



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Association mondiale de psychanalyse du champ freudien, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Traumatizations due to the discursive environment and improving individual responses to male chauvinism, an obstacle to women's empowerment

Psychoanalysis studies discourses. By this we mean the stratification of statements or communications collected over time for each natural language. From these discourses flow the patterns of organization of social ties that are valid for a given society at a given time, and hence the possibility of their development. These patterns, while they may be of the linguistic kind, impose themselves on subjects in a manner comparable to the laws of nature, which moreover they often claim to represent. They shape subjects and their symbolic and imaginary environment, they indicate to them what they should or should not do, they distribute the modalities of power as well as the modes of satisfaction. They belong to the majorities, and it is only the minorities (numerical or defined by the limitations assigned them) that will oppose this dominant discourse. Oppressed minorities are thus one of the principal agents of the changes, sometimes slow, sometimes abrupt, that will modify the discourses. Recent years have highlighted the example of the homosexual minority, and at the present time we have ethnic minorities that are mobilizing in Western countries against the discourse of domination that keeps them in their place. These discourses, which the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan called the "master's discourse", obviously result from the appropriation of the public voice by those who hold economic power and, in non-democratic societies, political power as well. The discourse operates according to a prescriptive and indeed imperative mode, corresponding nicely to what Sigmund Freud called the "ideal ego" or self and the "superego". These two instances are the result, in the overwhelming majority of human societies, of the patriarchal power that rules the family, which is the order underlying entry into the discourse for each subject. The structures of the traditional family assigned a specific place and precise functions to women. Their place: the family space and not the public space. Their functions: linked to procreation. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in "The Elementary Structures of Kinship", showed that women have dual values in human societies. As beings capable of speech, they are subjects, but they are also objects of exchange. Lacan fell back on Lévi-Strauss in addressing the social ties and relations between men and women.

Because psychoanalysis studies discourses, it is able to analyse the changes that affect them. The evolution of societies consequent upon advances in production systems and in science has led in developed societies to the weakening and gradual disappearance of the paternal sway over the social bond. The segregation of women has thereby been called into question as have the imperatives that denied them political and social responsibility. A patriarchal system is a male chauvinist structure, another form of racism. In effect it erects an anatomical difference into a symbolic and imaginary difference.

Today we witness situations that contrast sharply according to the discourse of the prevailing master. Thus, CNN recently broadcast interviews with women who had been kidnapped, raped and sold in various parts of the world. Examples of male chauvinism and of the physical and mental violence suffered by women abound in many societies, sometimes with unimaginable intensity. In other discourses, by contrast, the freedom of choice and of action and initiatives on the part of the

female population are growing and are encouraged. This chaotic situation corresponds to a shift in course. It contributes to a chaotic management of the human environment.

Yet if psychoanalysis studies discourses, it can do so only on the basis of the words of individual subjects. It is a discipline that involves the subjects themselves in developing the knowledge that concerns them. The ability to listen to men and women relate the events that have shaped them, in everyday language — the one they speak and the one they live — makes psychoanalysis a unique laboratory for the subjective experience of different traumatizations that have affected contemporary individuals. They are caught up in repetition, as Freud had shown when listening to persons mentally scarred by the First World War. The same holds today for people who have experienced constraining situations and extreme violence. Sexual violence is part and parcel of this. For beyond the traumatic situation itself and the violence suffered, the subjects must contend with their internalization of the discourses provoking and promoting these acts. This internalization of imperatives and judgments proceeds from the traces left by statements and also utterances of words that weave the fabric of the discourse that was and remains their environment.

On the strength of this method and this experience, psychoanalysis has produced a great many works on female subjects. Developed on the basis of individual cases and their treatments, these works make it possible to identify the mental mechanisms triggered in the unconscious by the impact of discourses and words uttered during sexual and social traumas, as well as the variety of solutions found for dealing with devastating mental conflicts. There are many such mechanisms: anxiety, depression, masochism, protest or aggressiveness. They affect subjects in all the aspects of their social ties, both familial and professional. The solutions are always individual and in each case they involve distancing oneself from the imperatives of universal value. Although they are in the numerical majority, women are in fact often treated as juveniles, and consequently are accorded the same treatment as oppressed minorities. What is at issue is an identity that is no longer merely assigned but that stems from a complex process of identification on one hand and, on the other hand, from the need to satisfy urges. We may add that belonging to the female gender does not prevent some women from taking a chauvinistic stance.

Finally, we should note that this research on contemporary feminine positions calls for comparable work on male subjects. Work with men who have committed violence against women can reveal the hidden causes of male chauvinism, and goes hand-in-hand with psychoanalytical research on the causes of racism. The idea is to relate causes to consequences.
