Democracy, parity and change. An institutional space for gender relations*

Democracia, paridad de género y cambio. Un espacio institucional para las relaciones de género

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Abstract
In this article, I examine how gender parity is a viable mechanism to protect the capacity of transformation that characterizes democracy. Fundamentally, I contend that a democratic system needs to provide arenas of deliberation in order to contest gender relations and eradicate practices of domination. Moreover, I argue that the exclusion and censorship of groups that question the predominant gender practices contradicts the spirit of democracy. Therefore, if women do not find institutional paths to express their ideas and to materialize their desires and beliefs, democratic institutions must be designed so as to enable these processes of inclusion.

Key Words: gender relations, parity, democracy, inclusion, and power.

Resumen
El artículo examina cómo la paridad de género es un mecanismo viable para proteger la capacidad de transformación que caracteriza a la democracia. Fundamentalmente, se sostiene que un sistema democrático debe ofrecer espacios de deliberación con el fin de debatir las relaciones de género y erradicar las prácticas de dominación. Así, se argumenta que la exclusión y censura de los grupos que cuestionan las prácticas predominantes de género contradice el espíritu de la democracia. Por lo tanto, si las mujeres no encuentran caminos institucionales para expresar sus ideas y materializar sus deseos y creencias, se deben diseñar instituciones democráticas que permitan su mayor inclusión.

Palabras clave
Relaciones de género, paridad, democracia, inclusión y poder.

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Introduction

Derrida once stated that inherent to the concept of democracy is "'the possibility of being contested' [for] it presupposes its own perfectibility, and thus its own historicity." (Noval, 2004, p. 151). For him, the power of democracy lies not on a rigid set of premises but on the opportunity of constant deconstruction. Consequently, democracy - as a political structure subject to perpetual change -contains within it the strength of transformation. This feature, nevertheless, not only enables its evolution but also makes it prone to revert into other forms of government. Accordingly, institutional boundaries must be designed to restrict the possibilities of mutation away from democracy.

In this article, I analyze the topic of gender parity. Gingerly, I embark on the task of deciphering its meaning, exposing the reasons that make its implementation valuable. From a theoretical and philosophical perspective, I examine how gender parity is a viable institutional mechanism to protect the capacity of transformation that characterizes democracy. Namely, I analyze how gender parity serves as a way of overriding practices of power as domination, empowering women so that their participation in the political bodies becomes a question of choice. As a result, I contend that a democratic system needs to provide arenas of deliberation in order to contest gender relations.

The article takes a step away from the academic partitions that divide the various disciplines of the social sciences, proposing an approximation to gender relations and democracy from a multidimensional approach. I examine the works of a collection of authors with the purpose of extracting some key insights that might serve as a guide for questioning the need for gender parity. The article is structured into three key sections. Firstly, I explain what I understand by gender parity, formulating a conceptualization that goes beyond the question of domination. Secondly, I tackle the subject of gender relations vs. hate relations, with the purpose of differentiating gender interactions from other types of group relations. Lastly, I explicate the potential of gender parity and how it provides an institutional space for democratic discussion.

1. Democracy and gender parity: political power and domination

1.1. Democracy, sexuality, and gender

Foucault (1980) once claimed, "In the space of a few centuries, a certain inclination has led us to direct the question of what we are to sex" (p. 78). This inquiry has surpassed the level of a purely introspective search, instilling itself in all sectors of the social fabric. Clearly, democracy has not been immune to the breakthroughs of this exploration; the subject of sex and gender increasingly sounds in political debates. The evolution of democratic institutions slowly opens the possibility to challenge traditional conceptions that for centuries remained as undisputed truths, as topics relegated to silence. With time, democracy adapts itself in order to permit an ever-growing contestation to the beliefs and desires that have been seen as "natural" for years. Steadily, these developments cause profound cultural changes, unimaginable for past generations; but, contrary to the common contention of some international theories,[1] these transformations are not the result of impositions but of a slow process of deliberation, which is still in progress and will endure.

When for the Greeks it seemed impossible to detach "sexuality" from "the household (*oikos*), with its economic, political, and religious functions; from the state (especially as the reproduction of citizenship); from religion […]; or from class and estate (as the determiner of property of sexual acts, and the like)" (Padgug, 1979, p. 16); today the composition of sexuality and gender is recurrently dissected. As a result, the "natural" notions of sexuality suffer constant deconstruction. In the global

north, for instance, where tradition has slowly let go of its grip on the social consciousness, gender roles are frequently contested along with the "natural" meanings of sexuality. More and more the understandings of the "natural" attributes of sexuality are being displaced by approximations that focus on gender as a socially constructed phenomenon.

The cultural and political transformations of the global north on the issues of gender cannot make us think that the end result is the definition of democracy, that the outcome embodies democracy's true meaning. It is dangerous to see democracy as a static point of arrival, as homogeneous order or a standardized system. Democracy is a process and not a true unitary identity. One cannot assume that gender relations of a determinate culture are better than others. What one has to ask is *not* how to impose the results of a particular democracy into another culture in order to promote gender equality, but how to strengthen the democratic processes so as to permit other cultures to live and create their own change. In other words, how to reinforce democracy and democratic identity so as to guarantee the free contention and modification of gender beliefs and desires?

1.2. Democracy, power and domination

After an extensive empirical and theoretical study about women's leadership, Eagly and Karau (2002) conclude:

> This analysis led us to argue that prejudices toward female leaders consists of two types of disadvantage: (a) Deriving from the descriptive aspect of the female gender role is the perception of women as possessing less leadership ability than men, and (b) deriving from the injunctive aspect of the female role is the less favorable evaluation of behavior that fulfills the prescription of a leader role (and thereby violates the female gender role) when this behavior is enacted by women compared with men (p. 588).

The uncritical perusal of the claims made by the authors might tempt us to automatically condemn the prejudices towards female leaders. One must, nonetheless, stop and embrace the weight of the issue. Firstly, the conclusions capture the opinions of both men and women. Correspondingly, the disadvantages are generated by a set of beliefs and desires shared by society as a whole, and not simply by men. Secondly, though the prejudices are troubling from a democratic theory perspective, the dilemma is even graver when the topic of culture comes into play. It reminds us that, at the end, any measure intended to consolidate a more inclusive democratic system cannot disregard culture.

James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (2005) write, "Rules, routines, norms, and identities are both instruments of stability and arenas of change" (p. 13). In this sense, stability and change do not surface as contradictory energies but as dynamics that interact within democracy. Norms and routines provide a space where processes that promote change can always mobilize and manifest.

It is important to keep in mind that the enactment of norms and regulations does not trigger an immediate transformation. The fact that "an enhanced or even equal representation of women in political decision-making bodies does not automatically mean that gender equality has been achieved" (Fuchs, & Hoecker, 2004, p. 1) reemphasizes the significance of taking into account culture when endorsing certain norms and regulations.[2] Moreover, one must be careful not to classify a determinate culture as undemocratic, simply because traditional gender relations create a particular result. What one has to guarantee is that institutional processes avoid replicating practices of domination that hinder democracy.

But what is domination? The first reasonable answer would be to say that domination is a type of power. According to Foucault (1980),

"power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (p. 93). For him, power is not something that can be grasped, obtained or exercised. Correspondingly, the complex strategic situation he describes consists of a permanent state of affairs and not a simple moment or instant in which one individual prevails over the other. Moreover, the permanency of power implies inescapability. It presents itself as a continuous force that acts over the social body. Any attempt to modify the particularities of the strategic situation, if successful, only manages to change its attributes, but it does not eliminate power (See Foucault, 1997).

If one accepts the definition of power expounded, one would still have to understand what distinguishes domination from other manifestations of power. According to Lemke (2010):

> Foucault reserves the term 'domination' for those asymmetrical relationships of power in which the freedom subordinated persons have little room for maneuver because of their 'extremely limited margin of freedom'. […] They are characterized by the fact that an individual or a group has succeeded in blocking the field of power relations and in establishing a permanent asymmetry (p. 37).

It is here that power and freedom are theoretically bounded together. Basically, power with very limited freedom is domination; and power with freedom is simply power.

This reasoning leads us to an inescapable question: can power without domination really exist? Don't all manifestations of power constrain freedom? Maybe one illustration can help clarify the trademarks of Foucault's interpretations, so as to distinguish the particularities of domination. The segregation of public bathrooms is a clear example of traditional practices where power exists but it is almost never perceived. As Erving Goffman (1977) carefully explains,

> The *functioning* of sex-differentiated organs is involved, but there is nothing in this functioning that biologically recommends segregation; *that* arrangement is a totally cultural matter […]. […] toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes when in fact it is a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference (p. 316).

What the author describes is a power relation that replicates certain behaviors without the need of coercion or violence. As a matter of fact, power has become so entrenched within society's beliefs that the compliance with the norm seems completely natural. Here, power is not something that one individual or group is endowed with. People comply with the division of the public bathrooms because they perceive it as rational. Desires and beliefs guide their behavioral practices and, though clearly in the presence of a relation of power, they do not perceive the gender division of bathrooms as a form of domination.[3] They freely choose to respect the segregation of bathrooms, without viewing it as an imposition by a specific individual or group.

One might wonder why the discussion of domination is relevant when tackling the subject of gender relations and democracy. Basically, the essence of a democratic system of governance is the consecration of forms of power that minimize the need of coercion and violence. In a democracy, though the nation-state has the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, this type of power is not the most common. In other words, in an ideal democracy *political power* replaces on most occasions *power as domination*.[4] The individual follows the rules because he or she recognizes their political authority and not necessarily because of the threat of the use of violence.

In order to reduce the instances in which coercion is required, democracy accepts hetero-

geneity, rejecting and counterbalancing the forces that seek to posit one unanimous culture as a "true identity". This provides a social consciousness in which the community views the norms and regulations as a source of protection and not as an asymmetrical imposition by a determinate group. Concretely, it provides a political environment that hinders acts of domination that place one group of society over another. This does not mean that power disputes do not take place but that the key element of power derives from its recognition. Accordingly, those who lose in a political runoff acknowledge the victory of the other without the need of coercion or violence. They comprehend the dynamics and reasons behind the political process, considering it not as a form of domination but as a natural result inherent to democracy.

When talking about gender, the premises of democracy expounded must not simply be ignored. The consecration of norms and laws that place women under a state of domination contradicts the very principles of democracy. Consequently, gender relations ought to be allowed to flourish as a result of political power and not as an expression of domination. Hence, the only limitation to the multiple manifestations of gender relations within democracy is traced by the condemnation of gender domination. All other ways of gender interaction that materialize as an outcome of political power, even when they create determinate roles within society, cannot be seen as anti-democratic.

1.3. Parity beyond domination

Keeping in mind the approximation to power discussed, one has to analyze how parity becomes a viable mechanism to resist practices of domination, so as to propagate political power within gender relations. As defended by most of the pro-parity factions and as conceived in many electoral laws,[5] parity refers to candidacies rather than results. As it will be explained, it embodies a democratic instrument that aims at opening a space where gender relations have an actual possibility of contestation. Simply stated, parity centers on two main issues: 1) the creation of an institutional process in which fifty percent of the candidates are women, and 2) the modification of the traditional notions of citizenship.

Ruth Rubio-Marín (2012) provides us with an interesting conceptualization of parity. She sustains,

> [Parity's] core objective is to unsettle the separate spheres tradition, understood as the tradition that separates the public from the private domain; defines them respectively as primarily male and female domains; recognizes only the public sphere as a domain of citizenship and power; devalues the social relevance of the activities and forms of participation that take place in the so-called private sphere while at the same time depoliticizing the forms of male power and hierarchy that find expression within it (p. 103).

This definition goes past the mere understanding of gender parity as a measure that aims to empower women by elaborating policies that augment their representation in appointed bodies and in elected institutions.[6] Her notions of parity surpass the question of numbers and suggest a reconceptualization of citizenship, one that shifts the lines that divide the public and the privet spheres.[7]

Despite the positive aspects, I have one fundamental objection to the author's contentions. I find the use of the term male power troubling. This particular usage of the expression is dangerous for it disregards the influence of gender relations, closing the scope of parity to the question of domination. That is, it neglects the fact that gender relations are mostly the result of shared beliefs and desires.[8] By centering the debate on domination, the importance of forming political power is pushed to the margins of the discussion. If one employs the term male power, readers might be led to believe that men are to blame. Consequently, any disparity bet-

ween the genders could be viewed as a direct result of male replicated practices of domination and not as a mutually constructed reality.

The advocacy for parity cannot be purely seen as a cultural imposition or as a reaction to practices of domination. Parity goes beyond domination and focuses on the promotion of spaces that make political power thrive in gender relations. It is intended to descry the complex dynamics that guide the interaction between men and women, creating a setting in which political deliberation prevails over practices of domination. By focusing on domination, one disregards the main sources that replicate gender relations. Namely, it consecrates an institutional safeguard that hopes to impede the exclusion of women from political life.

I have insisted that democracy should not be about instilling a homogeneous identity or a uniform type of gender relations. Thus, the center of the debate about parity should not be about placing the blame, as if it was an issue of a balance of power where men hold one position and women another; but on how parity serves as an institutional mechanism that helps create a political space for the contestation of gender relations. Accordingly, I define parity as a process that guarantees the *possibility* of contesting gender relations, which redefines the notions of citizenship and recognizes the social value of the activities and ways of participation that take place in the commonly named private sphere.[9] In the last section, I will expand on what the acceptance of this definition implies. For now, I want to address some of the theoretical difficulties and challenges to gender parity.

2. The compatibility of gender parity and democracy

2.1. Dilemmas of equality

One of the most severe theoretical chasms and complications that those who advocate for gender parity encounter has to do with conciliating its promotion with the notion of equality. The challenges emanate primarily from two related fronts, which derive from each other. The first springs from the understanding of equality in its formal sense. Hence, any action that makes a distinction and gives a determinate advantage to a specific community or group is seen as contradictory to the clauses of formal equality,[10] for it unbalances the grounds for political engagement. Those who favor this stance view democracy as a system that is meant to even out the field for the contesting interest to compete. As if transposing the logic of the invisible hand, they comprehend democracy as a system that allows antagonistic interests to fairly dispute for a position in the government's agenda.

This type of reasoning is somewhat similar to what some theorists have categorized as an aggregative model of democracy. It "interprets democracy as a process of aggregating the preferences of citizens in choosing public officials and policies" (Young, 2000, p.19). Under this model, theoretically, the big interests correspond to the preferences that count with the widest and strongest public support. Likewise, in an ideal type of democracy, politicians formulate their proposals in such a way that they encompass the interests of the greatest number of voters. Democracy institutionalizes a competitive process through which political parties and candidates generate propositions that attract the largest number of individuals (Young, 2000).

If democracy is "a form of government in which the ruling power of a State is legally vested, not in a particular class or classes, but in the members of the community as a whole" (Bryce, 1923, p. 23), in the aggregative model the significance rests on the fact that, by giving the power to the people, the governmental agenda should emerge from the competition of interests. This contest of visions and/or interests evolves within a series of categorical norms, which specify some basic binding principles that oblige the restraint of the

parties in conflict. These principles constrain the possibilities of fulfillment of the winning interests by establishing a set of restrictions to their implementation – i.e. the respect of human rights, inclusion, freedom, and common good, among others. Put differently, a democratic system, in order to legitimize a result, "requires that citizens' conflicting interests all be protected equally" (Mansbridge, 1980, p.4).

In a very similar line of thought as the one of the aggregative model, the contradictors of gender parity uphold that the government should only guarantee a *formal* initial station in which all individuals stand as equals, so as to let competing interests combat on a leveled ground. Consequently, the government should solely act to correct and prevent occurrences that generate a threat to the freedom and equality of those who participate. Thus, any affirmative action that artificially boosts the original starting situation of a community or group is considered a danger to the principle of formal equality. It is perceived as a perilous formulation that opens the door for the consecration of policies of unfair disadvantage, favoring some and not others.[11]

As a response to the critics, some pro-parity factions have defended their position by outlining the need for a substantive[12] rather than just formal recognition of equality.[13] They argue that the evenness of the field is simply a judicial fiction that fails to address the substantive deficiencies that can disrupt the proper functioning of democracy. From this perspective, the mere formal understanding of equality actually paves an initial situation in which some groups or communities enjoy a head start that permits them reach power positions more easily. This is due to historical and cultural patterns of marginalization that tile the playing field in such a way that some are granted structural leads while others are constantly held back. Subsequently, those in favor of gender parity reason that, in order to correct the recurrence of practices exclusion, equality should be accepted in its substantive sense; the government is called to correct the relegation of some groups to the sidelines and implement policies that effectively place them in the political playing field.[14]

It is here, nonetheless, that the second front opens. Even when accepting the premises for substantive equality, the contending side fundamentally asserts that the implementation of quotas and parity measures menaces the principle of representation and, correspondingly, the possibility of some type of union. These strictures underpin their allegations on their conceptions of representative democracy. Respectively, they highlight that representation warrants the pursuance of a common good. In this sense, to defend gender parity "would imply the impossibility of one gender representing the interests of the other" (Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, 2009, p. 1179). Both the critics and "most defenders of gender parity emphasize their commitment to the unitary, general, and abstract notion of representation - to the idea that, with or without parity (indeed with or without quotas), elected representatives, both male and female, should represent all citizens, both male and female" (Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, 2009, p. 1180). This position, however, raises a series of questions that create a never-ending circle. Firstly, if one accepts the principle of representation, how can gender parity be justified? Secondly, if one manages to justify gender parity, why would other underrepresented groups not have the same advantages? Thirdly, if all underrepresented groups have access to quotas, then wouldn't the unitary abstract notion of representation become obsolete?

To answer the first questions, defenders of gender equality mostly claim that parity would not affect the principle of representation. In an ideal situation, both women and men would represent all citizens. Parity would only be implemented temporarily so as to make the conditions of formal equality substantial. In other words, parity would be a provisional measure directed at correcting an imbalance in the po-

litical field, with the purpose of eradicating the historical exclusion of women from the public realm.

The implementation of an interim situation of parity, nevertheless, would also justify the creation of quotas for other groups and communities that have also been historically marginalized from the political arena. This would lead to a scenario of mirror representation. Under this conception, "ideas cannot be entirely dissociated from experience and identity, so that there is a need for representative political bodies to reflect more accurately the plurality of the society they represent" (Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, 2009, p. 1180). Correspondingly, via the premises of mirror representation, a multiplicity of quotas would exist, so that each group represents its particular interest. As a consequence, the public space would emulate the heterogeneous composition of the population.

Wouldn't the imposition of a mirror type of democracy fragment the abstract notion of representation? This is basically the doubt that the third question raises; and, paradoxically, the answer takes us back to the first interrogation, starting a problematic circle that at first sight seems to have no way out. Mirror representation would theoretically reject the possibility of a shared common democratic identity, and probably propagate the consolidations of true identities that distance themselves from the ideals that characterize the social body. Each group, because of the peculiarities of their experiences, would only be able to represent itself. Under this scenario, negotiation and communication between the various factions could exist, but the end result would resemble a fragmented body, rather than a representative union that synthesizes the identity of whole.

One might ask: could one justify gender parity through the principle of equality in a way that it benefits only women and not other underrepresented groups? Would this theoretical justification be inconsistent with the ideals of democracy? At first sight, the structure of such a vindication resembles what George Orwell famously coined as "doublethink", which means "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them" (Orwell, 1948, p. 270). Explicitly, any allegation in this direction would not only appear to oppose to the ideal of equality, but also disregard the elements that make up the democracy.

In order to escape this never-ending circle, pro-parity supporters have developed a variety of theoretical approximations. Blanca Rodríguez-Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Marín (2009), for example, following Pateman's understanding of the sexual contract,[15] advocate for the necessity of parity in order to dislocate the lines that separate public from private acts. They contend that parity dismantles the sexual contract and forms a broader and more inclusive conception of public sphere.[16] As a way to justify parity, the authors differentiate the initial position of women from that of other underrepresented groups, by outlining the masculine preponderant understanding of citizenship and the fact that gender is a transversal feature that is present in all races, nationalities, or religions. They write,

> This does not mean that the exclusion or underrepresentation of other groups is irrelevant or insufficiently expressive of a democratic deficit that deserves attention. It means rather that parity has its own democratic logic, a logic distinct from, though compatible with, the logic of representation quotas of minority groups. Parity democracy is then an enterprise concerned with redefining the sexes, state, and democracy in such a way that human interdependence gains a central place in the public sphere (Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, 2009, p. 1183).

I agree with the authors but also think it is pivotal to emphasize a greater difference between the marginalization of minorities and that of women. I believe that the failure to distinguish the particularities of women's situation

and to evidence its dissimilarity with the condition of other underrepresented groups hinders the advancement towards women's inclusion in the public sphere. More precisely, I consider that there has been a theoretical miscalculation in which the individualities of gender relations and hate relations have not been fully examined.

2.2. Hate and gender relations

Some feminists have adopted an openly belligerent position when addressing women's rights. They have exceedingly centered on situations of domination, in which women are overpowered by men's desires and beliefs. This causes the assimilation of women's condition to that of the other underrepresented groups. More concretely, the depiction of the situation of women primarily as one against domination makes their struggle more similar to that of other marginalized communities. Under these types of approximations, two separate countering forces are the portrayed: the oppressor and oppressed. The relation between men and women is then compared to other relations, in which the divisions between the sides are more precisely demarcated.

Furthermore, some authors have concentrated on highlighting the particularity of women's situation. Accordingly, they argue that gender:

> Is not merely another factor of differentiation: it is, by nature, cross-cutting in that it is immutable, noncontingent, or, as claimed, the *prima division* (the universal difference) because it is the only difference that cannot be disassociated from the notion of personhood (Rodríguez-Ruiz & Rubio-Marín, 2008, p. 302).

Though the contentions within these arguments are strong, they disregard the uniqueness of gender relations. Hence, this position misses the fact that it is not only a question about women or men's particular identity or difference but about their shared desires and beliefs.

The practices that characterize gender relations are very distant to those that typify hate relations. Consistently, when analyzing why gender parity should be seen as a reasonable measure, one has to center in gender relations rather than in relations of hate. Let me explicate. Hate relations are those in which practices of domination are the main form of interaction. Thus, they constitute a "relationship of violence [that] acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities" (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). Explicitly, each side in a hate relation holds a determinate identity that concretely opposes to the other's identity. Racism, homophobia, fundamentalism, xenophobia, and other forms of isms and phobias are all types of hate relations. Therefore, the essence of contradiction and conflict entails the promotion of beliefs and desires that advocate for the constitution of relations of domination. Hate relations conjugate desires and beliefs that pervade intolerance, exclusion, and inequality.

Albeit one acknowledges that in the interaction between men and women some situations inherent to hate relations occur, domination is not the preponderant trait present in gender relations.[17] By placing too much attention on practices of hate, one fails to recognize the particularity of gender relations. That is, one disregards the main force that replicates the desires and beliefs that frame male and female interaction. To overlook the distinctiveness of gender relations causes the reduction and simplification of the relations of men and women to the realm of domination. This theoretical approach not only constitutes a critical mistake but also takes away some of the main justifications for gender parity.

Taking these ideas into account, I will attempt to justify gender parity from a gender relation's perspective. I will try to answer to the three inquires to gender parity, searching for a theoretical way to escape the never-ending circle. Namely, I will examine how gender parity

can be justified, why other underrepresented vulnerable groups not necessarily have the same advantages, and why gender parity fits into the unitary abstract notion of representation.

2.3. Can gender parity be justified?

As argued before, gender relations are not mainly the result of domination. They are also the reflection of a set shared of beliefs and desires that guide the interaction between women and men.[18] Accordingly, in a democracy, gender relations should be granted a space where their predominant practices can be contested. Gender parity, therefore, is not a consecration of two distinct identities (men's and women's), but the recognition of the duality of gender interaction. It is not a question of the existence of opposing beliefs and desires; it is a matter of integrating both sides that make up the human sexuality.

Because of cultural and historical reasons, the public domain has been largely male directed. With the transformation of democracy's boundaries of signification, the exclusion of women from the public realm begins to be viewed as an internal contradiction to democracy. The marginalization of women from the public sphere is a potential source of domination that democratic institutions must aim to control, oversee, and monitor. If democracy strives to eradicate practices of domination that embody patterns of inequality and intolerance, gender parity materializes as a viable measure of regulation.

Gender parity opens a space for communication, in which gender relations can be discussed freely. It guarantees both sides the opportunity of communicating on equal grounds in order to determine the guidelines for male/female interaction. Essentially, gender parity permits the democratic deliberation of the beliefs and desires that characterize gender relations within society, giving each side an equal voice to put their opinion through. This way, gender parity serves as one democratic institutional mechanism that helps avoid the vicissitudes of gender domination. In a hypothetical situation, in which one side would seek to maintain the desires and beliefs that guide the interaction between the sexes by force and violence, gender parity could be one instrument to correct and counterbalance this anti-democratic force. Concretely, gender parity is not about how each side constructs its own identity, but how they work together to create, transform, and maintain the identity that typifies their gender relations.

2.4. Would other underrepresented groups not have the same advantages?

The establishment of quotas aims to bring underrepresented groups into the public sphere. Fundamentally, it is projected to correct phobias and isms within society by making the representative body more heterogeneous. As it was discussed, gender relations are fundamentally different from relations of hate. I do not mean to indicate that the establishment of quotas to benefit underrepresented groups is unimportant. I do want to highlight, however, the categorical difference between gender relations and relations of hate; and, consequently, the difference between gender parity and other type of quotas.

As expounded before, gender relations are not the consecration of two separate identities. Contrarily, they are a reflection of a set of desires and beliefs shared by both men and women. Relations of hate, on the other hand, do emerge as a division of two or more identities. If one recognizes this fundamental difference, one has to wonder if the same institutional mechanism can serve to generate a particular result: specifically, the consolidation of a stronger democratic identity.

As we saw, the objective of gender parity is the protection of gender relations, the construction of a space where these can be constantly contested and transformed by both of the sides involved. It is not a question of two separate identities, but of an identity shared by both.

Quotas on the other hand would aim at transforming hate relations into power relations created by shared beliefs and desires. I am not here to analyze whether this is possible or not.[19] If quotas serve as a way to correct hate relations and convert them into power relations that avoid true identities and domination, I think they need to be implemented. This topic, nonetheless, would need its own particular theoretical and philosophical study. Basically, one must examine if minority quotas can be a proper democratic instrument to change hate relations.

2.5. Does gender parity fit into the unitary abstract notion of representation?

As it was addressed before, gender parity would not constitute a system of opposing identities. It does not emerge from a conception of a mirror democracy. Gender parity is not a question of consecrating a separate irreconcilable identity. Contrarily, it centers on how gender relations are the result of a complex situation of interaction between women and men. As a historical construction, these relations incarnate the particular cultural desires and beliefs. They do not support themselves on mainly domination but are a shared identity that guides practices of communication. For this reason, gender party does not distance itself from the unitary abstract notion of representation. On the contrary, it symbolizes the formation of a democratic identity that helps impede the displacement of gender relations towards domination.

3. The potential of gender parity

There is no political consensus on whether democratic measures that foster and guarantee matching presence in representative bodies are appropriate (Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, 2008, p. 287). I think, nevertheless, that the importance of gender parity measures lies on the recognition of gender relations. Charles Tilly observed that the causes of a revolution involve "the appearance of contenders […], commitment to these claims by a significant segment of the population, [and] incapacity or unwillingness of the agents of the government to suppress the alternative coalition and/or commitment to its claims" (Tilly, 1978, p. 200). If one takes this into account, the implementation of gender parity would make the government both incapable and unwilling to oppose to a democratic transformation of gender relations. Basically, it would inhibit acts of coercion and violence.

Moreover, though my definition goes beyond the mere understanding of gender parity as a project that aims to empower women by elaborating policies that augment their representation in appointed bodies or in elected institutions, gender parity still implies the possibility of equal representation. Two distinct strategies would make up the institutionalization of parity.

The first rests on the reconfiguration of the public sphere, so as to integrate the actions that traditionally have been seen as private. Gender parity here entails the recognition of acts of caring and of interdependency, the search for policies that politicize gender relations, and the education of citizenry on the ideals of democracy. Rules, norms, and plans to pervade gender parity encompass the creation of ministries, agencies, and other institutional offices that concentrate on bringing into the public debate the voices that for years have been confined to the private sphere. It is not about the promotion of positive actions, but about the reconfiguration of citizenship as a whole: about the elaboration of spaces where gender relations come into politics.

The second strategy lies on the *possibility* of equal representation. I highlight the word possibility because gender parity is not about demanding a result of political participation. In other words, it is not about stating that fifty percent of the representatives of in elected institutions have to be men, and the other fifty women. The type of process that gender parity comprehends is that the fifty percent of the can-

didates that participate in electoral processes have to be women. Though this demand seems to go back to the issue of numbers, it distances itself by stressing the importance of the process rather than the result. If the citizenry decides to vote for a male directed public sphere because of their understanding of gender relations, the result is equally valid. The emphasis on parity is then on the enactment of a mechanism that gives a possibility for the contestation of predominant gender relations.

The disregard for gender parity as an opportunity for actual equal representation can cause the replication of practices of domination. When institutionalizing the possibility of creating a 50/50 representative body, gender parity stands as a mechanism that controls that majority forces do not disregard the duality of gender relations. Correspondingly, the advocacy for gender parity does not consist on measuring the number of men vs. the number of women in the representative bodies, but on endorsing the process. It involves guaranteeing the possibility of democratic change.

Likewise, gender parity could serve as one institutional tool that impedes that "an individual or a group […] [succeeds] in blocking the field of power relations and in establishing a permanent asymmetry" (Lemke, 2010, p. 37). The enforcement of the possibility of making representation perfectly symmetrical position itself as a regulative force that intends to correct the disparities that may and do exist within gender relations. These are not only asymmetries in regards to the number of representatives, but also those that present themselves as a deficiency of equal recognition.

Basically, gender parity would permit a more adequate functioning of a deliberative model democracy. This model describes democratic deliberation as a "form of practical reason, [in which] participants […] offer proposals for how best to solve problems to meet legitimate needs, and so on, and they present arguments through which they aim to persuade others to accept their proposals" (Young, 2000, p. 22). As a result, the big interests emerge from a complex communication process through which the diverse members of society determine which collective proposals are accepted based on reason (Cohen, 1989; Mansbridge, 1980, Bohman, 1996). In this sense, the approval of a proposal is not determined merely by the pure strength of the number. It is not only a question of which interests gain the greatest amount of votes. Participants in the deliberative model reach a decision by a process of discussion through which the collective selects the proposals that contain the most reasonable arguments. Communication plays a vital role in the decision making process, for it is through the discussion of ideas that the private interests advance towards the construction of collective interests.

Parity constitutes an institutional mechanism that opens the door for the actual deliberation between genders. This is because it places institutional boundaries that reduce the chances of domination within gender relations. It gives society the possibility of questioning predominant gender practices that guide the interaction between men and women. Without gender parity, the discussion of ideas in many countries will persistently reflect the interest of a predominantly controlled male government. Even if male leaders continue to occupy most of the seats of congress or parliament because of gender desires and beliefs, parity would not only provide the continual possibility of configuring a more gender balanced system, but also puts the discussion of gender relations on the table of deliberation. It allows future transformations to occur and, at the same time, creates institutional limits that protect democracy from regression, from the exclusion of women of the political debates.

Conclusion

The rhetoric about democracy has permeated the research of politics throughout the

national and international spectrum. Growing at an exponential rate, the literature on the promotion of human rights, the role of civil society, the defense of freedoms, the advocacy for participation -i.e. all that is related to the study of democratic systems-, tends to cluster and overly narrow down most of the social phenomena and crisis. It seems that the answer to social ordeals always leads towards democracy (or a lack of it). Despite the growing emphasis on the importance of democracy, the desire for immediate transformations towards a more democratic world has paradoxically boosted undemocratic practices, which somehow find a justification if the end result is a more democratic society.

The common good in democracy does not emerge from the existence of uniform interests; but it can be "interpreted simply as the addressing of problems that people face together, without any assumption that these people have common interests or common way of life, or that they must subordinate or transcend the particular interest and values that differentiate them" (Young, 2000, p. 40). Chiefly, the common good is not a clear route that guides society to specific point of arrival. On the contrary, the common good forms from the communication of difference.

As recognition of cultural divergences, gender parity enables a process in which the gender relations can be defined according to democratic principles.[20] Accordingly, parity does not impose a uniform understanding of the gender relations, nor does it disregard cultural differences. It creates a space where all the communities can communicate in the public sphere so as to debate the desires and beliefs that replicate patterns of interaction between men and women. If "democratic change needs to be generated through democratic forms of action" (Teivainen, 2011, p. 182), then gender parity is a democratic mechanism to enable the manifestation of the voices that demand transformative actions.

Finally, the recognition of difference is essential when undertaking the study of democracy and gender. The theoretical and practical approaches that propose to create a more democratic world must learn from heterogeneity, and not see the world through the prism of uniformity. Those who advocate for the propagation of democracy cannot apply a one model fit all strategy. On the contrary, they must embrace difference and find ways so that democracy can integrate more easily within the cultural imaginary.

Notes

[1] Particularly the theory of democratic peace has somehow mutated into a new form of imperialism that justifies the imposition of democracy as a viable way of constructing democratic societies. Heikki Patomäki analyzes the flaws that permeate the democratic theory. See Patomäki (2008).

[2] Charter Taylor (1994) and Axel Honneth (1995) are two authors who analyze the topic of culture from different perspectives, examining how democracy deals with problems of recognition.

[3] Though some in society might question the division of public bathrooms and conceive it as a form of domination, most comply with the segregation for they perceive it as important.

[4] Mark Haugaard (2010, p. 1051) elaborates a detailed analysis on how power relations are created in a democratic system. He defends that in an ideal democracy *political power* replaces in most instances *power as domination*.

[5] See Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, (2009); Parijs, (1996); Warren, (1996).

[6] I chose the conceptualization given by Ruth Rubio-Marín because she is one of the authors that has emphasized on the need for changing the notions of citizenship when

addressing the subject of gender parity. She has written extensively on the subject of democratic parity, elaborating some of the key works on the topic. Other authors have also retraced the definitional borders that separate the public and the private. However, as Rubio-Marín, they have also centered on the issues of domination. See: Walby (1994); Jónasdóttir (1988); Keating (2007); Pateman (1988); Waylen (1994); Beer (2009); Adkins (2008); Boucher (2003).

[7] In regards to the private sphere, Raia Prokhovinik (1998) writes, "Women who choose to stay in the private realm are undervalued as people, both by society and by men. The caring and nurturing undertaken by such women is taken for granted; its perceived social value is very low. However this paper would argue that the 'natural obligations' parents are seen to have in bringing up children should also be recognized and valued as ethically-grounded 'civic obligations', as part of citizenship." (p. 88)

[8] I understand that in some respects gender relations are the result of situations of domination. Rape is a clear example of a manifestation of asymmetric power within gender relations. I contend, however, that the primary force that drives gender relations is not domination but shared desires and beliefs.

[9] This definition is very similar to the one given by Rubio-Marín (2012, p. 103). It emphasizes, however, on the duality of gender relations and distances itself from the dichotonomous logic that places men in one side and women on the other.

[10] Formal equality refers to the recognition of being equal under the law. Material equality transcends the concept of formal equality and defends that the mere recognition of equality under the law does not automatically generate an actual equality within society.

[11] A series of authors have analyzed the dilemmas of formal equality. See Rodríguez-Ruiz, & Rubio-Marín, (2009); Young, (1990); Goodin, (1966); Parijs, (1996); Warren, (1996).

[12] Iris Young also analyses how substantive inequalities threaten the proper functioning of democracy. She states, "[w]here there are structural inequalities of wealth and power, formally democratic procedures are likely to reinforce them, because privileged people are able to marginalize the voices and issues of those less privileged" (Young, 2000, p. 34).

[13] Charles Beitz (1990) elaborates a comprehensive theory of political equality. See also Nussbaum, (1997); Adkins, (2008); Young, (2000)

[14] See Young (2000); Beer (2009); Prokhovinik (1998); Beitz, (1990).

[15] Pateman viewed the social contract that founded the modern sovereign state as an enactment of a sexual contract, through which women were ostracized from the public realm and confined to the private sphere. This act of segregation permitted the construction of a conception of independence that, in theory, was required to engage in politics. See Pateman (1988).

[16] See also Boucher (2003); Jónasdóttir (1988); Walby (1994); Prokhovnik (1998).

[17] Other writers have also distanced themselves from an approximation to gender relations that focuses primarily on domination. See Jónasdóttir (1988).

[18] For example, Jónasdóttir defends that relations of power should not be reduced to acts of violence. The author holds that one should unveil the acts of power that go beyond physical violence. She writes, "it may seem strange, but I think that it is the 'freely given' – and taken – love that should be centered" (Jónasdóttir, 1988, p. 312).

[19] See Taylor, (1994); Honneth (1995).

[20] Gender parity is not the only mechanism to transform the gender relations. Education plays a key role in changing practices of domination. As claimed by Osler and Starkey, "The struggle for the right to education can be seen as part of the struggle for citizenship. Full citizenship depends on accessing not only the right of education but a number of rights in education and through it. Thus the right to education is critical in the struggle for citizenship. It is only when schooling is made accessible, acceptable, and adaptable to learners' needs that the right can be realized" (Osler, & Starkey, 2005, p. 77). Furthermore, according to Fuchs and Hoecker (2004, p. 4), "European surveys have shown that with an increasing level of education, the 'gen'.

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