A CULTURAL
APPROACH TO GENDER ISSUES

UN ENFOQUE CULTURAL A LAS CUESTIONES DE GÉNERO

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ABSTRACT

In the gender analysis of culture, in the cultural structure of gender, it is very important to study the relationship between male and female thinking styles, and masculine and feminine paradigms of understanding. In patriarchal societies, for a long time, an idea has been formed that woman cannot think logically, this privilege was given to a man. However, research already shows results against this idea. In a society dominated by male logic, a woman is socialized by accepting the rules of male thinking, including adopting gender roles and stereotypes. In such a situation, or rather, the worldview formed during the period when masculinist logic prevails, determines gender asymmetry. While expectations about sex can vary greatly between cultures, some of its characteristics are common to many cultures. Today, there is an ongoing debate about whether gender roles and types are biologically determined or the result of sociocultural constructs. Thus, gender studies, which is a multidisciplinary field of science, studies the topics it studies at the intersection of several sciences (sociology, philosophy, pedagogy, psychology, political sciences, history, cultural studies, etc.). In this research, basic gender concepts and stereotypes are addressed in the socio-cultural aspect, and the context of Azerbaijan is highlighted.

Keywords: Gender, Gender inequality, Cultural feminism, Masculinity.

RESUMEN

En el análisis de género de la cultura, en la estructura cultural del género, es muy importante estudiar la relación entre los estilos de pensamiento por sexo y los paradigmas de comprensión masculinos y femeninos. En las sociedades patriarcales, durante mucho tiempo se ha formado la idea de que las mujeres no tienen la capacidad de pensar con lógica, este privilegio le fue otorgado al hombre. Sin embargo, las investigaciones ya muestran resultados en contra de esta idea. En una sociedad dominada por la lógica masculina, la mujer se socializa aceptando las reglas del pensamiento masculino, incluida la adopción de roles y estereotipos de género. En tal situación, o, mejor dicho, la cosmovisión formada durante el período en que prevalece la lógica masculinista, determina la asimetría de género. Si bien las expectativas sobre el sexo pueden variar mucho entre culturas, algunas de sus características son comunes a muchas culturas. Hoy en día existe un debate en curso sobre si los roles y tipos de género están determinados biológicamente o son el resultado de constructos socioculturales. Así, los estudios de género, que son un campo multidisciplinario de la ciencia, estudian los temas que estudian en la intersección de varias ciencias (sociología, filosofía, pedagogía, psicología, ciencias políticas, historia, estudios culturales, etc.). En esta investigación se abordan conceptos y estereotipos básicos de género en el aspecto sociocultural y se destaca el contexto de Azerbaiyán.

Palabras claves: Género, Desigualdad de género, Feminismo cultural, Masculinidad.

UNIVERSIDAD Y SOCIEDAD | Have Scientific of the University of Cienfuegos | ISSN: 2218-3620   Volume 16 | Number 4 | July-August, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The word "gender" was first used by Ann Oakley to describe the biological and social characteristics of women and men. According to Ann Oakley, people are born female and male, learn to grow up as girls and boys, and mature as women and men. They are instilled with gender-appropriate behavior, beliefs, attitudes, roles, activities, and how to treat others. Inculcated behaviors create gender identity and define gender roles (Nanda, 1972). How are stereotypes formed for women and men? How do they change over time and what are the factors that drive them to change? According to feminists, the difference between "sex" and "gender" is as follows: if sex is understood as a biological category of femininity and masculinity, then gender is a socio-cultural category and includes ideas about femininity and masculinity. Gender includes the characteristics of an individual that play their social role depending on their femininity and masculinity (Martin, 2023). For example, a woman is responsible for care and upbringing within the family, while a man is more active in the social sphere. Therefore, both sexes work in fields of work according to their characteristics; this leads to the belief that women are considered more adequate as medical workers and men as engineers. These characteristics are associated with masculinity and femininity and vary according to different societies and historical periods (Aghayeva, 2018, p. 7).

Gender becomes a social and cultural construct through a very complex process. An individual adopts their gender stereotypes in the process of socialization, that is, they acquire either feminine or masculine thinking in the course of social development as a person. The construction of femininity and masculinity plays an important role in the formation of various institutions, especially the family. Understanding the relationship of gender to society leads to the reflection of existing power relations between women and men (Halim et al., 2018). Children perform gender roles according to the demands of society and times. For example, a little girl is recommended to play with a doll, and a slightly older girl is recommended to play games related to housework. In doing so, they learn their own codes of conduct and live according to the norms of conduct. According to the Western construction of the concept of gender, men have always been dominant, and women have always been in a subordinate status. By this, they mean that men have always and everywhere been superior to women, that the work performed by men has been more important or more valuable. It is not at all surprising, since these thoughts are mainly based on the theories presented by male researchers, which is the result of their viewing all societies through the prism of their own stereotyped cultural values. Based on male dominance, they ignored the role of women or referred to male information.

Therefore, gender includes the situation formed within the framework of social relations between the sexes. These relations determine the image and place of a specific woman and man in society. However, the system of relations attributed to gender varies according to geography, ethnic identity, family, and national moral values. As a result of these relations, there are different approaches to the equality of men and women in society (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). At the same time, gender relations have different forms depending on the economic and cultural context. It should be noted that the development of the gender system in society is characterized by the process of socio-cultural construction of its constituent elements, which intersect and interact at any time. The main role in the cultural construction of gender is played by the system of socialization, during which people learn gender norms, roles, and stereotypes (Costa et al., 2001; Sreen et al., 2018).

At this time, certain ideas about what "masculinity" and "femininity" are formed. These ideas are confirmed at all levels and in all areas of social existence and are regularly updated in the course of social practice. To understand the main points of the cultural formation of gender, the cultural approach to the study of this phenomenon is very important. The field of application of the cultural approach to gender research is quite wide and multifaceted (Giuliano, 2020; Guiso et al., 2008; Kinias & Kim, 2012). Taking this into account, this work discussed the general problems, processes, and concepts that allow us to understand the main essence of the cultural construction of gender, but also the current state of gender relations in Azerbaijani society is reviewed from a historical and cultural aspect.

DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning of the 20th century, research conducted in the field of cultural anthropology and sociology presented the analysis of gender-social relations in society from a new perspective. American anthropologist Margaret Mead shows in her research that there are alternative and different representations of gender roles in society in the history of civilization. All these gender obligations, which are "slipped" into the sexes today, have nothing to do with human nature. Margaret Mead observed the lifestyles of pre-industrial tribes in South American and African societies and concluded that the historical justification of the naturalness of today's division of gender roles is nothing more than a fabrication of patriarchal societies. As Margaret Mead observes, the gendered division of

labor has nothing to do with human nature, for even today in some tribes living similar to the lifestyles of our great ancestors, there is no male work, female work, or male dominance, but both in the performance of all work. gender participates and does what they want. One is neither rewarded nor punished for acting according to one's gender.

In every society, there is a division of human activity according to the gender factor, but a job that is considered a man's job in one society can be considered a woman's job in another society. This can vary from culture to culture. For example, in one society it is considered normal for a woman to be engaged in construction work, while in another it is exclusively a man's job. In many societies, cooking is usually left to women, but there are also societies where it is mostly the responsibility of men. According to some researchers, activities that require physical violence are still monopolized by men in most countries. In some countries, including Israel, women are also recruited into military service. It is known that women can be as aggressive as men in war conditions (Estioko-Griffin, 1987; Lepowsky, 1994, p. 202).

Note that sexual characteristics are biological and do not change over time and in society. Gender characteristics are formed by the influence of social relations, change over time, and may have different characteristics in different societies. Gender perceptions do not only change over time and space. In the same society, people's ideas about the characteristics of "femininity" and "masculinity" differ depending on a person's age, social position, ethnic group, religion, family status, and other factors.

Gender stereotypes and discrimination

Gender stereotypes are concepts, and ideas that play an important role in the life of all humanity, divided into two parts, women and men, and demonstrate their behavior and thoughts, how they should behave in society. Stereotypes can be both positive and negative, but this information is unlikely to accurately represent the gender in question. Gender is not only in our everyday life, it has existed and been with us for centuries in religion, philosophy, and literary works. Let's take a look at examples from works from ancient times to the present day: "A woman is more tender-hearted than a man and cannot control her tears... But men can help in a dangerous situation and are more courageous than women." This was also the case in Aristotle's time (Aghayeva, 2018).

The most widespread idea about the stereotypical role of a woman among people is the idiom about her getting married. A woman always prioritizes the interests of her family over her interests. A woman is full of love, soft-hearted,

caring, attentive, sympathetic, and empathetic. The role of the man is different because he is the provider of the family. He should also be rational, ambitious, competitive, independent, aggressive, courageous, efficient, career-oriented, and pragmatic. Discrimination based on gender is called gender discrimination. In other words, "treating any person or group unfairly is discrimination." Sometimes the cause of this injustice can be age, gender, religion, or race" (Kele, 1980, p. 22). The inequality observed in the treatment of girls in society leads to hierarchy at all levels. Such biases are observed not only at home within the family but also in public institutions and all areas of the social structure. This means that such biases are based on physical, economic, cultural, and psychological factors. These differences are not natural; they are socially constructed differences in a patriarchal society, which makes them practical and accepted as normal by society. This discrimination has become a part of women's lives. It starts from the first day of pregnancy, and from the moment the sex of the child is known. This life-long discrimination is carried out easily and openly in several situations (Lordo lu & Özkaplan, 2003, p. 223).

Gender-based discrimination can manifest itself in different ways in different situations, but its root is based on ideology, that is, people's thoughts. Women's economic dependence on men creates the opportunity for men to abuse women. In some places, cultural factors support and even force women to control men. Perhaps it is implemented differently in urban and rural areas, but in most cases, it is similar everywhere (Agayeva, 2014).

Mixed cultural genders.

Contrary to the traditional gender paradigm, some societies even have three or four genders. An example of this is the Berdache (eng. Berdache) who lived in Asia, south of the Pacific coast, and North America. Berdaches are individuals who acquire the gender behavior of the opposite sex. Even though there are berdaches among women, unfortunately, the most basic studies have been conducted with berdaches among men. Berdaches live as the opposite sex lives, work as they work, and dress as they dress. However, they do the jobs that both sexes do. Social anthropologist Will Roscoe has done extensive research on the Zuni (an ethnic group in America). According to him, although these people are of mixed gender, they are neither transvestites nor transsexuals, as some researchers believe. Their clothes are according to the rituals of these tribes. According to Zuni philosophy, one's status as male, female, or berdache is a product of one's culture, the result of socialization, gender roles, and the adaptation of one or more gender practices. All these are desirable for the Zuni (Roscoe, 1991).

The Mohave, an indigenous people of America, allowed women and men in their society to live as mixed-gender types. Boys who play with and dress up as girl toys have the opportunity to symbolically assume a female identity during adolescence. They adopt a female name, paint their faces like the women in their community, do women's work, and marry men. They do all this in the form of theater - performing rituals. If a Mohave woman also likes the way of life of men and wants to live like them, there is no problem for her. Girls who accept this are called hwamis. Hwamis live like men, hunt, farm, practice shamanism, and can even be in leadership positions during war. Some women start having sex after giving birth to a child (Martin & Voorhies, 1975). Such mixed-gender patterns can also be found in Tahitian culture, among the Muslims of Oman, and the Hijras tribes of India.

Feminism Movement. Cultural Feminism.

Feminism is a new theory as well as a political movement to achieve "equal rights, human dignity, and the right of women to make their own decisions". The leading forces of the feminist movement do not reconcile with the discrimination of women based on their gender and fight for the equal value of both genders in society. The seeds of the modern feminist movement were planted at the end of the eighteenth century, although the precursors of feminism can be found before this century. The Italian-born medieval French writer Christine de Pisan (1364-1430) may be the earliest feminist in the Western tradition. She is believed to be the first woman to earn a living by writing. Feminist thought began to take a more significant form during the Enlightenment with thinkers such as the English writer and traveler Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the French philosopher, mathematician, and politician Marquis de Condorcet, who advocated women's education (Halsband et al., 1994).

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century is called the period of the first wave of feminism. It begins in the era that encompasses the demands for voting, education, and property rights centered around the slogan "liberal feminism". According to liberal feminists, it is the patriarchal structure that does not give women their rights and freedoms within the legal framework. The most obvious representatives of these were the suffragists ("suffrage" is the English word), and they fought all their struggles in the direction of women gaining the right to vote. The active members of this movement were Harriet Taylor, Margaret Fuller, Harriet Martineau in England, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott in America. They argued that if women had the same rights as men, then women would be less dependent on men, and this dependency would gradually disappear.

This would greatly benefit society as a whole. As a result of the struggle, women were given the right to vote for the first time in many countries (Germany, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain) (Aghayeva, 2018).

Another theory within the first wave of feminism, particularly influential in the late nineteenth century, is cultural feminism. Cultural feminists, like liberal feminists, believed in the importance of critical thinking, but unlike liberal feminists, they focused on the difference, not the sameness, of men and women. In addition to emphasizing the differences between men and women, they argued that women have a completely different culture and morality and the importance of working together to fight against the male-dominated culture. As can be seen here, unlike liberal feminists, they advocated the need for large-scale cultural change, not political change (Tansel & Yildirim, 2018).

Margaret Fuller's book "Woman in the Nineteenth Century", published in 1845, is considered the beginning of the cultural feminist tradition. Influenced by German and English romantics, Fuller emphasized the importance of self-determination, that women should not be governed by external rules that are against the spirit of women, centering on the concept of the romantic individual. Another well-known representative of the cultural feminism movement was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was known for her sharp criticism of religions. Stanton, along with a group of other feminists, wrote The Woman's Bible (1895), commenting on certain parts of the Bible. In this work, she noted that all beliefs and scriptures are based on patriarchal thinking, that women were created after men, for men, in a subordinate and inferior status to men, and she suggested the importance of rejecting all these ideas (Donovan, 2001, pp. 70–77).

Cultural feminists argue that if aggressive male behavior is replaced by traditional female behavior, society will benefit. What features are meant by this? These are kindness, caring, and cooperation. If people prefer these qualities, society will be more different. There will be development in all institutions (family, school, health care, etc.). Cultural feminists are convinced that feminine qualities can save the world from evil.

Gender relations in Azerbaijan.

There are historical roots of gender equality in Azerbaijan, which is a part of the Turkic world. Although the man has been considered the head of the family since the establishment of the family, women who work side by side with their husbands in every field have been able to participate in decision-making on many issues, although not as much as their husbands. As it is said in the "Dede Gorgud"

saga, a woman should be able to be with her husband in every period, be it war or peace. When men chose a wife for themselves, they gave importance to many criteria. A woman should be able to accompany them during the war, not only in the status of procreating for them. When men got married, they did not consider only women's beauty; they gave more preference to brave, resilient, tenacious women who could ride horses well. Patriarchal rules were indeed the basis for most of the ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan, but women's independence has always existed in Karapapaks, Afshars, Shahsevens, Gajars, and many elite tribes (Agayeva, 2014, pp. 55–56).

As in many countries of the world, the gender problem has not escaped Azerbaijan. Cases such as early marriage, domestic violence, and the exclusion of girls from education have shown themselves in all periods. However, along with multiculturalism and tolerance, the development of gender democracy in Azerbaijan went parallel throughout history.

In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, conditions were created for girls to study only in noble families. The irrevocable battles of Azerbaijan's intellectuals, writers, and public figures on this path partially prevented the social rules regarding Azerbaijani women's education. For example, M.F. Akhundov, Y.V. Chamanzaminli, S. Efendiyev, H.Z. Taghiyev, M.A. Sabir, U. Hajibeyov, M.A. Rasulzadeh, Jafar Jabbarli, O.F. Nemanzadeh, and others can be shown. Over time, the rights of women in Azerbaijan have expanded. In 1921, it became the Institute of Education in schools for girls, and a year later, it became the Higher Women's Pedagogical Institute (Asadova, 2018).

Women's rights in Azerbaijan are protected in the first legal form by the Declaration of Independence adopted by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic on May 28th, 1918. During the period of the ADR, it gave women the principle of equality, the right to choose and be elected. With this law, Azerbaijan was the first country in the East that legalized women to elect and be elected (Mahmudov, 2015, p. 175).

In modern times, gender equality in Azerbaijan is ensured by the constitution adopted in 1995. Article 25 of the Constitution states that men and women have equal rights. The equality of rights and freedoms between men and women and the prohibition of discrimination based on gender are reflected in the Labor Code, the Family Code, the Criminal Code, and other laws. In this regard, the law "On Guarantees of Gender Equality" was adopted in 2006. In 2010, in the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on

Prevention of Domestic Violence was submitted. At the same time, our country joined the CEDAW convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Declaration, and the Millennium Development Goals. In Azerbaijan, early marriages are legally prevented because they pose a risk for teenagers to become mothers at a young age. At the same time, early marriages are prevented through education. In 2011, the age of marriage for girls in Azerbaijan was raised to 18 in the Milli Majlis. The number of female employees in the public sector in Azerbaijan is no less than that of men (Budagov, 2012, p. 97).

Currently, the literacy level of women and men in Azerbaijan is close to 100%. As in many countries, in our country, the labor code provides concessions and privileges for women. They are mainly intended for women's physiological characteristics and health protection. According to Article 240 of the Labor Code, it is not permissible to refuse employment contracts to women who are pregnant and have children under the age of 3. Privileges are given to women even due to their retirement age. So, women can use the right to a pension 3 years earlier than men. Besides, today, there are departments on gender issues within ANAS, BSU, Western University, the State Committee on Women's Issues, and some ministries, and several activities are being carried out to improve even further this situation.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender is one of the actual issues covering the cultural, social, and political structure of societies. A cultural approach to gender studies emphasizes that gender differences are not a purely biological issue, but rather a social construction based on the cultural system, which is the sum of various beliefs and national values of the society. This approach describes how gender roles and gender stereotypes are formed in a cultural context and how they change over time and space. As a result, a cultural approach provides a perspective oriented towards understanding and addressing gender issues. This approach recognizes that gender differences are closely related to the cultural and social dynamics of society and are important for gender equality. In this respect, it is important and important to understand the cultural structure of the society regarding the discussion and solution of gender issues in modern societies.

Regarding Azerbaijan, the country has made notable steps towards gender equality through its legal framework, which enshrines gender equality in the constitution and includes laws against domestic violence and workplace discrimination. Besides, the government's

recent efforts indicate a commitment to further integration of gender equality in national policies. However, significant challenges persist due to deep-rooted social norms in society such as child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Therefore, while progress has been made, in general, substantial cultural and structural barriers continue to impede gender equality in Azerbaijan.

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