

The origins of gender preconception

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This work is about the mythological, religious and philosophical roots from *machismo* (sexism), a common expression not just in Latin America, but a usual practice in many places around the world. The pre-concept against women is still strong despite the efforts to guarantee same human and civil rights for both genders. In many countries girls and young women have outnumbered and outperformed boys and men at all levels of schooling for decades. Nevertheless, these advances have yet to be translated into greater equity in employment, political, cultural and social relations.

The roots of this belief about the superior level of men in history are very old and can be found to the first historical texts about myths, religions and philosophical concepts in the Greek and Roman civilizations. From biblical perceptions in the Old Testament, to war practices in Ancient Greece or spreading ideas in early Christian societies, the position of women in the western civilization and culture were always considered to be under men protection and control.

This text analyses fundamental concepts like freedom and knowledge, which are considered the basis for an equalitarian and well developed society. The myth of Lilith is a central piece of sexual interest in the former times, such as the notions of purity or impurity in the Bible (Lev. 12, 2-7), which have given strong arguments against the equality between men and women, since the primitive societies.

In the Middle Ages, books like *De planctu Ecclesiae* (1330), by the Franciscan Spanish monk Alvaro Pelayo, is rich in 'facts' about the vicious and fails of women. The handbook about sorcery and witchcraft, *Malleus Maleficarum* or *The Hammer of Witches* (1486) written by James Sprenger and Henry Kramer, Dominican monks, remained in use for three hundred years. These books had tremendous influence in the witch trials in England and in Europe in general; *Malleus Maleficarum* in particular was used as a judicial case-book for the detection and persecution of witches, specifying rules of evidence and the canonical procedures by which suspected witches were tortured and sentenced to death. Thousands of people (mostly women) were murdered as a result of the procedures described in this book, for no other reasons than strange birthmarks, living alone, mental illness, cultivation of medicinal herbs, or simply because they were falsely accused.

Nowadays, even when considering the contemporary Christian churches, completely different and naturally more liberal than in the past, it is possible to understand that the majority of churches still don't accept women as priests, which is a clear gap in regards to sexual egalitarianism.

In the philosophical context, the segregation of women can also be found in the Greek philosophy, namely in Antisthenes, the Cynic and Diogenes of Sinope, followers of Socrates, and in Plato, as he believed that the primeval souls were males because they came from a higher level in the 'world of ideas'.

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In Schopenhauer's 1851 essay, Schopenhauer wrote that "Women are naturally fitted for acting as the nurses and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous and short-sighted". He opined that women are deficient in artistic abilities and sense of justice, and expressed opposition to monogamy. He claimed that "woman is by nature meant to obey".

But in the scenery of contemporary philosophy, as in the arts and cultural fields, there are many women with high importance: Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), Emma Goldman (1869-1940), María Montessori (1870-1952), Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1888-1966), Edith Stein (1891-1942), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Simone Weil (1909-1943), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), Ayn Rand (1905-1982), María Zambrano (1904-1991), Elizabeth Anscombe (1919-2001), Sylviane Agacinski (1945), Chantal Delsol (1947), Sarah Kofman (1934-1994) or Judith Butler (1956).

Nevertheless, the struggle against the gender preconception must continue because in many countries and cultures women are still considered as 'second level' citizens or worst, as a way to reproduction or as slave labour, in blind obedience to men. In countries like India and others in deepest Africa and Latin-America or in the poorest suburbs around the world, as well as in scope of religions like Islamism, the 'fragile sex' becomes just an offensive expression to cover injustice and oppression.