *irreligiosity* (Somma et al. 2017: 136/7). Besides, the precarity created by the gradual implementation of neoliberal reforms have contributed the enlarge social injustices in the region and let population with little opportunities to build a life full of meaning (Dux 2016) and religion have been a well-established resort to alleviate social problems:

“former prostitutes, drunkards, and adulterers freely testify to their conversions. Finding a sense of purpose in their new beliefs, many have developed abilities within the church [...] that have improved their daily work and helped them to rise economically. Pentecostal men are found to be sensitive and dedicated to their families [...] their income is spent on children’s education [they] ‘see themselves as more optimistic and hardworking than in the past’ as a result of their conversion. Pentecostals are generally credited with providing a sense of community to the masses migrating from the countryside to the cities” (Sigmund 1999: 60).

While analyzing one of these megachurches in Colombia, Monterroza sheds light on their pillars of belief. Namely: the near and the far world, the latter is constituted by past, and future events where the believer has little or no action; strangely, Communism is expected for

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 3

the church because their occurrence is associated with an event wanted for all: the rapture, when Jesus will come back for the second time (2017: 24). The *near world* is the most appealing, securing an inner and steady conversion: “Salvation itself is their biggest problem [and the] believer has already solved it through his new birth. Other people are about to do it, and the believer must devote part of his efforts to getting these people to reach their new birth” (Monterroza 2017: 28). Once a believer enters the church, her/his salvation is guaranteed, their job is attracting new people to the project; the idea of secured salvation has shown to be robust and binder. For most of these groups, political action is a way to gain more souls; however, these political parties have a biblical version of gender roles that is compatible with GI.

To conclude. The LATAM version of GI shows similarities with the Spaniard’s. In this sense, the belief that is an international project involving influential sectors with various purposes, the use of conferences to disseminate the message, the call for action, and the importance of religious groups are the most relevant coincidences. However, LATAM shows some divergences, the disruption of evangelical groups with appealing promises of conversion, and the explicit Anti-Marxism provided by the proximity with the US. This chapter has illustrated how Spain and LATAM are regions where GI has been spread and promoted to detain legislations and create an explicit rejection against gender. However, this opposition did not emerge there. The focus must shift to the role of the Holy See in the conferences that put gender mainstreaming in the center of public policy.

## Chapter 5 The Emergence of Gender Ideology

GI is a new event in a long chain of disputes between religious institutions and every change that challenges or contradicts its core of beliefs. The socially constructed idea of Gender is something that is impossible to accept by different actors in this configuration. Consequently, the International Conferences convened by UN in 1990s and/or the opposition carried out by the Catholic Church have been considered as the origin of this opposition (Kuhar and Patternote 2017; Mena-Lopez and Ramirez 2018; Dos Santos 2018; Bernabé et al. 2018 Corredor 2019; Butler 2019). This chapter focused on those discussions and proposed a long-term perspective.

### 5.1 Gender Mainstreaming

The appearance of GI is paralleled with the advances made by Gender Scholars and activists during the 1990s and the Gender Mainstreaming approach aiming to achieve “gender equality and the empowerment of women” (Krook and True 2005: 111). Aware of the possibility to reach a critical point of no return, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICDP) held in Cairo in 1994 reunited more than 170 countries and was the result of previous conferences such as: the Summit for Children [New York 1990]; Environment and Development [Rio de Janeiro 1992]; Nutrition [Rome in 1992]; Human Rights [Vienna 1993]; Indigenous People, 1993; Sustainable Development [US 1994]; and The International Year of the Family, 1994 (UNFPA 1994: 6-7). It is true that one of the main concerns before the Conference was the rising of the global population; the preamble of the UN report is packed with current figures and projections on the matter. The fourth principle of the Report also states: “Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development related programs” (UNFPA 1994: 15). This was one of the main foundations of the conference and a logic principle to adopt given that some previous conferences were also focused on gender issues. For instance, Chapters VII are focused on SRHR and has a specific component on Human sexuality and gender relations, and VIII are focused on Health, Morbidity, and Mortality and despite that rejects the possibility of abortion as birth control, calls for actions against unsafe abortion (UNFPA 1994). These three aspects of the conference: Control of Population, Gender, and abortion, were enough to demonize the purpose of the Conference with consequences that are present in today's right-wing arguments.

During the conference, several reservations were made by the delegates; for instance, El Salvador said:

“[LATAM] countries are signatories to the American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San Jose). Article 4 thereof states quite clearly that life must be protected from the moment of conception. In addition, because our countries are mainly Christian, we consider that life is given by the Creator and cannot be taken unless there is a reason which justifies it being extinguished. [...]. As far as the family is concerned, although we are quite clear about what is contained in the document, we would like to express specific reservations on how the term “various forms of family” is going to be interpreted, because the union is between man and woman” (UNFPA 1994: 133/34)

Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Paraguay, Argentina, and Peru expressed similar doubts; the Dominican Republic cited the Holy See in its own reservation. The Holy See



itself declared an extended reservation against aspects they cannot accept: abortion, family planning, the concept of individual, the terms sexual health and sexual rights, and reproductive health, therefore they did not ratify chapter VII and VIII because: “despite the many positive aspects [...] the text that has been presented to us has many broader implications”, the members of the Holy See demanded for clarity to eliminate any doubt about subjects they considered against religion, however, they did not reject the whole Proposal:

“This does not exclude the fact that the Holy See supports a concept of reproductive health as a holistic concept for the promotion of the health of men and women and will continue to work, along with others, towards the evolution of a more precise definition of this and other terms” (UNFPA 1994: 142)

Mainly, in the Conference, the tensions were focused on topics related to reproduction, no sexual diversity (Correa & Jolly 2008: 26). Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out the historical aversion in the Christian world to any kind of sexual expression located away from heterosexuality. The tepid winks of openness of Pope Francis are still out of the table in the 1990s. Moreover, this long-term hostility will emerge eventually, and it is a cornerstone to understand GI in LATAM. Back to the Conference, it is also relevant to say that LATAM countries were not the only ones expressing reservations. However, focusing on other regions would deviate the argumentation.

Another Conference that was controversial was Beijing 1995. There, women and gender were the centres, and the goals were: “equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity” (UNFPA 2014: Cp3). One of the most important outcomes of this Conference was Gender Mainstreaming. This action emerges from the need of “accelerate the process that formally began in 1975, which was proclaimed International Women’s Year by the UN General Assembly”, the idea was to introduce gender perspectives in “the established national machinery in all spheres of society” (UNFPA 2014: Cp25). Notably, the use of the language in these documents has been fertile soil for conspiracy theories, regardless that the Platform for Action produced by this conference was signed by 189 states.

Coincidentally enough, 1994 was the ‘year of the family’ for the Catholic church. In his Letter to the Families the Pope offers his definition of individual and gender:

“Man is created ‘from the very beginning’ as male and female: the life of all humanity — whether of small communities or of society as a whole—is marked by this primordial duality. From it, there derive the ‘masculinity’ and the ‘femininity’ of individuals, just as from it every community draws its own unique richness in the mutual fulfillment of persons. This is what seems to be meant by the words of the Book of Genesis: ‘Male and female he created them’” (John Paul II 1994: §6)

The Pope recognizes the influence of society in the behavior of women and men, but at the bottom lies the idea of difference attached to meaning: the individual must be either masculine if it is man or feminine if it is woman in order to accomplish what the society and the religion expect from them. He emphasizes the importance of family to preserve traditions: “They share their educational mission with other individuals or institutions, such as the Church and the State. But the mission of education must always be carried out in accordance with a proper application of the principle of subsidiarity” (John Paul II 1994: §16); this subsidiarity is the consent of the parents. This is not the first time that the Church shows concern about the role of education. A long letter was written by Pope Paul VI in the convulse 1960s details:

A change in attitudes and in human structures frequently calls accepted values into question, especially among young people, who have grown impatient on more than one occasion, and indeed become rebels in their distress. Aware of their own influence in the life of society, they want a part in it sooner. This frequently causes parents and educators to experience greater

difficulties day by day in discharging their tasks. The institutions, laws, and modes of thinking and feeling as handed down from previous generations do not always seem to be well adapted to the contemporary state of affairs; hence arises an upheaval in the manner and even the norms of behavior (Paul VI 1965: § 7)

The letter has profound and benevolent observations about science, change in society and mentality, the loss of faith, etc. It is a detached understanding of the world whereas it reflects the anxieties about the role of religion in this changing scenario; it is a statement of principles:

“human culture must evolve today in such a way that it can both develop the whole human person and aid man in those duties to whose fulfilment all are called, especially Christians fraternally united in one human family” (Paul VI 1965: §56)

This intellectual effort of the Vatican is not new. Neither it is their concern for education as a transformation tool or the increasing apathy for religion in some societies. There are several letters to the Bishops analyzing these issues, and it shows that the Catholic Church measures the scope of its actions in centuries; they have accumulated enough knowledge and have invested efforts in understanding humanity, and they plan accordingly. Consequently, they patrol any educational reform that challenges their doctrine as a threat to the Church.

They know that initiatives like SRHR, first represents a loss in another field they used to possess, and second, they already know the outcomes of a secular education [being Gender one of them] and fight back to maintain their position as moral guides, preventing at the same time future challenges and they use their position of power. The Vatican has been a Non-member Observer State in the UN since 1965. In this role they have tried to stop or change any initiative that contravenes their belief system and uses their influence to impose it over delegations from different LATAM countries (Chong and Troy 2011: 343/44). In fact, after Beijing questions were raised about the intrusive role of the Holy See regarding if they were acting as a religious group or as a state (Abdullah 1996: 1835/36), but the topic is beyond the scope of this research. Other religious groups were not apathetic in the gender debate, but the scope of their responses was less notorious.

### 5.1.1 Academic Opposition

Also, in the 1990s decade, some authors reflected their concerns with Gender in American Academia. One book called *‘Who stole feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women’*, published in 1994 by Christina Marie Hoff Sommers critiques the so-called *gender feminism*. The author identifies a bifurcation in feminism: equity feminism and gender feminism. Being the latter a produced of US Academia and is the object of her ferocious criticism. It is not possible to find the book, but the critics shed some light on the content and main argumentation. Hoff Sommers tries to critic the radical fraction of feminism without following the canon of academic objectivity (Guczalska 2016: 391). How? She based her allegation against Gender Feminism in a sum of anecdotal situations aiming to illustrate certain *disturbing tendencies* in the American Feminist movement. For Hoff Sommers equity feminism shares the liberal aims for equal rights that the US claims be the center of its foundation: “she assumes that the fundamental feminist postulates are perfectly achievable within the society founded on liberal tradition and principles” (Guczalska 2016: 391/2). Hoff Sommers dedicates few pages to elaborate on what is *equity feminism*, for her is enough to say that all the central claims of feminism have been solved in her country. Consequently, *Gender Feminism* is a corrupted movement “dominated by loud and aggressive minority which is incorrectly considered an authentic and lawful representative of women’s issues” (Guczalska 2016: 393). Her conclusion is that leftist feminist stole feminism and that patriarchy, oppression or domination are none-existent in the American society.

Hoff Sommers was not alone. René Denfeld in 1995 writes *The New Victorians* explaining why young women do not identify themselves as feminists; she also describes two feminisms: one that does not *believe* in inequality and other that have “become bogged down in an extremist moral and spiritual crusade that has little to do with women’s lives” (Denfeld in Kinahan 2001: 32). Denfeld observes that expressions of culture like magazines present feminism that is easy to digest and closer to her society. The other is overcomplicated and negative. The third author is Katie Roiphe, who in 1993 published a book denouncing how “feminism [...] has contributed to [create a] climate of fear and victimization” the book is called *The morning after sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus*, where she states that radical feminism creates the ‘perception of women as victimized, powerless, and in need of protection’, she argues that “feminism should be helping women to become sexually assertive, self-possessed, and responsible; instead, it is fostering a climate in which women learn to be afraid” (Kinahan 2001: 33). For Kinahan, the reaction is related to the fact that these three authors attribute radicalism to “the increasing influence of queer theory, radical lesbians, and feminists of color” (Kinahan 2001: 31). Briefly, the American opposition to Gender is the same that Laje reproduces in his conferences. This can be connected to his training in Counterterrorism, but this has been impossible to demonstrate

The previous paragraphs help to understand three things: the decade of 1990 was decisive in the creation of GI, especially for the transnational character of the Conferences and their results; second, religious groups were not the only actors in this tension, states, and American liberal-conservative academics had something to say about gender. Thirdly, there were visible changes in the way to understand sexuality and gender; this can be attributed to the gradual entry of previously marginalized groups voices in the debate (Correa & Jolly 2008), advances in research and other movements consolidating the elements for change and by doing so, giving elements for future confrontations to the visions of the world they were challenging. An extra element helpful in this argument is the use of the language: the religious parameters in the understanding sex and behaviour; the use of anecdotal situations to build opposition; the negation of any kind of conflict, the heterosexual point of view in the whole configuration and the confluence of this elements the American conservative opposition.

## 5.2 Gender as an *Ideology*

In the new century, the gradual implementation of Gender Mainstreaming unifies the opposition around Gender and triggers further mythology around the concept. It has been shown so far how Spain used GI to attack proposed laws. However, they were replicating the words of the Holy See. The word ideology appears in a pejorative way referring to Gender under John Paul II. In a short letter sent to the Pontifical Council for the Family in 2001, after calling attention to certain *pieces of legislation attacking the institution of family*, he says:

“The proliferation of international forums on misleading concepts concerning sexuality and the dignity and mission of the woman that underlie specific ideologies on “gender” are also a cause of concern [...] among the dangerous designs to undo the family, there is also the attempt to deny human dignity to the embryo before it has become implanted in the mother’s womb, and attacks on its existence with a variety of methods” (John Paul II 2001 § 3)

For the Church, the legislation threatening the family are the agreements signed by the States in the 1990s International Forums, and this letter is also unequivocal about his uneasiness over issues like abortion or contraception. These are not just words written by an old conservative man isolated from society. There is a deep understanding of society in every paragraph; moreover, these messages are shared in the homilies around the Catholic and Christian world, completing a circle where the beginning and the end of the message is interconnected.

Pope Benedict XVI provided no change in the matter. On the contrary, he adds a series of alleged strategies framed as *new approaches*. He rejects subordination because it creates “antagonism between men and women” (Ratzinger 2004 § 2) For him, the pursuit of power by women are problematic and harmful for the family:

“In order to avoid the domination of one sex or the other, their differences tend to be denied, viewed as mere effects of historical and cultural conditioning. In this perspective, physical difference, termed sex, is minimized, while the purely cultural element, termed gender, is emphasized to the maximum and held to be primary [...] This theory of the human person, intended to promote prospects for equality of women through liberation from biological determinism, has [inspired] ideologies which [...] call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent” (Ratzinger 2004 § 3)

Indeed, the Pope makes the link between Gender, Ideology, and homosexuality, whereas he rejects Gender as a construct and its alleged consequences. The substantiation of his arguments is Biblical, and the rest of the Letter is dedicated to that. Previously, John Paul II had expressed his concern about abortion and the sanctity of the family, but this letter expanded the quarrel to an old enemy of tradition: homosexuality. The similarities with right-wing arguments are undeniable.

### 5.2.1 Old Strategies

Even though the American churches were not directly implicated in the emergence of GI, all their strategies to attack sexual diversity had been replicated in this configuration. In a book published in 1998, Didi Herman explores how the apocalyptic vision of the world in the Christian Right-Wing built an imaginary Gay Agenda. Herman located this alleged agenda in the 1990s when HIV campaigns targeted the LGBT+ community. She traces back its origins in the 1950s and 1960s when Christian groups disseminate the idea that Homosexuality was on the rise, and they attribute this phenomenon to Communism and its project to destroy the nation (Herman 1998: 30). Moreover, constant representation of homosexuality as rape and paedophilia were mixed with education, atheism, and the devil's work:

“Another writer, in a two-part series, accused the postmodern mind, typified by an avowal of moral relativism, of wreaking havoc on American culture, [...] in 1962, Charles Lowry found communism's bedfellows in the ‘widening gulf between our intellectuals and the great body of the American people’, ‘an unconscious secularism’, and a ‘spreading moral decline’, linked with progressivism in education, the removal of religion from life, and the thrust of materialism and the sensate in American culture generally” (Herman 1998: 32)

The pressure was on controlling education and bringing Christ to the schools as the only solution to the homosexual menace. These strategies were replicated again in the 1990s, accusing the LGBT+ community of promoting homosexuality, disease, and perversion even in the Army. Evangelicals usually used the term “Cultural War” to describe how LGBT+ groups wanted to impose their apocalyptic agenda (Herman 1998: 55). Going back much further would make emerge right-wing strategies connecting anticommunism with race, but that would be a deviation in this research.

## Chapter 6 Analysis and Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

This paper has shown how the conditions of possibility for the emergence of GI in LATAM can be explained as a division between two logics. For one side, constructionists define sexuality as something ductile and affected by culture; on the other side, the essentialist understanding of sexuality relies on rigid categories under a mask of scientific truth; however, what lies beneath is a biblical logic. The last group cannot accept that a constructionist version has been promoted by UN agencies; they see this as an attack to them and their vision of the world. This has been illustrated with the role of the Holy See in the UN Conferences; the Vatican Letters to its Bishops; and with the evangelical opposition using strategies directed to link aspects of human sexuality with crime, disease, and social ills. These actors appeared in the region, engaged in politics, and using their influence to spread their messages and mobilizing people.

In LATAM, GI messages have been shared on social media and conferences available on YouTube. These messages are plastic, capable of accommodating to learned emotions in a given society: GI exacerbates existent anxieties, linking them with a conspirative notion of gender as an imposition. The Colombian case shows how homophobia was the trigger to oppose a Sexuality Education proposal. Likewise, other contested fields like abortion, radical feminism and LGBT+ rights are maliciously blended with sickness or global conspiracies to create apocalyptic scenarios in peoples' minds. Furthermore, the connection between GI with sexual crimes like pedophilia and rape, have proven to be effective mobilizing people. The influence of the US in the region have been also part of this research. The flourishing expansion of Evangelical groups, most of them from the US have imprinted the GI debate with anti-Communism and anti-Marxism, one of the preferred enemies in the American vision of the world.

GI is spread by speakers introducing themselves as secular, separated from biblical interpretations of sexuality, and based on science and reason. They, usually men, are open to talk in every forum, are active in social media, and belong to academia or right-wing think-tanks. These people use a familiar and humorous language to explain complex topics like the origin and evolution of Gender while urging their audiences to be involved in political opposition, picturing themselves as outsiders fighting against a well-established plan.

GI promoters explained how gender was meant to subvert morality from the very beginning. There is a critical remark here, all the authors cited by right-wingers wrote radical manifestos against the status quo, consequently, GI promoters pick the most exacerbating quotes found in the radical branches of feminism and social theory to elaborate a coherent argument presenting gender as the product of deviants and delusional authors; they reduce Gender to this lineage. Likewise, the heinous news about sexual predators, pedophilia and more, are accurate, these are real articles based on real-life cases. The problem is not the lack of authenticity; it is the insidious connection with gender that is problematic.

### 6.2 Elias and Development

#### Scope

Social configurations where the certainties about human nature are defied are central in Elias (Weiler 2008: 808). That was the primary concern in this paper: despite the claim of being a scientific truth, GI opposition uses arguments with high levels of fantasy; yet they obtain successful results. This raises questions about our own way of thinking and living as humans.

In that sense, Development Studies should pay more attention to mentality and emotionality. As is deeply explain by Elias, accumulative social knowledge is interdependent with individual and social changes. These transformations often challenge emotional aspects of humanity that organize the lives of millions, like tradition or gender roles. Therefore, change, wanted or not, and their logical emotional responses should be understood.

There is not an evil plan behind Gender Mainstreaming, but the religious oppositions see it as a threat to tradition. Gender opens the gates to a more comprehensive understanding of individuality and has been developed and complexed by multiple actors everywhere in an accumulative process. Simultaneously, the biologist/natural interpretation of sexuality, also a product of Modernity and “[gaining] sophistication, depth and public appeal, repositing sex as a unified domain of human experience” (Correa and Jolly 2008: 23) has adopted fantasy as a promoter of fear. Elias, understanding humanity as a process and not as a collection of impositions, offer the tools for a nuanced interpretation of this phenomenon.

#### Limitations

There are several aspects of this paper that deserve a separate inquiry. For instance, religious people have just been sketched as seeking meaning through conversion; further research with them would offer a more comprehensive vision. Questions about the effectiveness of these messages are also open: To what extent do people holding banners with messages against GI believe that gender is an ideology? How critical are they regarding the information they receive? There are also intriguing topics that appeared, like the confluence of similar phenomena in 2016: right-wing populism, post-truth, fake news, and Cambridge Analytica, to name a few. There are commonalities demanding further analyses.

Additionally, strategies to respond to GI were consciously left out of this research: how are different collectives targeted by right-wingers responding to the backlash? What kind of strategies is being used to fight back this outrageous campaign? During this research I found hundreds of videos from The Dominican Republic, Argentina, Colombia, Spain, the US, and more, made by individuals, groups, and government offices, interested in clarifying, educate, exemplify and respond to elements of GI. These questions are beyond the scope provided by Elias.

### 6.3 Final Remarks

In this research I wanted to illustrate how social phenomena are not as simple as a confrontation between sides; framing the other as just undesirable or erroneous is a sterile exercise. however, assuming right-wing arguments as worthwhile knowledge is also not tantamount to sympathize with them. Understanding their ideas is necessary if we want to confront them; outstandingly when they are investing efforts to build an intellectual fort. Religion, in general, could do better, they can be kinder with other human beings; but most religious groups have chosen to exclude and demonize the difference. I am aware that there is not a unified religious front, but this research was focused on one sector of them.

I consciously decided to research GI arguments and logic because I thought that it is necessary to locate this opposition in a historical context. It was not a pleasant experience; I was constantly confronted by egregious misinterpretations in elements that are pivotal in the structure of my personality. During this process, I realized that we need more tools for explaining the human experience: neither religion nor gender encompasses the multiple complexities found in this research. Several aspects scape the analysis when the researcher is clustered in fixated polarities, mainly, when the topic under question is oneself.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: On the critiques of Elias

One of the most flagrant misconceptions of Elias are the charges of ethnocentrism and racism; however, those arguments have been debunked by multiple authors in the last decades (Weiler 2008 and 2012; Kilminster 2008, 2011; Loyal and Quilley 2005, 2008 and 2011; Wouters 2019; and especially Mennell 1989, 2000, 2008 and 2011). A telling example is this: “The charge of racism is patently absurd. The whole tenor of *The Civilizing Process* is obviously anti-racist. In the 1930s, there were many people who were only too eager to interpret differences in manners, customs, mentality, personality structure, and capabilities as proof of the inherent, biologically based, racial superiority of white, Western people. Elias’s book demonstrated precisely that these differences were not in any sense inherent; on the contrary, they were the outcome of social processes capable of molding [...] any human being caught up in them” (Mennell 1989: 230). About ethnocentrism the counter-argument is twofold. First, the unfinished dichotomic separation between native and sociological concepts, or native and scientific perspectives; to overcome this dichotomy, Elias proposes a more detached and less involved perspective avoiding falling into any polarity (Mennell 1989: 231). The second critique is the accusation that Elias uses ‘Civilization’ to legitimize dominance to the powerful, again Mennell: “far from being naïve about these things [Elias] actually begins *The Civilizing Process* by devoting the first forty-eight pages to showing how the very notion of civilization originated in a polemical context in Western European society, and how the concept has been used to legitimize the dominance first of certain groups in European states and then, increasingly, of European society as a whole vis-a-vis non-European and especially the so-called primitive societies” (Mennell 1989: 232). A final remark, evidently there is a criticism of Western society in the *Civilization Process*, why would Elias want to praise a society that was the most significant cause of his complete uprooting?

Appendix 2: "Indignation for the gender brochures with impropriety in schools."



[Costanoticias.com](http://Costanoticias.com)

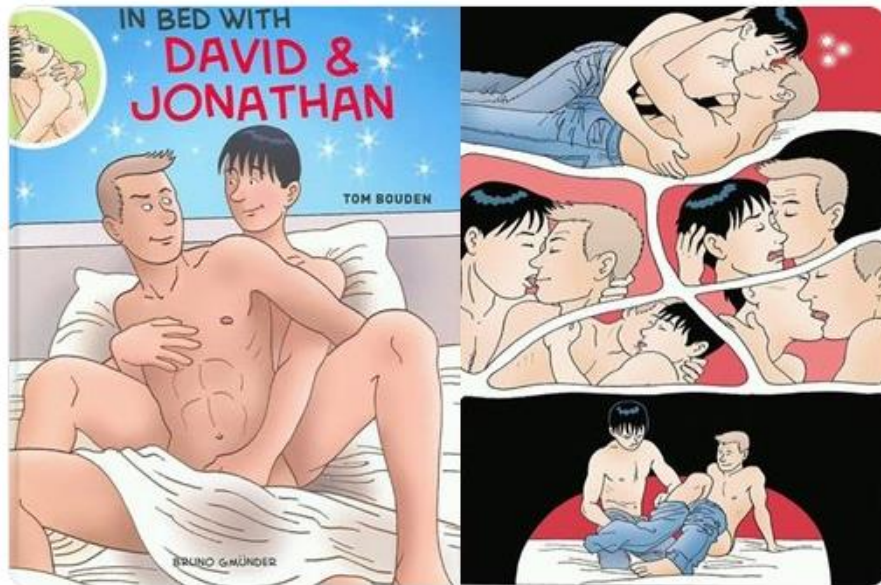
@CostaNoticiasTV

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Indignación por las cartillas de género con morbosidad en los colegios

[costanoticias.com/indignacion-po](http://costanoticias.com/indignacion-po) ...

@PGN\_COL @A\_OrdonezM



12:12 PM - 4 Aug 2016

331 Retweets 96 Likes

Claudia, Luz Marina Esper, jorge luis rosales and 7 others

72 331 96

Source: [twitter.com/CostaNoticiasTV](https://twitter.com/CostaNoticiasTV)



#### Appendix 1 *Escrache* in Laje's Facebook profile



*"I filled my students with little brilliance, and the boy that refused saying 'that is for girls' I put the triple. I taught him neither the games nor nothing has gender. He went to home happy and me too"*

Source: Facebook/AgustinLajeArrigoni

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