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Abstract

Feminist scholarship has been developing lately along two separate tracks, one highly abstract, the other very much down-to-earth. Theory has been meta-theory, and empirical research has paid little attention to it beyond lip-service. This lack of communication threatens both poles with stagnation. For gender studies to be effectively feminist we need to combine a good measure of reflection with careful description, attentive to details. The descriptions need to be dynamic and specific, yet make room for comparison.

Gender is not enough. The verb to gender is a great advance, since it introduces change and variation. But a situation, a society, a product, etc. can be gendered in various ways.

In this paper, I propose three concepts that differentiate between aspects of gendering: force, scope and hierarchy.

Force refers to the importance of gender. (Is gender-governed behavior clearly or loosely defined? Are there sanctions for those who infringe the gendered patterns?) Scope deals with how many areas are affected by gendering in a given time/place (division of labor, interests, body dynamics, etc. Are there few or many gender neutral phenomena?) Hierarchy is not a new concept, of course; it has to do with power, authority and resources of all kinds. (Is one gender more powerful or considered more valuable in any sense than another?) The point here is that it is not the only relevant aspect.

The use of concepts such as these should make it easier to catch sight of contradictions between gender orders and regimes (different times/places, different institutions within a given society, etc.) as well as within the categories of women and men without simplifying those differences unduly. The concepts give us a vocabulary for speaking concretely about many things that have taken up much time and energy in feminist debates, for example about difference/similarity/equality. Paralyzing relativism could be avoided without a return to crude elementary concepts like patriarchy or under-theorized descriptions of particular details.

Introduction

Feminist research is usually about the circumstances that dominate the time and place where the researchers themselves happen to live. All feminists want to criticize the circumstances that affect us directly. That is necessary, but not sufficient. We also need the proof, which anthropology and history can furnish, that things can be different; we need to remind ourselves constantly that what we have here and now is not naturally given, not eternal, not self-evident.

Even the proposition that is basic to most feminist research, that there is oppression of women, cannot be taken for granted by anthropologists. That does not mean anthropologists do not study the power aspect of gender. On the contrary, not taking it for granted allows more critical questions about it. One can certainly ask: "Is the oppression of women universal?" but one cannot answer without first formulating and trying to answer a lot of other questions. Especially: What can one mean with "oppression"? How can we distinguish which categories oppress which other categories in a given society? Which categories exist, to begin with, in a given society, i.e. how do the people there sort themselves, how do they define each other, in which groups according to which criteria? What are the symbolic expressions of these categorizations and how are they reproduced? Etcetera.
One lesson of anthropology for feminists of other disciplines is that to ask such questions is useful even when you study your own society. They relativize even that which you think you know, so that room is made for new interpretations.

The feminist commitment is to denounce any "injustice" based on gender distinctions. This necessitates careful analysis of such abstract ideas as justice and power, and it necessitates descriptions of actually existing hierarchies and whatever makes them possible.

So far "unjust" gender arrangements have been mainly conceptualized in the broad ideas of "patriarchy" and "oppression". These are necessary words, but they need to be concretized. Local circumstances must be described in specific ways and debates must be launched about exactly what it is we want to change. The broad concepts need to be made empirically "empty" in order to be cross-culturally valid, and that in turn makes it necessary to specify what is meant in each case.  

A related problem is that the rigid dichotomy patriarchy-equality has little to do with life as experienced. Most real cases, be they small groups, isolated events or whole societies over the longue durée, are mixtures.

It is impossible to know in advance, when approaching a new piece of reality (in another continent or around the corner) what gender will look like and what it will mean to the people who do the local constructing of it. So we need concepts that can point to circumstances of power that have to do with gender without taking anything for granted ahead of time about what is meant with feminine or masculine, oppression or power, or about how one thing influences another, concepts that nevertheless make it possible to compare different circumstances, not just describing them in isolation from each other.

How can we describe the effects of gender ideas in careful subtle detail and with all due respect for the people concerned and for the cultural differences that may produce misunderstandings or falsely grounded evaluations, without losing sight of the main goal and purpose of feminist studies which is unavoidably normative?  

The current intellectual fashion is a rather high degree of relativism. For feminists (and other politically committed researchers) this creates a problem. It is necessary, somehow, to compare and evaluate. If we do not, we must accept things as they are, at home and abroad, and then we are no longer feminists. We have to recognize the multiplicity of the world, yes, and we do not have to yearn for any streamlining. But if anything goes for "the others", then anything goes "at home", too. All critical impetus is lost. 

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1 Renata Salecl makes a similar argument for "human rights" and other so-called universals (Salecl 1997). Violence, freedom, and so on, are understood differently in different contexts. That is a fact, but it does not mean that they are politically useless. "However, universals are essentially empty, which is why we have to engage in the struggle for their content. And this struggle has to go in the direction of expanding universals, not in the direction of limiting them to only some cultures. This very expansion is the only way for the universals to get new - it is to be hoped democratic - meaning." (Salecl 1997:95-96)

2 When I say "we" here, I refer to any person or group that wants to call itself feminist. I am not speaking only about so-called Western feminism. It certainly dominates the feminist scene, but other voices are beginning to be heard, and it must be a goal of feminism to have people from all parts of the world define their own problems and goals. When they do, and when they introduce their ideas into the international debates, they will run into the same problem as Western feminism, namely that of realizing that one’s own viewpoints and vocabularies are not universal and that we must respect each other, but that this is very difficult and may sometimes feel politically dangerous. What is feminism in one context may look or sound like anti-feminism in another.

3 The problems of relativism have long been debated inside anthropology, both generally and as they concern such matters as feminism, socialism, development or applied anthropology. Some remarks on these debates can be found in almost any introductory textbook. There are no easy solutions, but one partial remedy is to realize that there is a difference between necessary methodological relativism (the bracketing of one’s own ideas while trying to grasp foreign ones) and a paralyzing value relativism (being unable to form a commitment or even a judgment). For the special problems postmodernism has entailed for anthropology, see Mascia-Lees et al 1989, for feminist anthropolo-
A further problem is that gender orders are about much more than hierarchy. And this is not irrelevant for feminism. There is for example the controversy between lay feminists and Christian feminists around sexuality, or the one between lay feminists and Muslim feminists about dress and spatial and social segregation. What for some people is an expression of oppression, for others is something else, recognized as gender difference, yes, but not as hierarchy. For this reason, all sorts of phenomena that can be traced to gender in any way must be scrutinized from a feminist point of view, even if they do not immediately seem related to power. We can bracket the questions about power, while we describe local circumstances, not in order to forget about power, but precisely to give ourselves better tools and better data to ask better questions about power at a later moment in the analysis.

Personally I tend to suspect that most expressions of difference can be and usually are used for the establishment or reproduction or reinforcement of hierarchy. This goes not just for gender but also for other human categorizations such as ethnicity or class. Categorizations are dangerous. But humans think by means of categories, and we must recognize that differences can be experienced variously. They can enrich life. And if we want to understand hierarchy, one necessary step is to distinguish that which directly leads to it (such as differential access to crucial resources) from that which has only an indirect and perhaps tenuous relationship to it (such as the genderization of body language, emotions or domestic space).

Given these problems, I want to suggest two new concepts to facilitate the description of different gender orders in such a way that they become comparable to each other. My hope is also that the kind of descriptions they would lead to would clarify some old feminist debates, especially the one about difference/similarity. There is a growing consensus that this debate has become unfruitful, but it has not, as far as I can see, been convincingly laid to rest.4

I am an anthropologist and the problems I see are problems that have made feminist anthropology difficult for the last decade or two, and the concepts are designed especially with cross-cultural comparison in mind. But I hope my suggestions will be useful also for feminist research from other disciplinary horizons. In my present position as a professor of gender studies in an interdisciplinary unit, I am daily struck by the similarity among the interests of feminist researchers from different disciplines. Still, my paper should be read as speaking from an anthropological horizon. I think my proposal can be useful for many others, but certainly not everyone, and the problems that made me invent my concepts are definitely not the same in all disciplines.

What kind of concepts are needed?

The concept of gender has been tremendously fruitful, it has pointed away from the given towards the thinkable, and it has pointed away from "women" towards that which really interested feminist researchers from the beginning, i.e. the relationships between women and men (power is a relationship) - and further towards cultural constructions of what femininity and masculinity are, what is considered a man or a woman, what they are considered to usually want to do, be able to do, should do, etc.

But one concept is not enough. We need a whole family of concepts related to gender in order to be able to say more about those aspects of reality that have to do with gender.

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4 This is also the opinion of Nancy Fraser (1997). According to her, some of our present problems are rooted in the fact that new issues claimed attention before this important debate had been well resolved. She also argues that these old debates must be transcended in such a way that we do not lose the "unsurpassable gain" of recognizing all sorts of differences, yet "develop an alternative vision that permits us to make normative judgments about the value of different differences by interrogating their relation to inequality." (Fraser 1997:108)
What I am after may become clearer, if we compare with another area of anthropological interest, kinship. Anthropology has relativized the concept of kinship, it has shown that it is something that exists in all societies, in some sense, but that it can be a very different sort of phenomenon from that which we so-called Westerners usually think of when we talk of kinship. Kinship does not necessarily have to be about biological relationships, or not only about that, and "biological relationships" in itself is something that can be variously defined. Further, anthropology has shown that kinship can organize larger or smaller areas of life and different areas of social life. Analogously, anthropology has relativized gender, it has shown that there is a principle of organization that seems to have to do with sexual reproduction in all societies, but that it has nothing directly to do with biology.

However, the study of kinship would not have been as fruitful if kinship had been the only concept. Anthropology has developed a host of descriptive and comparative concepts around kinship: matri- and patrilinearity, double descent, classificatory terms, cross and parallel cousins, and so on. And of course the graphic code used in kinship diagrams. In other words: a whole set of tools were developed around the central concept of "kinship", tools that could be used in thinking about what kinship might be and how it functioned in social life. The concepts could also be used to compare the kinship systems of different societies. One type, for example, was called "Omaha". Not just the Omaha people had this system. It was a type, and with the aid of it, similarities and differences among kinship systems as such could be explored and their place in the social processes could be compared.

**Connell's suggestion: analytical concepts.**

Before we sort any particular instance into any typology, however, we need to describe it carefully, on its own terms. For that we need descriptive or analytical concepts. For gender, some very useful ones have been suggested by R.W. Connell (1987, 2002). At least four structures can be described for any gender order: production relations, power, emotional relations, and symbolic relations. When we describe them, in detail, for a given society, we obtain a picture of a large number of relevant circumstances and their connections to each other. It will be a dynamic picture, because it will also contain the contradictions within the gender order, and the contradictions between the gender order and other aspects of social life.

Connell proposes to call the large pattern, at the overarching level, *gender order*. When we describe gender related phenomena in one part of a society - for instance an office or the whole labor market, a family or the school system or religious aspects... - we can call that a *gender regime*. We should not take it for granted that the whole is a simple sum of the parts. Since the gender regimes are many, contradictory and different from each other, the whole, the gender order, cannot be unitary. It is many-faceted, fragmented, difficult to interpret, just as the postmodernists have taught us. But it can be described in structural terms. In order to describe processes in collective life that are not totally idiosyncratic and interesting only as individual testimony, it is necessary to suppose the existence of discernible structures and units.

I am arguing, not so much that we should use Connell's concepts, as that we need to develop concepts of this kind. Connell's could be called analytical. They work so that one can sort data with their aid. I mention them here, first to define some concepts I use later in this text, second to make it clear that the concepts I suggest are of a different kind, and third to inscribe the new concepts in a wider theoretical framework usually called practice theory (Connell 1987, Giddens 1979, Bourdieu 1977).

**Comparative concepts**
In the effort to understand individual societies, we need analytical or descriptive concepts first of all. In the effort to try to understand human conditions and possibilities overall, with the aid of what we know about a number of real societies, we also need another kind of concepts.

For example, it is possible that the concept "labor market" is excellent in the description of one society, but useless in another where it might be better to talk about "the social organization of hunting", something that is probably not very relevant in the first case. These labels are not universally applicable, since they contain hypotheses about reality. The overarching concept that can make them comparable is "distribution of tasks". If you want to say something about the distribution of tasks in various societies at the same time, you also need such concepts as "even or uneven distribution", "institutionalized or improvised organization" and so on.

In other words, if we want to compare, we have to make up our minds about what and how, and for this we need comparative concepts. We could also call them question-generating concepts. They should be as empty as possible of suppositions about local circumstances.

Marx' conceptual apparatus is comparative and question-generating in this sense. So is most of feminist theory. Anthropologists are sceptical towards this kind of theory building, because theories and concepts are cultural products, and since it is precisely cultural products that constitute the study objects of anthropology, a paradox is born: the tools we use to grasp reality are part of that reality. The theories bite their own tails, and anthropology is paralyzed and prefers to stick to the foreign ideas to be studied. Comparison is usually not warranted and always risky. Concepts are never wholly free from suppositions, taken-for-granted things.

The central experience of anthropologists is to try to make sense of something that requires an effort of interpretation. The questions to be asked are typically, "What is this? How can it be understood?" Anthropology is rich in this kind of questions and in concepts that have been developed from them. But most of these questions and concepts cannot be usefully applied to any other empirical material than that out of which they arose.

Such careful analyses are useful and interesting but not enough in themselves. If each researcher creates concepts only starting from her own data, we will merely obtain plenty of descriptions of human phenomena and no universally applicable knowledge about the potentials of humanity. We will limit ourselves to "butterfly collecting" as one famous anthropologist snorted.

Once we have good descriptions, we need to generalize them in such a way that they become relevant for debates about how we want to live.

What we must not do, of course, is to launch the comparisons without having made our empirical and relativist homework first.

**Force, scope and hierarchy**

The gender order pervades all of society, by definition, but it can do so in various ways and to varying degrees. One important word we use, in order to talk about this is the verb, *to gender*. A given relation or situation may have to do or may not have to do with gender, i.e. it can be defined as significant or neutral or irrelevant for gender. And this state of affairs can change, a relation or situation can become gendered or degendered. For example, I think degendering is what European feminists strive for as far as the labor market goes. We do not just oppose unfair treatment, we propose that the gender category of a person should not be a relevant piece of information in the context of an employment interview or when negotiating a salary. When you study a gender regime or a whole gender order, it is interesting to see which relationships inside it are gendered and which ones are not, plus the degrees of gendering.
To gender. More or less gendered. But in which sense? I see three possibilities. The gendering in a given case can be more or less strong, more or less extensive and more or less unequal. We can call these aspects force, scope and hierarchy.

Let us start with force. The degree of importance assigned to a man's being very "masculine" or a woman very "feminine" varies widely in time and space. In some societies there are no degrees: if you belong to a given gender category, that is all there is to say about your gender. There is no femininity or masculinity in the sense of continuous scales. In societies where there are degrees, these degrees can (independently of how they are symbolized) be experienced as more or less important for the identity of an individual, for the maintenance of social order, or whatever. In all societies, anything that can be organized according to gender (distribution of tasks, decision-making, symbols, and so on), can be experienced, analogously, as more or less important. It can be more or less culturally elaborated or more or less strongly sanctioned. A person's gender can be considered the most important piece of information about that person or only as one piece of information among many which are useful in order to know what sort of person she or he is.

If I compare two countries I know well, Sweden and Spain, both obviously partake of Western and Christian traditions, so there are degrees of femininity and masculinity, and in both countries it is important for individuals to feel secure in their gender identities. What is organized clearly by gender, will preferably not be modified. A woman prefers not to use body language that is considered masculine, a man avoids dressing in colors defined as feminine, etc. But there is a difference of emphasis. The emotional significance and the social consequences if someone infringes the norms are smaller in Sweden, where gender is also symbolized in a less distinct way in dress, body language etc. For instance, the difference between feminine and masculine ways of walking is greater in Spain than in Sweden, even though approximately the same characteristics of movement are defined as feminine or masculine in both countries. And in both countries dark colors are considered more masculine, but Swedish men can use more varied colors than Spanish men without being labeled effeminate. A Swedish man or woman who treads too close to the line or oversteps it, can often counter criticism (and self-criticism) with arguments according to other criteria than gender (for example arguments of efficiency: it was quicker to jump over the ditch than to walk all the way around; or arguments of necessity: my track suit was dirty so I used my sister's...) while dubious gender behavior is more difficult for a Spanish woman or man to defend credibly.

So far about force. As to scope, I define it as all areas of collective life that are affected by the division of humanity into gender categories. This is most clearly exemplified by the division of tasks. All known societies have some sort of distribution of work according to gender. But what varies is not just which tasks are considered appropriate for which gender, but how many tasks are gendered at all and how many are defined as gender neutral and instead are distributed according to age or social rank or are simply carried out by whoever has the time or feels like it. Analogously different amounts of emotions, different quantities of decisions, variously large

5 The concepts force and scope were originally suggested by Clifford Geertz in order to compare the role religion plays in different societies (Geertz 1968:111). He compared Indonesia (Java) and Morocco, two Muslim countries that are otherwise very different from each other. Geertz found it striking that religion was very important in both countries, it was something that was present in everyday life, it was experienced as emotionally important, and to refer to religious reasons was effective in most arguments. And it was the same religion, Islam. Yet it was just as striking that religion meant different things for Indonesians and Moroccans. Geertz resolved the paradox by arguing that the force of religion was greater in Morocco but the scope greater in Indonesia. In Morocco there were phenomena for which religion was not relevant, but in the areas of life where it was relevant, it was very much so. In Indonesia religion was present everywhere, it pervaded life, it could not be thought out of any context, but it was seldom the most relevant aspect or the decisive argument.
parts of the ideological constructions of the society, different numbers of colors and so on might be gendered or gender neutral.

Finally, hierarchy. All differences between gender categories constitute gender asymmetry, but certain differences, such as access to important resources, possibilities, health, prestige and so on are more than just asymmetry. They constitute not just difference, "horizontally", but inequality, "vertically", and that is the reason for considering them factors of hierarchy. To be certain, hierarchy can be expressed in many different ways, and it is not always easy to recognize it, not even within cultural borders. What is a useful resource depends on context. And it is important to remember that things may be different in different gender regimes within one and the same society; women and men can be differently positioned in relationship to each other in different contexts. But it should be possible to make some sort of summarizing statement about how hierarchical relationships between the gender categories are, how "high" they are, generally, in the society in question. It is also of interest to note how important the gender hierarchy is in comparison to other hierarchies in the same society, such as class or ethnicity or merit. Not to speak of the tensions that arise when they point in different directions.

Force, scope and hierarchy can combine in various ways. It may be difficult to imagine a society where the gender order has weak force and narrow scope, yet is strongly hierarchical, but it is not logically impossible. It may be that the modern urbanized middle class in Japan is one example. That would be one reading of some descriptions of the hegemonic Japanese gender order (Kondo 1990, Lebra 1984) and it might be one way of clarifying certain debates between feminists (both Japanese and foreign, e.g. Buckley 1997, Fujimura-Fanselow 1995), who contend that the gender order in Japan is highly hierarchical and unfair, and others (Iwao 1993) who contend that gender is not a very important fact of life in Japan. Both sides could be right, in different ways. For urban middle class Japanese, gender may not be an important factor in most situations (scope is narrow), and when it is, it is still not as important as other factors (force is weak), but to the extent it does have social effects, these are hierarchical.

It is probably possible that a society may have clearly marked and strongly sanctioned gender characteristics even though neither gender category enjoys more power or prestige than the other(s). In other words, strong force and wide scope could conceivably be combined with a flat hierarchy, even though it is difficult to think of examples.\

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6 That is how one can interpret for example the common discussions (in Sweden, in Spain and in other Western countries) about the supposed power women have inside the home, in personal relationships, their power over words, etc. They may or they may not have such power (I refrain from arguing either way about that for the moment); but if they do have more power than men, on the average, in such gender regimes as love, friendship, everyday conversation and the organization of the household, for example, that is no proof that men do not have more power in other gender regimes. Power is not monolithic; a person or a group is not necessarily totally helpless just because they have less power than someone else as a whole. In other words, it is not unimportant to point out that women may have more power than men, or equal possibilities, inside certain gender regimes. It is not useful, however, to count the gender regimes in order to see who has most power in the largest number (which would be a very difficult exercise anyway, since gender regimes overlap and power is hardly quantifiable), but to analyze the possibly hierarchical relationships between the various gender regimes; it may well be that superiority in one gender regime has more of a total effect on one's possibilities than superiority in another gender regime.

7 Clearly marked asymmetries between the gender categories even when it comes to crucial resources could exist in perfect equilibrium, so that even if the gender categories have at their disposal different kinds of resources, different types of autonomy, different forms of decision-making over different decisions, etc., there is no difference in the total sum of resources at the disposal of each category. (At least, it is possible to imagine such a situation, even though it will probably always be a matter of controversy whether a given piece of reality is of this kind or not.) But such a balancing act could easily be disturbed. When social change accelerates and/or social complexity increases, it is not very probable that such an equilibrium could be maintained. Change would also decrease the probability that people would experience the situation as balanced, and this in itself could be one upsetting factor. In other words, "separate but equal" is conceivable in theory, and we should have a term for such a gender order, but it would be so fragile that it would have problems reproducing itself, and therefore it is improbable that a practical example will ever be found.
In any case, these concepts should clarify some discussions. When feminists criticize hierarchical circumstances, for example, it is not uncommon to hear counter arguments that are not really about hierarchy but about force or scope. In Sweden, one popular argument has it that feminism has become unnecessary because Sweden has now achieved perfect gender equality in the labor market. This is not true, but even if it were, the argument would be beside the point, since the labor market is not the only gender regime. The person proffering the argument would implicitly be saying that no other aspect of social life in Sweden is gendered. Scope would be denied and one gender regime would be confused with the whole gender order. Another common type of argument has it that hierarchy does not exist or is not important, when "only a few things" are gendered. Here scope is denied in a different sense: it is recognized that many gender regimes could exist, but it is claimed that they are not, here and now, gendered in a hierarchical way. Given my concepts, we can point out that hierarchy might be steep even when scope is narrow.

If we assign an extreme value to each one of these three dimensions, we obtain eight logically possible combinations, eight different kinds of gender order. In a sense they ought to be twelve, since the hierarchical dimension should have three extreme values: no hierarchy at all, clear hierarchy with male gender in the superior position and clear hierarchy with female gender in the superior position. But this last possibility does not seem to exist in reality.

Eight or twelve types of gender orders, using only extreme values of the dimensions and thinking only of two gender categories. There are societies with three or more gender categories, and in reality the values will resemble complex products, not sums, of different gender regimes, different contradictions at different levels, and so on. Typologies abstract from details but must not contradict ethnographic data. Allowing for the necessary modulation, the three dimensions I suggest could constitute the basis for a more dynamic vocabulary of gender than the rigid dichotomy patriarchy-equality. It would also be a vocabulary that could furnish feminist groups with ideas of what to struggle for or what one wants to evaluate in which way. But it is normatively and empirically empty, i.e. it does not impose any values or take anything for granted.

Let us consider some examples. In order to make them more illustrative, we can leave out the hierarchy dimension (which is after all well known, not an invention of mine) and imagine extreme values of the other two. In this way we obtain four types of gender orders.

The first combination: There might be societies where both force and scope of gender are negligible. It is not easy to find descriptions of such societies in the ethnographic literature, probably because such a gender order is not interesting measured by the usual Western ideas. Some might even think they are not gender orders at all. Anthropologists who have found such societies may not have realized that there was anything interesting to say about gender there. But Bali as described by Margaret Mead (1950) is one example. There, women and men dressed approximately alike, and even the bodily differences seemed minimal. Another example would be !Kung, a hunting and gathering people living in Namibia and Botswana (Shostak 1990). The scope is a bit wider than in Bali. Quite a few tasks are gendered. But far from all and not all of the most important ones. The scope of gender is narrow also because hardly any decision-making process, rituals or spaces are gendered. Force is definitely minimal, since gender norm breaking is barely sanctioned and people seem to pay very little attention to psychological masculinity or femininity. (The gender hierarchy is also unusually weak among the !Kung, which makes them a very interesting case.)

The second combination: There are societies where force is strong but scope narrow. Sweden right now is one approximate example. It is true that the force is not as strong as in Spain, as I said, but the difference in force is not as great as the difference in scope. Christian (and therefore indirectly Mediterranean) traditions weigh heavily even in Sweden. Gender identity is

This does not, however, make it superfluous to ask the question in each case: Do the differences we see here mean just asymmetry or also hierarchy?
psychologically important for most people. But scope is not great. There are many situations where gender would be relevant in Spain but is not in Sweden. For instance there are few gendered public spaces in Sweden. Gender is not a relevant aspect when you board a bus, neither your own, that of the bus driver or that of the other travelers; it is not important which gender is that of the waiter/waitress in a cafeteria or bar or restaurant, so a woman does not usually have to search for a gender appropriate place to have a cup of coffee or a beer (as Spanish women do); gender is not relevant when you look at the employees or the customers of a supermarket nor in the line at the bank or post office. In all of these cases, gender would enter the picture in Spain, albeit less now than twenty years ago. Changes in Spain are towards a narrowing of the scope of gender. However, it is still much wider than in Sweden, also, when it comes to such things as clothing, hair styles, colors, body language, professions, political activities... So Sweden is an example of narrow scope but strong force. The fact that the scope is narrow should not be confused with weak force.

The third combination: Which society could serve as an example of wide scope but weak force of gender? It would be a society where tasks, symbols and spaces were defined more according to gender than according to any other criteria, but this would be done with a pragmatic attitude and great variation in practice. Whoever commits a "mistake" might be laughed at, or just shrugged off, the norm breaking would not be punished, hardly even through commenting, even though it would be culturally clear. If you break a norm, you would be able to refer to all sorts of circumstances as excuses - in case anyone would think an excuse was in order. Judging from anthropological literature in general - if we can trust it when it comes to gender - there are many examples of this kind among so called simple societies. The Trobriands is one. In this society off the coast of Papua New Guinea almost everything - tasks, places, economic exchanges, magic knowledge, etc. - is in principle gendered, but practice varies quite freely (Weiner 1988).

The fourth combination: Great force and wide scope. In Spain, and in the Mediterranean region in general, gender organizes a great many things and organizes them in a rather strict manner. Most things are gendered and the gendering is strongly sanctioned. The combination great force and wide scope means that gender is always at hand as a principle everyone understands and everyone finds important and therefore it is easy and politically effective to refer to it in all sorts of crises and social reorganization. In view of this, it becomes understandable for instance why conflicts that are really about modes of production or forms of government are easily translated into conflicts around spatial segregation between women and men in Mediterranean countries (Egypt, Algeria...) or around definitions of sexuality (Spain) (Evers Rosander 1991, Thurén 1988, 1993 and in preparation).

It becomes easier, too, to understand why Mediterranean women do not accept some arguments that emanate from the mainly Northern European feminist movement. They think that the Northerners confuse power with symbols. Why should special dress for women or spatial segregation comport oppression? they wonder. In my terms they are saying that hierarchy is not the same thing as scope. The Northern feminists usually retort that scope does lead to hierarchy. It is a possible argument, but more research is needed to determine whether the connection is inevitable or not.  

In non-feminist discourses in Spain, feminism is often described as a movement that wants to abolish the differences between women and men, and this is then often interpreted as puritanical, unnatural and uncomfortable, since it would abolish sexual attraction. Those who think in this way confuse gender and sexuality (common enough in all of the so-called Western world), but apart from that, such discourses point to further questions about the connections between force, scope and hierarchy. If people in a given time and place construct gender as very closely connected to sexuality, so much so that the two are confused, and if sexuality is con-

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8 Cf note 7.
structured as requiring noticeable differences in order for attraction to exist, then gender must be constructed in such a way that important gender differences are retained, even if (what is constructed as) injustice is abolished. This is not of great importance in Northern Europe, where sexuality is constructed as something more similar to friendship, i.e. requiring a measure of similarity (in e.g. opinions and interests), and where equality in the sense of justice is often confused with equality in the sense of similarity, even when it comes to other social differentiations than gender (Gullestad 1989). In this light, it becomes logical that Northern European feminism has stressed similarity in rights and obligations and placed equality on the labor market high on the agenda, while Southern European feminism has concentrated on questions related to sexuality and language and spent much energy on internal debates about the so-called "feminism of difference".

To sum up my concepts:

**Force:** How important is gender? Overall. And in any given situation, for each individual. Many, strong and clearly defined sanctions if you infringe well defined norms around gender = great force. Few, weak, unclear sanctions if you do not conform to gender behavior that is not very well defined to start with = weak force.

**Scope:** Many things (tasks, symbols, places, body language, qualities of voice, clothes, areas of interest, lifestyles, types of resources...) are gendered = wide scope. Few of them are gendered, i.e. most of them are gender neutral = narrow scope.

**Hierarchy:** One gender category has more power in some way and/or is considered more valuable than the other one = high degree of hierarchy. Neither gender category has more power or is considered more valuable than the other one, or they may, perhaps, but this is not clearly the case, or more power/value in one area of life is compensated by less in another = low degree of hierarchy.

**What questions can we ask now?**

The concept of gender defined a study object, and it is gender that has really been the object of most feminist studies. They have not been only about women, even while called women's studies, but about the *relationships between women and men* and all their varied expressions, causes and consequences. This whole aspect of social life in a given place and time can be called a gender order or a gender system. But this study object is very large and complicated. It is not easy to delimit. To grasp it requires studying societies as wholes, from a special perspective. To do that we need to develop concepts that can serve as handles, perspectives, analytical stepping stones, to help us describe and interpret this aspect of social life. The concept of gender made it visible and important. Now we must do more than give proof, again and again, of its existence.

I am arguing, in other words, for more and better defined concepts around that of gender. I am convinced that we can never do any good thinking unless we have tools to think with. True enough, once we have finished a piece of analysis, we must turn it around and inside out and think of possible other ways of seeing it. But in that exercise, too, we must have tools. And when we reach a new possible interpretation, the re-interpretation starts over once again. The job is never finished - but we must start with something. We must not confuse concepts with reality, but we must have categories with which to think, since human thinking is dependent on categorization.

One important problem with comparison concerns which units to compare. What is "one" society? I do not naïvely think that borders are visible and firm or that reality is independent of discourses. This is one example of how we need to learn to apply postmodern or relativist methodological gains, such as flexibility, attention to multiplicity and self-reflexivity, without giving up altogether on description. "One gender order" is that which pervades "one social whole" - but where to draw the lines around the unit to be studied must be decided in each case, depending on
what sort of comparison we want to make. We can talk about the West as well as middle class Madrid, or about Eastern Europe; or we can define our units according to other measures than political space. Anthropologists can handle space in the same way historians handle time. Long periods are as interesting as short ones, and periodization can be variously made depending on the purpose. Large areas are as interesting as small ones, even though the generalizations that can be made are different. Cultural distance is not parallel to geographic distance. Different concepts render different images and that is not a source of error but interesting.

The concepts I propose can and should be used not to forget about gender hierarchy but to ask more specific questions about it. We must take ideas/culture/discourses into account, but not leave it at that, but proceed to ask how different aspects of gender asymmetry are constructed and combined. In that way, we will be able to ground theories about what gender "is" and what consequences it has for people’s possibilities to live a good life, in descriptions of gender that are respectful of multiplicity without abandoning the goal of defining "justice". The concepts I propose, placed in the context of practice theory, lead to empirical questions such as:

How important, how emotionally charged, is the fact that there are women and men in society X? Are there other gender categories, too? Which criteria are used there to determine the gender of an individual? Are there degrees of femininity and masculinity, of both (all) or of just one gender, to what degree and how important are they for individuals and for social organization? How are the gender categories and their respective characteristics symbolized? What are the consequences of this for the economy, for the socialization of children, for cultural change, for the distribution of resources, for political organization, for religion, and so on? How central are the symbols of gender, and how central is gender in the symbolization of other matters?

How many tasks and how many situations are defined as gender neutral and how many are defined starting from some idea about gender? And which ones? Do people infringe these norms? What are the sanctions for infringement and how serious are their consequences? To what extent are the worlds of women and men (and possible other gender categories) similar/different? Do women and men evaluate good and bad in similar or different ways? And how does this similarity/difference compare in importance and extension as well as possibly homologous symbolizations, with the forms of similarity/difference that exist for other categories in the same society (for example class, age)?

What ideas about gender hierarchy are there? Are the gender categories considered to be equally valuable and equally important, and do they have the same resources, privileges, etc., or does one dominate over the other(s) and in that case how (in which way and with what means, and how is this handled culturally)? Is there incompatibility between the various roles of women? And between those of men? How do the possible incompatibilities affect the life possibilities of individuals and how do they affect social organization as a whole? How are the possible contradictions and the possible differences between men's and women's dilemmas interpreted and handled? Which dilemmas are most visible or most controversial? Do some of them serve as metaphors for others? What opportunities are offered, culturally and socially, for resolution of the dilemmas? Can women and men obtain to the same extent what they themselves consider the good things in life? How well can women's goals combine with or adapt to men's goals, and vice versa? What happens when they do not coincide? Are there any overarching criteria for what is good in life that are equally valid for all gender categories?

What resources (i.e. things that give a group or a person possibilities to act in a given context) are more or less evenly distributed among the gender categories? Which ones are unevenly distributed and how? How is this legitimated? What other social circumstances beyond the construction of gender, contribute to uneven distribution of resources or work?

What tasks are carried out by women and which ones by men, how are they evaluated, how much time do they require, how heavy are they? How is the labor of each gender category
compensated? Are the tasks connected to power, resources, autonomy, prestige, and so on, and if so, are they connected in the same way for women and men or in different ways?

How does the gender differentiation enter the overall whole of the differentiations and hierarchies of the society in question? Is it interpreted as the cause of other differentiations and hierarchies, as the consequence of them, as unrelated to them...? Is the gender differentiation as such considered something negative or positive? Or unimportant? Is it perhaps invisible? Are some of its effects invisible, even if the differentiation as such is not?

Or, once more, for clarity's sake: These questions are not about what "is" but about what "is becoming". How do all of these things reproduce/change? Thinking with sorting concepts can render static images. (The family is this way or that, there are the following gender regimes, the scope is...) Such pictures can be likened to amateur snapshots or impressionist paintings. Only using non-moving pictures can we take the time necessary to see the details that create the dynamism of reality. For example how the modulations of light influence the ways we see. But a non-moving picture of moving reality is always a simplification. People do not have culture, do not live unresistingly in their gender orders, and so on. They discuss, they resist, they defend, they wonder, they doubt, they believe... And it is these actions, this constantly ongoing practice, that creates and recreates reality. This has by now been emphatically pointed out for over a decade. It is time to move on. All actions are carried out in a context, using thoughts that are possible to think in that place, building on experiences and purposes that have developed under certain circumstances. Therefore the circumstances must be described and interpreted for events and actions to make sense.

Only if context and structures are taken to exist, can political goals be defined. Theoretical concepts and the kind of descriptions they lead to influence which political questions are asked. The concepts I have suggested make it possible to ask new feminist questions. For example: Is it desirable for the gender order to have a wide or narrow scope? What degree of force do we consider appropriate or possible in "our society" (however you want to define that)? As feminists we have already decided that we do not want gender hierarchy, but perhaps we still want to retain some kinds of gender asymmetry. How can we ascertain that they do not reinforce existing expressions of gender hierarchy or create new kinds? Do we strive for a total degendering of society or not?

My overall purpose with this paper has been to sketch questions and concepts that make feminist research possible. We must try to describe what is at hand, in all sorts of contexts, and we must do so with as deep an understanding of the local circumstances as we can muster. The gender orders of this world are not all alike. A theory of gender can never make universal propositions without taking local circumstances into account. Therefore, concepts must be developed to describe local circumstances in such a way that they can be both detailed and comparable.

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REFERENCES


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