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Culture, gender and human rights: contrasting perspectives from the global North and the global South

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RESUMO
Serão abordados os conceitos de gênero, cultura e direitos humanos presentes no livro de Sally Merry sobre a evolução do movimento internacional de violência contra as mulheres. O trabalho de Merry será então construtivamente contrastado e comparado com a ideia de Hanna Rosin envolvendo o fim dos homens e a ascensão das mulheres. Serão analisadas as ideias sobre o Norte global e o Sul global de ambos os autores, nomeadamente, através da forma como o gênero é definido, tanto para as mulheres como para os homens, não só à escala local, mas também à escala global.

Palavras chaves: gênero, cultura, diretos humanos, violência contra a mulher

ABSTRACT
The concepts of gender, culture and human rights in Sally Merry´s book on the evolution of the international movement of violence against women will be approached. Merry´s work will then constructively be contrasted and compared with Hanna Rosin´s idea involving the end of men and the rise of women. The ideas on the global North and the global South of both authors will be analysed, namely, through how gender is defined, both for women and for men, not only on a local but also on a global scale.

Keywords: gender, culture, human rights, violence against women

RESUMÉN
Se abordarán los conceptos de género, cultura y derechos humanos en el libro de Sally Merry sobre la evolución del movimiento internacional de violencia contra las mujeres. Luego, el trabajo de Merry será contrastado y comparado de manera constructiva con la idea de Hanna Rosin sobre el fin de los hombres y el ascenso de las mujeres. Se analizarán las ideas sobre el Norte global y el Sur global de ambos los autores, es decir, a través de cómo se define el género, tanto para mujeres como para hombres, no sólo a escala local sino también global.

Palabras clave: género, cultura, derechos humanos, violencia contra las mujeres.

RÉSUME

Les concepts de genre, de culture et de droits humains dans le livre de Sally Merry sur l´évolution du mouvement international de violence contre les femmes seront abordés. Le travail de Merry sera ensuite contrasté et comparé de manière constructive à l´idée de Hanna Rosin impliquant la fin des hommes et l´essor des femmes. Les idées sur le Nord et le Sud des deux auteurs seront analysées, notamment à travers la manière dont le genre est défini, tant pour les femmes que pour les hommes, non seulement à l´échelle locale mais aussi à l´échelle mondiale.

Mots-clés: genre, culture, droits humains, violence contre les femmes.

RIASSUNTO

Verranno affrontati i concetti di genere, cultura e diritti umani presenti nel libro di Sally Merry sull´evoluzione del movimento internazionale contro la violenza contro le donne. Il lavoro di Merry verrà poi contrastato e confrontato in modo costruttivo con l´idea di Hanna Rosin che prevede la fine degli uomini e l´ascesa delle donne. Verranno analizzate le idee sul Nord globale e sul Sud globale di entrambi gli autori, ovvero attraverso il modo in cui viene definito il genere, sia per le donne che per gli uomini, non solo su scala locale ma anche globale.

Parole chiave: genere, cultura, diritti umani, violenza contro le donne.

Introduction:

Sally Merry´s book, entitled "Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice", portrays the contrasts between the way human rights are lived out on a local level, in opposition to the global perspectives regarding human rights. One of the first questions the author raises is whether or not people in local communities reject what is unfamiliar to them (Merry, 1994: 1). Merry uses the evolution of human rights perspectives regarding violence against women to confront global views with local views, as human rights have become a major global approach to social justice, alongside local activism. Human rights are seen as preconceived ideas regarding the nature of people, communities, the state, and embedded in cultural assumptions. On the other hand, Merry considers there is the need for human rights ideas to be a part of the consciousness of everyday people, in order to overcome the global/local divide between transnational elites and local activism (Merry, 1994: 2-3).

Amidst the efforts carried out by human rights law to set universal standards, the adaptation of these standards to local settings often reveals that local conditions are irrelevant to global debates. Moreover, human rights ideas are frequently packaged in a way that enables their adoption, but also need to be presented in local cultural terms, in order to be persuasive (Merry, 1994: 4-5).

Merry goes further into the concept of culture within the context of human rights. She draws a parallel in the contrast been the global and the local, as rights are to culture. Moreover, the author points out the global North/global South divide, and the fact that the south is awash with cultures, which are somehow absent from the global north, as if these cultures from the global south have no contact with capitalism or transnational superpowers originated in the so-called "global North", tendentiously seen as unaffected by culture (Merry, 1994: 6-7).

On the other hand, Merry notes that culture is often used to resist human rights, as essentialized concepts remain popular among cultural relativists. However, culture, as capitalism and patriarchy, are not homogeneous entities. Universalist principles do not apply to all cultures, nor does the respect for culture trump the respect for universal human rights standards (Merry, 1994: 7-8).

The balance should be somewhere in the middle, with culture as a

context for human rights mobilization. Just like culture, this author considers that gender is also hybrid and porous, as struggles over cultural values can be looked upon as struggles for gender equality (Merry, 1994: 8-9).

The understanding of gender is therefore as complex and fluid as the understanding of culture, and, like culture, it is socially constructed and goes beyond certain binary conceptions.

Just as the tradition/modernity binary needs to be overcome, so does the male/female binary. Culture, like gender, are therefore heterogeneous concepts, which cannot be viewed as totally fixed or totally malleable, according to Merry (Merry, 1994: 13 and 15).

Culture often appears as tradition in the human rights activism discourse, as well as “primitive”, in opposition to human rights, which would be “civilized”, or more evolved. Within this framework, the so-called “global South” is often referred to in order to describe the poor countries from that part of the world, as opposed to European or North American countries (Merry, 1994:12-13). Moreover, still according to Merry, culture is “rural” and abundant in the villages of the global South and, per opposition, culture is absent in United Nations conferences in the global North.

According to this author, human rights law itself is a cultural system, based on a culture of transnational modernity, which specifies, among other procedures and conceptions, the definitions of gender roles (Merry, 1994, 16). Merry refers to transnational elites and cultural flows in the process of understanding the interface between the global and the local, and considers global cultural flows “(…) channelled by global inequalities of resources and power” (Merry, 1994: 20).Merry points out the need for a holistic image of culture in order to present a more persuasive human rights package to the human rights transnational elites of the global North (Merry, 1994: 22-24).

Merry´s portrayal of the evolution of the concept violence against women as a human rights violation in the eyes of the global North can be contrasted and compared with Rosin’s portrayal of men and women in the global North (Merry, 1994: 24-25).

Women´s rights agendas are used back and forth in this global/local interface, and are often successfully lobbied for in international human rights contexts. This process of homogenization and packaging of women´s human rights issues may leave some people out of the human rights culture/gender loop (Merry, 1994: 18-19).

Therefore, the objective of the first part of the paper will be to follow Merry´s line of thought. In Merry´s work, the violence against women movement is used as a case study for pointing out the contradictions between culture and rights. In order to surpass them, Merry considers there is a need for cultural transformation involving a different approach to cultural understandings of gender and sexuality (Merry, 1994: 24-25).

Merry makes an ethnographic analysis of globalization as a transnational phenomenon, in a social world on both a local and global scale, which exists in various spaces, even though words and practices around them look similar, particularly when it comes to the construction of the human rights rhetoric (Merry, 1994: 29-30).

Within this context, the culture of transnational modernity for Merry does not consider the "Third World" as excluded from the UN/NGO world under analysis, but more those who are poor, not only in rural but also in urban settings from anywhere on the globe (Merry, 1994: 31).

In the second part, the paper will also attempt to critically analyse "The End of Men: And the Rise of Women", wherein Hanna Rosin draws a new picture of women and men in "today´s world". The author notes that women are undeniably ahead of men nowadays, and points out the profound implications of this shift on various societal levels (Rosin, 2013: 1-16). However, is this author´s narrative really including the global South, or is she just considering the global North as the norm? This perspective can be compared to the setting for gender issues in the human rights system described by Merry, and critiqued in a similar way, when she points out the absence of local relevance in human rights standard settings.

In the third part of this analysis, I will attempt to render a constructive critique based on the contrast and comparison of these two authors.

1. Sally Engle Merry's perspectives on human rights, culture, and gender:

In her work, Merry analyses consensus building which produces human rights law. She describes this space, with its own norms, values and cultural practices, and points out its participants. As NGO actors and government representatives stand both in local and global places when entering this conversation, Merry defines this as a "transnational culture of modernity. She points out that this culture is based on the formal equality of nations, but

that it is also a secular, universalistic and English-speaking one (Merry, 1994: 31). Merry proceeds to point out signs of the imbalance of power between countries which are represented in the UN (i.e. their percentage in payment of the UN budget) (Merry, 1994: 40). Even though she notes the language of UN documents is not necessarily determined by the global North, she does stress that Spanish-speaking representatives complained about feeling excluded from a more active. (Merry, 1994: 42-44). Another form of exclusion involves unequal resources between poor countries from the global South and those from the global North (Merry, 1994: 45).

The cultural system within the UN is complex and Merry highlights it takes time to learn, giving more leeway to those with more experience (Merry, 1994: 47). Nevertheless, she concludes that this process of creation of human rights is shaped by global inequalities which affect the power of decision of countries in the UN (Merry, 1994: 48). She also notes the limitations in NGO participation in UN meetings, as well as the different statuses among NGOs´ themselves (Merry, 1994: 50-51). Merry points out the hierarchy among NGOs´, stating that “The sharp resource disparities between North and South radically limit the ability of poorer NGOs´ to participate in the process" (Merry, 1994: 52-53). Furthermore, funding is critical for NGOs´ and its origin is mostly from the global North. Organizations from poorer countries are unable to attend UN meetings in Europe or the USA, and major funders are often reluctant to provide financial support to unknown, smaller, more recent organizations (Merry, 1994: 54-55).

One of the first references to gender imbalance within the UN system is made by Merry in her analysis of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), when she describes it´s body as largely male, noting its core concerns are civil and political rights (CPR), such as torture or freedom of expression, but that focus is evolving towards economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR), as well as women´s rights and indigenous people´s rights (Merry, 1994: 54-55).Whether this association is intended or unintended, it can be interpreted in an extremely relevant way in order to attempt to point out a dichotomy between global North/global South issues and male/female binary divisions within the human rights system.

Such rights (ESCR), since their establishment, are not immediately enforceable according to their respective UN Covenant, unlike civil and political rights, which are immediately enforceable by States. A quick overview of Article 2 in each of the covenants will clarify the different status and degrees of demand in implementation of both sets of rights (CPR and

ESCR). ESCR, particularly education and social rights, seem to be destined to the so-called "minorities", which include women, while CPR appear to be "genderless". Here again the absence of culture/gender seems be evident in the global North UN system, while gender issues, education and social rights are left behind in local contexts where national sovereignty seems to limit international intervention. Merry also concludes that "Document drafting is a process of cultural creation.", and classifies the community that emerges from this transnational discursive process as epistemic. However, the outcome is positive according to Merry, due to global consensus, even if the final language of the documents can be considered vacuous. (Merry, 1994: 60-61). As for Special Rapporteur Reports, those which challenge cultural practises tend to encounter more resistance, according to Merry, referring to a particular rapporteur´s report which notes "cultural relativism" is often used as an excuse to permit inhumane and discriminatory practices against women. (Merry, 1994: 62-63). Furthermore, she highlights the fact that this report focuses mostly on continents from the global South, even though it was intended to be inclusive (Merry, 1994: 63). Could this not be a recurrent issue? As mentioned before in this body of work, the global North is often regarded as "cultureless". Therefore, the "cultures" of the global North are not looked into, whether we are looking at violence, women´s sexuality or gender issues in general. The fact that this particular report referred to culture as national identity (rather than as tradition) is one of the reasons Merry points out for the greater resistance. Tradition and custom were concepts associated to the "uneducated, rural poor" from the global South, and the shift towards culture as national identity was provocative, in the sense that it confronted what Merry calls the "transnational elite activists" with the fact that their "national practices" were not as modern as they perceived them to be, which placed their cultural practices closer to tradition (Merry, 1994: 64). In contrast, a country from the global South was also given as an example of the resistance to the concept of custom being included in the concept of culture, as with honour killings ((Merry, 1994: 64-65).

In one of the few references made directly about men, Merry notes that they were the most resistant, in stating that human rights were not just "Western", and would not have the global North imposing their values on them. Once again, one can draw from these parallels- global North/ lack of cultures and global South / cultural relativism— as well as a gender connotation between cultural relativism and patriarchy (predominant in the global South) and, per opposition, absent from the global North ((Merry, 1994: 65).

Within the context of the Commission on Human Rights and the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW), major policy documents set standards for those who wish to be members of the "civilized" international community. Human rights, and particularly the status of women, have become a measure of good governance and a pre-condition for aid by international donor agencies (Merry, 1994: 66-68).

As for the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), Merry considers it fosters new cultural understandings of gender and violence, even though it has limited power to compel states to comply. Acceptance of human rights seems to be the new international "standard of civilization", in a way which this author considers to resonate to colonial conceptions of what it means to be "civilized" (Merry, 1994:72-73). She considers the standard for "civilized status" in this context to be based on colonialist ideas, based on European definitions of "moral virtue". (Merry, 1994: 79).

Merry further attempts to explore how culture is conceptualized within the CEDAW process, approaching tensions between the application of global standards and local political contexts. She notes the CEDAW is "committed to universalism". It explicitly calls for cultural changes in gender roles (Merry, 1994: 73-75). The General Recommendations produced by the committee develop the convention´s obligations, and this is how, according to Merry, violence against women became included on the CEDAW agenda (Merry, 1994:75-77). CEDAW has been critically approached by feminists and the convention has been updated and adapted to contemporary feminist thinking (Merry, 1994: 78).

The fact that the USA has not ratified CEDAW, as well as other human rights conventions, is pointed out as contributing to a double standard that discredits the human rights system as a whole, on the other hand, States from the global South, according to Merry, complain it is hard for them to comply without financial aid from the global North (Merry, 1994: 80).

The hearings of the Committee are fundamentally political, in Merry´s view, and therefore the focus of the process is to create violence against women as a "cultural category", in order to mobilize and globally legitimize gender equality (Merry, 1994: 81-82). Countries care about their "international community reputation", but those that are dominant from a political and economic level are less vulnerable to international pressure (i.e. the USA) (Merry, 1994: 88-89).

The cultural meanings produced by the ratification of CEDAW are associated with what Merry considers to be "values of a secular global modernity" and, consequentially, a particular cultural understanding of gender. International human rights law is similar to national law, as compliance depends on the extent to which legal concepts are embedded in cultural practice, and influence it beyond the reach of their sanctions (Merry, 1994: 89-90).

So, how is culture discussed in CEDAW hearings? According to Merry, the committee considers culture, religion or custom should not justify human rights violations. Many countries, however, use patriarchal culture as an excuse not to comply, for example (Merry, 1994: 90-91).

On the other hand, committee members refer to culture more often as an "obstacle to change" than a "mode of transformation". Culture as "national essence" or "tradition" also pops up as a problem in committee discussions. (Merry, 1994: 91-92).

Faced with reports from countries from the global South, where culture is often presented as a good excuse for failure, the national elites which participate in these international realms are seen by Merry to juxtapose their "urban and educated world" to the "apparently ancient and unchanging traditional culture of rural areas, riddled with patriarchal culture". Merry associates this to the colonial past, as countries from the global South appear to promote human rights in order to pursue liberal development models and foreign partnerships regarding their resources (Merry, 1994: 94-95). She notes significant differences in the way countries talk about the role of culture, either in the expression of the efforts to overcome issues like gender stereotypes. Cultural distinctiveness is sometimes celebrated, mostly by those countries where less is being done for women´s rights. However, references to "attitudes and traditions" did pop up in a report from Denmark, when referring to men not taking parental leave (Merry, 1994: 98-99).

Other contradictions are pointed out by Merry, such as the fact that "national culture" seems to be something that should be valued, while culture in "rural villages" or in "immigrant minorities" seems to be something that must not remain the same (i.e. European countries tend to try to change cultural practices of these communities) (Merry, 1994: 98-99).

It is when the "educated urban elites" belonging to countries from

the global North call for reforms that "national culture" becomes desirable. Merry contrasts the unequal power of "culture at the center" and "culture at the margins" within the international human rights framework played out by what takes place in the CEDAW committee, and goes on to propose a more fluid conception of culture. Instead of being static and unquestioned, culture can therefore be seen as contested and redefined in a variety of settings, which my lead to cultural transformation. This result, according to Merry, would be much more effective in the human rights monitoring process than sanctions for cultural differences. Furthermore, this author notes that marginalizing rural or immigrant people represents a danger of replication of colonial discourses in human rights language. (Merry, 1994: 100).

Merry´s conclusions regarding the CEDAW process are clear: post-colonial elites and elites from the global North are incorporated in human rights processes. Even though she concludes it is not an exclusively Western space, it does, however portray a neoliberal perspective of modernity. These processes therefore produce norms that reflect this human rights culture (Merry, 1994: 100).

Specifically regarding violence against women, the author notes it has been influenced by the West and shaped by these "cosmopolitan elites", according to whom gender equality is seen as the best way to protect women from violence. Therefore, culture or religious difference can´t compromise universal standards (i.e. cultural assumptions such as the autonomous self, the capacity to make choices, or the possession of rights). (Merry, 1994: 100-101).

Culture, on the other hand, is seen as irrational, unchanging, patriarchal and a justification for oppression. The fact that the mastery of English ends up being essential in order to participate in these meetings is often used as an example by Merry to point out what can be seen as an indirect form of exclusion. She ends up noting it is a mostly neoliberal backdrop, even though rule of law, protection of the individual from violence and accountability of state actors for human rights violations are basic values. (Merry, 1994: 100-101).

Merry notes that the way culture is perceived by its participants, as something far away, in villages, mountains, minority communities is a contradiction. The fact that they are referred to as static and timeless "traditional societies" creates a distance that leads to their lack of representation at "global conference tables". The author ends up pointing

out the parallel with “the appeal of civilization during the era of the empire”. This would be translated, according to Merry to the fact that culture is buried in the background of these “everyday practices of modernity”, where “backward others” in colonial times have now been substituted by “(...) those who are ‘developing’ but still burdened by culture” (Merry, 1994: 101-102).

Negotiating the divide between the more generalizing strategies of the human rights law system and the work of local activists is a “key human rights problem”, according to this author, as human rights interventions are based on a neoliberal vision of social justice, as opposed to other community-based, socialist or religious conceptions of justice (Merry, 1994: 103).

CEDAW rejects that culture can justify practices detrimental to women´s human rights. Transnational woman´s rights activists agree, as they use the power of human rights standards as valuable resources to challenge women´s human rights violations at a local level. However, the author points out that local NGO´s do not necessarily share their vision, as it restricts alternatives to solve these situations from a social justice perspective on a local level. The lack of perspective of local context is seen by Merry as translation of a “reified conception of culture”, which is not recognized by international NGO´s, but is by local ones (Merry, 1994: 104). The author goes on to use the country reports of India and Fiji to the CEDAW Committee as examples of the disjuncture between the global and the local. In both cases, the Committee condemns certain national and local practices (i.e. different personal laws for religious communities in India or bulubulu as a form of reconciliation in cases of to rape in Fiji) as oppressive for women. Local political context is seen by Merry as having been disregarded in both countries in these cases (Merry, 1994: 104).

In the case of India, CEDAW did not bridge complex underlying circumstances that made feminist movements clash with communalism, seeing the persistence of separate religious law in India as oppressive to women, according to Merry. Furthermore, this author considers that the Committee only analysed this issue in terms of gender, leaving out the so-called “intersectional approach that looks simultaneously at gender, ethnicity/race, and class (...)” (Merry, 1994: 112).

As for bulubulu in Fiji, government representatives complained there was not enough time given to them by the Committee members in order to explain the nuances of the use of the custom. In this case, committee members noted that this traditional practice should be banned in all its forms, even

though it was only under analysis for cases of rape and sexual violence and the fact that this cultural practice of reconciliation was being used to escape legal penalties (Merry, 1994: 114-115). Merry questions what went wrong in this Treaty Body dialogue, as both CEDAW and the Fiji government were worried about the lenient treatment of the cases of rape in Fiji. She questions whether the failure or success of bulubulu depended on this custom in different contexts. Rural or urban settings were pointed out as possibly influencing the positive results of the practice, and, on the other hand, Merry notes the negative aspect of the use of the custom to influence magistrates to mitigate sentences (Merry, 1994: 118). Merry concludes that the conceptions of culture shared by the CEDAW members and the "nature of transnational legal processes" all contributed to make it impossible to understand the complexities of this "complicated and changing practice" (Merry, 1994: 118).

In conclusion, Merry considers that the tension between the maintenance of cultural diversity and the universal promotion of equality and rights is essential to human rights practice. She notes in both case studies of India and of Fiji, human rights are a source of political power for group mobilization, but the way they play out in practice depends on the context. It is this context of local situations that Merry considers the Committee lacks, as the lack of detailed knowledge of experts leads to treating countries mostly in the same way, which is also a demand of the Convention. This may be why committee members focused on gender subordination and did not see the intersectionality between gender and ethnic, religious and class exclusions, added to its suspicions of cultural claims, due to the fact they are used to justify women´s oppression. However, Merry notes that focusing on culture as a barrier both ignores the possibility of change within culture, in a process of "culturalizing" those who are not in urban contexts, for example. It is as if the social life of those who are not a part of the middle or upper class is not carried out in other realms besides culture, such as economics or politics (Merry, 1994: 131-133).

On the other hand, she raises the issue of how human rights ideas become part of local consciousness. The appropriation of global human rights frameworks and their translation to the local level, according to Merry, often implies "transplanting institutions and programs" (i.e. gender training, laws on domestic violence). This implies a transversal approach, as this process of transplantation is across boundaries such as "class, ethnicity, mobility and education", according to Merry (Merry, 1994: 134-135). People who carry out the interface between the local and the global in this context are vital, as they contribute to a greater consciousness of both sides of the spectrum,

as local activists become more aware of global rights and global activists will understand local context better. Among the actors of this interface are "political elites, human rights lawyers, feminist activists and movement leaders" as well as "social service providers, and academics", in the view of this author (Merry, 1994: 134-135).

Merry analyses how these programs and strategies are transplanted from one social context to another, and uses several countries as an example. She considers it intriguing that the strategies local activists are using to tackle violence against women are similar, even though they are supposed to develop models adapted to their particular histories. Merry uses India, China, Fiji, Hong Kong and the USA as case studies for the implementation of these programs and institutions. She notes that connections are revealed through the similarities of information flows and funding (Merry, 1994: 134-135).

Therefore, even though the models at stake are adapted to the local level, what Merry calls the "process of transplanting" is a global process. She uses the example of women´s shelters, which were created locally, then became global through international meetings and then were re-adapted again to other local contexts. This means that transplantation is simultaneously global and local, according to Merry´s view (Merry, 1994: 134-135).

She considers these similarities her most interesting finding. Nevertheless, the Euro-American model seems to prevail due to the background set by UN mechanisms and conferences, and Merry notes that there are always global inequalities as a backdrop to this circulation of programs and funds, not only as far is wealth is concerned but also regarding power. (Merry, 1994: 176-177).

She concludes by noting that these programs are never fully transposed to the local level, as they are only superficially transplanted and not "fully indigenized". Merry notes that it is the unfamiliarity to local context that often makes them effective (i.e. "denaturalizing male privilege"). Nevertheless, they can only be considered adopted when they become familiar to the surrounding social world they are intended to influence. According to Merry, they need to be presented in familiar cultural terms to be appropriated, and this is why their impact is not so great at the local level. (Merry, 1994: 177-178).

After having given examples of cases where human rights are

appropriated to local contexts, Merry questions whether the primary subjects of women´s human rights violations see themselves as having human rights problems (i.e. rural women). The main question Merry poses is whether or not there has been a change in "rights consciousness" and whether or not the most vulnerable have asserted their rights (Merry, 1994: 179). Merry considers that there is the need for human rights to become part of local legal consciousness in order to fulfil the purpose of emancipating their title holders. Nevertheless, whether it is in villages of the "global South" or "even in the United States", there is a reluctance to assert these rights, even when there is an undisputed legal basis to do so (Merry, 1994: 179).

In a sense, Merry advocates the adaptation of human rights into existing local legal structures in order to give them the power to change people´s way of thinking. She advances a proposed solution by activists in local contexts that involves dialogues not only within but also among countries, in order to assert universal standards while respecting cultural differences (Merry, 1994: 179-180).

In the specific area of violence against women, Merry demonstrates, through two case studies, how there is a coexistence between two different sets of ideas and meanings when it comes to the human rights framework and local norms. Women took on human rights ideas encouraged by local activists, but nevertheless they did not abandon their earlier perspectives on their local norms of kinship and care. So, the human rights discourse can be taken on at a local level, according to Merry, in terms of a "double subjectivity", where women can see themselves as rights bearers on one hand but as kinswomen on the other. It is, however, pointed out by the author that this is a slow process, which needs institutional support in order to be carried out (Merry, 1994: 180-181). If on one hand, on a local level, peoples´ claims are treated as unimportant, they will tend not to use a rights approach to solve their problems on a local level. On the other hand they are more likely to claim those rights with institutional support.

As in the case study of Hawai´i, poor women reflected the support they had from public powers (i.e. courts, police) in the transformation of their consciousness of self-bearing rights holders. Furthermore, using the male inheritance movement in Hong Kong, Merry points out that a particular human rights movement may have more or less effect according to the involvement of different groups, with "different levels of commitment to rights" (Merry, 1994: 215).

Merry concludes by saying that when human rights frameworks are adopted at grassroots level they are not imposed but appropriated, as the language of rights offers flexibility to activists to translate them to relevant situations on the local level. Nevertheless, in this process of translation, as local concepts that can be considered equivalent to rights are tailored to institutions (i.e. courts), there is the danger of women´s experiences being lost in the process. Even though Merry considers there is more of a "top down" than a "bottom up" effect in the translation of international human rights perspectives, she still sees the value in the translation of concepts such as autonomy, equality, choice and the protection of the body, which she considers to remain untouched in this process (Merry, 1994: 216-217). On the other hand, she does point that the risks of asserting one´s rights can come at a price on a local level. For example, the fact that women asserted their right to equal inheritance produced backlash on the ground, as the changes in the law were not retroactive, so the benefits for women who fought for this change were not that clear (Merry, 1994: 216-217). Therefore, Merry notes it is a risk in becoming a person who asserts they have been a victim of human rights violations, as the risk of ostracism and resentment at a local level exists. She reiterates that "poor people" will have less of a tendency to assert their rights if they have no state support in the delivery of their claims (Merry, 1994: 216-217). Finally, she considers that grassroots groups relate to human rights on a "double consciousness" level, sometimes using the so-called "rights claims" superimposed over "social obligations of kinship", and sometimes abandoning their attempts to do so. Merry points out it is the role of women´s rights activists and domestic violence advocates to translate the global human rights concepts to the local level and "bridge the divide" (Merry, 1994: 216-217).

2. Hanna Rosin's perspectives on "The end of men and the rise of women"

Rosin´s work opens with the so-called "hook up culture" in colleges in the USA, where women seem to be enjoying casual sex and the sense of empowerment attached to their control over their sex lives. Sex and romance are disconnected, but women are still looking for relationships. "Acquaintance rape" is noted to have gone down in America, as has teenage pregnancy. She refers that the economic independence of women has reduced their vulnerability to be the victims of abuse in relationships, nevertheless, the old "double standard" still persists, but women are considered by Rosin to be well-equipped to handle the ups and downs of this more aggressive sexual culture (Rosin, 2013: 19-20). She considers that even the sexual revolution

did not change women´s attitudes and behaviours radically, as the bedroom seemed to now work much like the workplace, where they experimented, took on new roles and became more aggressive. On the other hand, men did not have such a change in their sexual preferences and desires. Male sexuality is considered more rigid according to this author, constant, unchanging and innate, while women have more "erotic plasticity", more mutable in response to culture and social circumstances (Rosin, 2013: 41).

Rosin refers to a new "breed of female sexual creature", who acknowledge the "eternal vulnerability of women", but at the same time manipulate it to their advantage (Rosin, 2013: 43).

Rosin does, however, note that less vulnerability does not necessarily mean more empowerment for women, as she concludes that it will take time for women to figure out what they want, and that the desire for human connection always seems to surpass the phases of sexual freedom (Rosin, 2013:45).

As far as marriage goes, Rosin uses statistics from the USA and the UK to characterize the new "breed" of American housewives (Rosin, 2013:48). She contrasts these "alpha wives" as the new bread-winners to their "omega male" husbands, who are mostly unemployed and immature (Rosin, 2013: 56). She proceeds to note that this phenomenon in the majority of American families is also reflected in families in Europe and will also be reflected in some Latin American and Asian countries within the next generation.

She also divides the intimate relationships of the college-educated and those of people without college degrees (the group where this shift is considered to have more grave consequences regarding the existence of marriage). Rosin points out that, for these college-educated "elites", marriage is becoming "yet another class privilege in America" (Rosin, 2013: 48-49). This new model of "elite marriage" is a fine tuning of bread-winning proportionality between the couple, and it works mostly due to the lack of rigidity of gender roles.

However, even though in her interviews most couples stated they were happy, she considered underlying tensions existed regarding this new female-breadwinner status quo, namely, the same old marriage anxieties, but this time in "reverse gender" (Rosin, 2013: 52). Resentment appeared in women carrying the "whole economic load", while in men, on the other hand, resentment popped up in identity crises due to the lack of a place for

their manual labour skills in the job market, which pushed them inevitably into domesticity (Rosin, 2013: 52). But the role reversal was not a complete one, according to Rosin, as she could not find one single “bread winning” woman who had given up the domestic realm completely, even in cases where they were working two jobs. Women were mostly still doing more child care as well (Rosin, 2013: 53-54).

As for men, according to Rosin, they seem to be portrayed as happy Super-Bowl-Sunday couch potatoes, mostly due to their new submissive position in relation to their “dominatrix” wives. Women obsessed with success are contrasted to lovable “degenerate” men in this new era of reverse-gender marriage rules (Rosin, 2013:56-57). “New maleness” seems to be under negotiation, and money seems to play a big part in this process of emasculation, as well as the fact that men can´t seem to interchange gender roles completely (Rosin, 2013:58-59).

However, this dead-end doesn´t seem so bad for what Rosin calls the marriage “elites”, as it is apparently a passport to a healthier life for men, even though women are still a few steps away from the top jobs. Men are therefore still slowly adapting to this “new, more androgynous world” at “the top”, according to this author, but they still seem uneasy with the idea of a “coming gender apocalypse”, even if they have “nothing material or concrete” to complain about. Rosin concludes that men are simply annoyed because their “team is losing”. (Rosin, 2013: 60-61).

Rosin noted that men in years past who failed to fulfil the universally acceptable role of “providers” were considered somewhat of a “fallen idol” or, worse still, irresponsible, immature and adolescent-like. If they failed to accept their “breadwinner role”, this was seen as “deviant” and “unnatural”. Men who did not want to marry were immediately pointed out as “selfish”, “frightened of responsibility”, or even unable to “[…] commit [...] to a permanent relationship.” (Rosin, 2013: 62-64). Besides some of these previous examples from the 40´s, Rosin presents others from the 50´s and 60´s, where men are considered as being forced to suppress their concrete skills in the workplace, and warned against this form of emasculation, in order not to surrender to the triumph of “people skills”, which are so highly valued in the working world today. Nevertheless, between the 60´s and 70´s marriage was seen as an impediment of female fulfilment. Divorce rates went up, but, once again, later went down for the “college educated”. This “ambitious class”, opened the chance for women to provide for the family , and thus made the marriage more stable, according to Rosin, as they were less likely to divorce,

"probably because of less financial stress" (Rosin, 2013: 65-66).

In conclusion this is Rosin´s explanation of how what she calls the "seesaw" marriage works: what couples are after, according to this author, is their own fulfilment within the marriage. She considers this new marital set up has been established in an era of greater fluidity where having jobs or staying at home is concerned, and is increased by a "[…]culture that privileges self-expression over duty". According to Merry, it is progressive due to its "instinctive gender-blindness", its rejection of the obligation to work, and "utterly conservative in its comfort with traditional marriage" (Rosin, 2013: 67).

Nevertheless, Rosin does critique this "bohemian bourgeoisie" as "smug", identifying its smugness to the outcast of anyone who wants to deviate from this new script, by doing something like divorcing or being single mothers. In this equation, the college-educated men are in a very comfortable situation from a financial point of view. Apparently, they are happier and live longer as well. According to Rosin, even on the level of scientific research, its focus is now directed at confirming the "new cultural notion that men have become the frail dependants in need of a protector" (Rosin, 2013: 67-68).

As for fatherhood, Rosin notes that younger men do in fact have different expectations, as they seem to want to conciliate it with some job satisfaction, and therefore find a balance in their lives. She points out the pressure of the "forcibly machoed" and the fact that some advocate for men to have the same stay-at-home or part-time-work options as women, thereby releasing them from their "constricted sense of manhood". (Rosin, 2013: 69).

Rosin concludes that the "gender transition movement" is not complete, not only for men, who she suggests need to mobilized in order to defend their own demands (Rosin, 2013: 69-70), but also for women, who Rosin considers need to become accustomed to "owning the power" that is "so obviously theirs". Women have therefore not substituted men in the old concept of "provider", but now represent a "new variation" of it, as, even though women run the show at work and in the home, doing most of the housework, planning, childcare, participation in school life, and carry most of the workload in the workplace, they still attribute to men the "protector aspect" of the breadwinner concept, even though they are not making money (Rosin, 2013:76-77).

According to Rosin, there has been a fast decline in marriage and a fast rise in divorce in middle class America, as well an increase in single mothers. She notes that sociologists tend to consider this negative, associated with the increase of the gap between rich and poor, the end of the "stable white working class" and the "sinking of the traditional middle class". However, the author points out that this change is affecting men and women in very different ways, and considers what she calls the "emergence of American matriarchy" the biggest change at stake in this scenario. Rosin considers men are no longer the breadwinners and are "closer than any time in history to being obsolete" (Rosin, 2013: 82). Men seem to be out of jobs in the USA, as women are stepping in to take on the role of providers (Rosin, 2013: 86-87). She points out the historical resemblance to another moment in American culture, when black men lost their jobs in the 70´s, and families and marriages fell apart as a consequence (Rosin, 2013: 88). As divorce rates shoot up, examples of what can be considered matriarchies have been emerging in the USA, with women calling all the shots in family life. The author points out that the fact that women are now unbound to marriage gives them much more power, as it is they who make the most important decisions (i.e. having a baby). However, Rosin notes that this is not equivalent to a "feminist nirvana". As unmarried mothers become the "new normal", women are struggling financially, working and studying at the same time, even though they are the new breadwinners. She further notes that the lower classes are affected by the erosion of marriage due to the independence of women, who set the terms of marriage too high for men to meet up to (Rosin, 2013: 92-93). Rosin considers this to possibly be a socially transversal phenomenon in the USA, as marriage is also increasingly rare in the new middle class. On the other hand, marriage is in danger of becoming a luxury according to this author, not available to all the social spectrum, similarly to a good education (Rosin, 2013: 94-95).

As for education, Rosin points out a particular city in Alabama called Auburn, as the most outstanding example of wage disparity between women and men. The city has a huge university, on which its economy depends, and is turning into a town dominated by women. This wage disparity seems to be the case in many metropolitan regions in the USA, and it apparently is being translated into greater economic power according to Rosin, as women are adapting to the restructured economy much better than men (Rosin, 2013:106-107). The perfect reflection of the "modern, feminized economy" is Auburn, as it has a university, government jobs and services typically tailored for jobs for people with communication and team work ("people skills"), which apparently are better carried out by women, according to this

author. Even in the manufacturing plant, 55% of the workers, the new "team facilitators" and "coaches" with the desired people skills were women, and they were part of a female army that wanted a better life and a good job (Rosin, 2013:108-109). Rosin considers Auburn a sign of hope for women but also a bad sign for men, as they seem to be resisting the need to abandon certain male codes, and are somehow still in denial that they need to adapt to the new economy (Rosin, 2013: 110).

Where Auburn seems to be an example of a city where females dominate income wise in the USA, pharmacy seems to be an example of the epitome of a female-dominated profession (Rosin, 2013: 114). Rosin goes on to present statistics of 2009, when, for the first time, the balance of the workforce tipped toward women. She further notes that this is also happening in other countries, such as the UK, Spain or France. She points out how in the past four decades the job market has become indifferent to "size and strength" and much more permeable to the above mentioned "people skills" (i.e. empathy, communal problem-solving), which Rosin attributes more to women than to men, considering them "traditionally female attributes" (Rosin, 2013:118). Women are dominating what Rosin considers to be "surprising professions", in the areas of accounting, finance, medicine and law, among others. But she notes the uniqueness of pharmacy, as the value of the so-called "people skills" is at the top of the list (Rosin, 2013:118-120).

Just like the leadership skills Rosin noted in high-school elections, presumably in a school in middle America where the candidates were all girls (Rosin, 2013:102), the same leadership and career ambitions were recognized at the university level for female pharmacy students, unlike their fellow male colleagues (Rosin, 2013:123).

The deeper issue is why men are failing to get the message that they need to adapt and persevere at getting college degrees in order to face up to the new challenges of the American economy (Rosin, 2013:125-126). As for the feminization of the pharmacy profession, women started hiring other women, so the more they worked, the more power they had in the workforce. This multiplying effect ended up normalizing workplace demands that would be inconceivable in other eras, such as four day weeks (Rosin, 2013:136).

As for the economy of the future, education is pointed out as key by Rosin, and the prevalence of jobs which require human contact and interpersonal skills will continue. The future workplace will then adapt to

women´s needs, with a change in timetable rigidity, in order to allow women to work regular hours, or work remotely, alternating full-time and part-time work schemes in order to allow them to take on motherhood, for example (Rosin, 2013:141).

Rosin considers the fact that women are taking over college degrees the most profound change of the century, as she notes it is happening not only in the USA, but also in most of the rest of the world. She relates this fact with the takeover of the middle class by women, and raises the issue of the possibility of discrimination against women in admissions procedures in private colleges in the USA, where, unlike public universities in America, there is no obligation to obey a gender balance criteria. Rosin concludes by relating this issue to the fact that it is unsettling to the status quo in the country, as it means that men are the ones in need of help (Rosin, 2013:149).

In order to note the widening education gap, she points to statistics from the USA, but also to those of other countries (OECD and UNESCO statistics), and concludes it is happening "all over the world". She then specifies that she is referring to "industrial democracies" regarding the OECD statistics, and Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Arab States when noting the UNESCO numbers (Rosin, 2013: 150).

As for the reasons for men falling back in higher education degrees, Rosin presents as a possible explanation the fact that cultural habits changed in "less educated" families, as there has been a reversal in the pattern of sending mostly sons to college. Nowadays, according to the study Rosin refers to, girls are more likely to go to college, particularly those with no father present in the family. Apparently women are now the better investment for their families who want to rise into the "middle class", as they are more likely to excel in the current economy (Rosin, 2013:159-160).

This contributes to explaining the rise of women in education, but what about the fall of men? As schools have become "microcosms of the larger economy", Rosin raises the issue of the adaptation of school curricula to its demands. This means "pushing verbal skills earlier in the curriculum" at pre-kindergarten level and, according to Rosin, boys are not "mature enough to handle it". They therefore consider themselves bad at school from a very early age, and this attitude continues throughout schooling (Rosin, 2013: 162). Rosin concludes by noting that programs that pay special attention to boys are being carried out in countries like Australia and the UK in order to address what she calls the "boy crisis" (i.e. all boy classrooms, reading

material more attractive to boys) (Rosin, 2013:166).

According to Rosin, women are less likely to be the victims of crimes such as murder, rape, assault or robbery nowadays than ever before. She supports this conclusion by statistics and reports from the USA. She further refers to experts that consider this may have to do with the fact that women have more power nowadays, doing better on a financial level and in the job-market, while boys are on the opposite path. To these elements the author adds studies from the UK, which point out women are more likely to get arrested for domestic violence than men, further noting that one of the British studies shows 40% of men as being victims of domestic violence (Rosin, 2013:182-183).

She notes the social resistance to seeing women as murderers, and the tendency to consider them the victims of circumstance, when they use violence as a form of revenge, for example. Rosin gives the extreme example of female suicide bombers to note that motivation is not "gendered", in the sense that most women carry out these attacks against occupying forces or due to loyalty to a cause, and that motives are very similar to those of men in the same circumstances, with women being highly effective in carrying out their attacks (Rosin, 2013:185).

Other studies noted by Rosin lead to the conclusion that women are as aggressive as men, and "[…] have suggested that if the social acceptance for female aggression expanded, women would fill in the space". Moreover, the author points out that research has pointed to the direction that qualities such as assertiveness, dominance or competitiveness are context- specific (Rosin, 2013:186-187). She goes on to refer how Western countries are coming to accept "female aggression", and to conclude by saying that the rise in female violence and the need to break the denial that a world run by women would be less violent, as, according to Rosin, it is power that corrupts and it is mostly gender-blind. Nevertheless, she highlights women´s plasticity when responding to social expectations in adapting personality to circumstance, violent behaviour included (Rosin, 2013:189-191).

As top jobs go, even though women work for hours on end, juggling childcare and the home, often in highly paid jobs, there are still few women that are at the head of companies. Rosin notes that top employers (i.e. Silicon Valley) are progressively adapting to women´s needs for flexibility, so they can work and tend to their family life (Rosin, 2013:195-196). Rosin further points out that even though women are not the CEOs yet, they are already

the best paid top executive officers in the ranks immediately below them. This, according to this author, is a sign of “the last gasp of a vanishing age” for men (Rosin, 2013:198-199). A more “feminized management style” is the new word of order, as well as a more “horizontal leadership”, based on more creative principles and a more sensitive, socially intelligent type of leadership, even though Rosin notes in this chapter there is no explicit definition of these traits as “feminine” (Rosin, 2013:199-200).

So, Rosin questions what is still holding women back from surpassing men completely. She refers to a “brand identity problem” of the “ambitious career woman”, and believes they somehow need to assert themselves in order that they stop seeming like they are out of place at the top. Furthermore, Hanna Rosin points out that both men and women are not “gender blind”, and there still is an amount of external and internal resistance to their new gender positions, but there is some degree of recognition of a shift in the paradigm that the author believes will disappear as more women occupy positions of power (Rosin, 2013:204).

Another disconcerting detail pointed out by Rosin was the fact that women´s earnings seemed to be levelling off when they got to the top. Apparently, unlike men, women tend not to ask for raises, better working conditions for their particular situations, or negotiate their salaries (Rosin, 2013: 205). Yet another factor working against women in the workplace is gender bias. Women who are assertive, self-promote or express any sort of anger are considered to lack social skills, while the same traits in men seem to be not judged at all (Rosin, 2013: 210). Apparently, for women, “it does hurt to ask”, so, with the gender stereotype working against them, Rosin points out studies that conclude the safest bet for women to increase their earnings is “to meet the stereotype halfway”, and play with simultaneously “semi-feminine” and “semi-masculine” postures in order to get their way (Rosin, 2013: 211-212).Women therefore need to overcome not only the external, but also the internal barriers which are holding them back, according to Rosin (i.e. not letting go of the housework to give it to their husbands). It is, however, comprehensible, according to the author, that women feel vulnerable even at the top due to the rigid structure still present in the workplace (Rosin, 2013: 216).

Furthermore, Rosin points out that women may have been submitted to social pressure that led to their lack of admission and drive to demand recognition. Women themselves seem to relate ambition with negative characteristics such as selfishness and manipulation (Rosin, 2013: 217). Rosin

highlights another trait in women which is working against them, which is the fact that they have a tendency to get more job satisfaction from aspects of their jobs that are not directly related with promotions. According to the report cited by Rosin, the reason for women staying in certain jobs is related to a sense of meaning on a professional level, which she associates with their concept of "moral identity" in work, as in life (Rosin, 2013: 229).

In conclusion, Rosin considers that the American workplace is still very patriarchal, and that many women tend to give up the fight before they reach the top. She stresses the fact that spots at the top will soon reach tipping point in favour of women, and considers they will become closer to the norm of the workplace. She therefore encourages women to get to the top in larger numbers, in order to push for a more "family-friendly" workplace (Rosin, 2013: 230).

When describing South Korean universities, Rosin characterizes women as "killer academic competitors" and the environment as "cut throat". She also notes that their "Confucian-inspired power structure" enshrined "Family Laws" in the Korean Civil Code in 1958 specifying that the heads of family were the eldest son and inheritance passed down through men. Rosin considers the case of Korea one of the most exceptionally positive turnarounds from an economic point of view, as the government encouraged women to study, which led to women surpass men in college enrolments and then in the job market. According to Rosin, these modifications changed the reigning patriarchy through law revisions that gave women more equal rights, giving them the right to inherit property, and taking away the automatic status of men as head of the family (Rosin, 2013: 233-235).

The author further elaborates on how women are at the centre of the changes in Korea, but still are expected to "work like killers", while they are still expected to fulfil traditional roles as wives and mothers. Rosin further notes that the shift in Korea in applicable to other countries and continents, even though she ends up referring mostly to the Latin American continent, other countries in Asia, and the Middle East.

She reiterates the fact that economies are now depending on women´s success. She refers to one report from the UN and another from the OECD in order to point out how women are lifting up economies almost everywhere in the world. "The greater the power of women, the greater the country´s success" (Rosin, 2013: 236). Furthermore, Rosin restates that the cultural upheaval caused by women´s success is creating a deep change in marriage

patterns, with women "marrying down" (to men with lower educations) in countries like Portugal, France or Israel, or marrying "men in the future", as women in Spain seem to be marrying men from Germany or Sweden, while Spanish men are looking for "a woman from the past" and marrying Latin Americans (Rosin, 2013: 237).

After all her analysis, Rosin finds research about differences between men and women´s brains not that convincing, but believes women are at a stage in history where they are using their flexibility and responsiveness in a way that is defining their success, while men, in contrast, are at a more rigid moment, where they are resisting. She considers this divergence may change over time. Rosin also points out that it is not just men who are resisting change, but it is also society which still stigmatizes their roles. However, these attitudes are shifting. (Rosin, 2013: 263-265). She uses Sweden — a model country for male parental leave - as an example of how a redefinition of masculinity is underway, where qualities like caring and nurturing are no longer considered "unmanly" (Rosin, 2013: 268).

3. Contrasting and comparing Merry and Rosin's perspectives on gender, culture and human rights

The backdrop of Rosin's book is the USA. Rosin, at the outset, introduces the theme of the absence of men in a working-class town in Virginia, where men used to be around, taking part in everyday life, and now are becoming unnecessary, superfluous, and even a burden on women. She relates this to economic recession and its consequent job loss for men and their "bread-winning" role in American society. The shift in the economy was therefore forwarded as one explanation for the shift in culture, both for men and for women. However, the twist is that women have surpassed men in many ways. Not only in the workforce, but also in school, where women dominate worldwide, except in Africa. The US economy is seen as becoming a sisterhood where women who work create jobs for other women, and society is seen as slowly developing into a matriarchy. Certain qualities in men seen as valuable to the workforce, such as size and strength, are now replaced by machines, and these traits are no longer sought after. They have been substituted by the need for other traits, such as communication and social intelligence, which are not predominantly found in men, according to Rosin. (Rosin, 2013:1-5).

Nevertheless, she does note the "rise of women" exists in India and in China, where they learn English faster than men and own a higher

percentage of private businesses. “Asia” is given as an example where the new-found economic power of women has led to increased divorce rates, and the mismatch between tradition and progress has created an “international market for spouses”, while, in the “West”, women are more sexually aggressive than ever before, according to this author (Rosin, 2013:6).

With the USA as the basis of her analysis, she notes relationship changes are playing out in almost opposite ways in different social classes. She separates a smaller percentage of those with college degrees from those without one, the latter 70% being composed by those of the working-class, the poor, and the “moderately educated middle”. It is within this majority group that Rosin considers that “[…] the rise of women is associated with the slow erosion of marriage and even a growing cynicism about love.” (Rosin, 2013:6), with men failing to reach women´s new standards, while the “educated class” has seen a renaissance of marriage, due to women´s newly found economic power. In these marriages, which Rosin call´s “seesaw marriages”, the fluidity of the division of earnings among couples created something she considers to be “beyond equality”, as it has created new models of marriage. The fact that both members of the couple can switch places as breadwinners is key to the satisfaction of women, even though men seem less satisfied with these flexible new roles, according to this author (Rosin, 2013:7).

Rosin goes on to portray women as much more flexible than men, who seem to be caught up in more rigid social roles, while women have been evolving throughout the last century into evermore demanding and cumulative roles, involving work, motherhood and marriage. She also points out the release from old stereotypes, with women avoiding marriage and being sexually adventurous, but still hanging on to some old issues which create a whole new set of dilemmas between work and domesticity, power and vulnerability, “niceness” and happiness (Rosin, 2013:7-8). Within this new category of plastic women, the author finds what she calls a highly socially valued “superbreed”, able to handle old male and new female responsibilities, while men´s lifestyle and ambitions are seen to have remained mostly the same. However, men are now losing their jobs in the less physically demanding labour market and their role as providers in the home. Masculinity is seen as ornamental, as the old roles of men do not seem to be being replaced by new ones, as men seem to hesitate in taking on a new territory of professions, as the working-mother has become the norm (Rosin, 2013:8-9).

The author notes women are becoming more aggressive and even

violent in ways that were thought to be reserved to men, with a new "breed" of female "killers" on a professional level but also from a literal perspective, with female murderers. She notes that the rigid "natural" order which people based their ideas on men and women has been overturned, as a more female-dominated society does not necessarily translate into a "soft feminine utopia" (Rosin, 2013:10).

Patriarchy is therefore eroding or even reversing, according to Hanna Rosin, with the age-old preference for first-born sons throughout history being overturned by couples in fertilization clinics in the USA asking to have daughters. Regarding this particular issue around biology, the author goes on again to extend it to "the world´s most advanced economies", using South Korea as an example of this very shift and as having been "one of the most rigid patriarchies in the world", where the preference of first-born sons has vanished (Rosin, 2013:12-13).

Rosin notes that women are now the standard for success, and are not just "catching up with men", even though she admits the USA and many other countries still have a gender wage gap and that women still do most of the child care and positions of power are still dominated by men (Rosin, 2013:13-14). However, she does consider these circumstances are soon to be relics of the past as the speed of economy and other forces show that women are on their way to "hold the cards" in what she considers to be "modern economy" (Rosin, 2013:13-14).

She positions herself as neither a radical feminist or an anti-feminist, but someone who points out the "straightforward progress for women", with all the ups and downs this entails for them, namely, their newly found "ambiguous independence", less likely to be in abusive relationships on one hand, but more likely to raise their children alone, on the other. (Rosin, 2013:14-15).

Yet, she highlights the problems arising from the "excess choice" of the "college-educated class", the dilemmas involved in finding the "perfect partner" and the "rewarding job" and the anxieties that come from these new spheres for women (Rosin, 2013:15).On the other hand, young men in particular are seen to be in transition from former traditional roles for men which they no longer want, but can´t really turn away from completely, as power and influence is now being acquired by women, and men don´t seem to want to embody a new set of jobs and roles which Rosin associates with women and traits of women (Rosin, 2013:15-16).

The author concludes by stating that she changed her expected view of a more caring “woman´s world” as the outcome of her research, and at the end was not so convinced that the shifts in the roles of women and men have so much to do with fixed values or traits. Rosin considers this perspective a kind of denial of the revolution in gender roles which is unpredictable and inevitable (Rosin, 2013:16).

“Global cultures” are referred to by Rosin as the stage for scientific findings, and associated to findings “back in time” (Rosin, 2013:45). Rosin notes that “In years past, and in many cultures still, women´s sexual malleability has made them vulnerable to coercion and control, either by an individual man or a patriarchal culture; say, mullahs in Afghanistan.” Florida State University, where these findings are the result of “brilliant, sweeping theories” is in the USA. (Rosin, 2013: 42).One might as: where is the “culture” or where are the “cultures” of the “global North” in these theories and perspectives? Moreover, Rosin’s references to women as a “breed” and as manipulative sexual predators, not only on college campuses but also in the workplace may be seen as underlying signs of misogyny, neoliberalism and essentialism in Rosin´s work. The absence of references to a plurality of cultures in the USA, with a somewhat binary division between the college-educated and all the other “less educated” part of the American population, shows that the backdrop of the Ivy League student populations may not reflect all the nuances of a multicultural, socially and ethnically diverse and economically unequal America. She also only focuses her perspective on the global North’s single “culture”, with Rosin seems to use as the norm, in comparison with all other cultures. In a particular chapter called “Pharm girls”, Rosin even starts referring to US culture as “the culture”. (Rosin, 2013:122-123). While the USA often used as the backdrop for the “West” in general, entire continents, such as Asia and Africa are referred to in order to point out a stronger degree of patriarchy and age-old traditions, in comparison with the West. Moreover, the poor and the rich, the educated and the uneducated, are crosscutting themes throughout this author´s work (Rosin, 2013:50-51).

Rosin recurrently uses hostile terms to describe women: from the new “breed” of bread-winning housewives (Rosin, 2013:48) to the “voracious” Plastic Woman (Rosin, 2013:54) or “killer career wives” (Rosin, 2013:55), these married women in what she classifies as “seesaw marriages” are a follow up to the female students of Ivy League Universities in America, who are “hunters” and “killers” in the dating world on campus, and continue their

killing skills once they enter the job-market on Wall Street (Rosin, 2013:34). Women are also considered by Rosin to be expanding their "colonial empire" in the take-over of bread-winning functions, as opposed to men, who are working slightly less, but also not upping their child care hours (Rosin, 2013:54).

Rosin uses Spain as an example of "more traditional or more macho cultures", where the concept of the "alpha wife" has led to more marriages between Spanish women and what Rosin calls "progressive men from Belgium or Switzerland". On the other hand, Spanish men are portrayed as "marrying down" to wives from Ecuador and Colombia. She also notes that men from South Korea and Japan seek out "brides from poorer Asian countries", with more "traditional" notions of marriage. One may consider issues of gender and marriage here a breeding ground for the stereotypes of global North and global South in Rosin´s book. The progressiveness of the global North is contrasted to lack of progress in the global South. She even specifies a kind of "macho culture" subgroup in Europe, exemplified by Spain, in order to link the choices of men for Latin American women as an explanation for their regressive views on marriage and gender equality. On the other hand, South Korea and Japan seem to escape the generalized "Asia" qualification in this particular context, but Rosin does use these countries as examples of how men from "rural towns" import brides from unspecified "poorer Asian countries" (Rosin, 2013:55).

As for men Rosin uses words such as "pitiful", "dead space" or "humiliation" and "pride" to characterize them. They appear as "losers", desperately hanging on to the last bit of pride they have left in their marriages as a result of the takeover of women (Rosin, 2013:58-59).

"Superstar", the name a stay-at-home dad calls his over worked wife is, as Rosin puts it, not only a sign of how power has passed on to women from the "provider role" perspective, but, more than that, has rendered men in the couple dynamic obsolete. One may consider, however, substituting the word "superstar", for "super slave", as, in the scenario exposed by Rosin of this middle class couple, as the mother pumps breast milk while carrying out a high powered job, she has actually not given up the domestic space, but "doubled her load". Women are considered by Rosin to have happily taken on these new roles, while men are more reluctant to change their family functions. Male entitlement is evident in the man-child caricature of the husband of the couple Rosin analyses, living in Pittsburgh, originally from families from the Midwest, with "factory roots". She notes that the wife

pursued a college-education, while the husband lurks lazily and selfishly behind. Unlike what is evident above the surface of her highly qualified executive professional skills in this so-called modern era this super-woman may be seen to be as immersed in Patriarchy as never before, amidst all the cooking and laundry still left behind for her (Rosin, 2013:76-77).

Nevertheless, Rosin seems to have a few moments where she reveals a more compassionate perspective toward men, in the sense that she does not attribute the issues they are facing exclusively to their own choices. However, she does conclude by reiterating that “men have not yet fully embraced the message”, as there are “no men marching in the streets to demand paternity leave or flexible schedules”. She notes that there are only still mere isolated cases of men living this reality, in a glimpse of what the (not to distant, according to Rosin) future will look like (Rosin, 2013:69-70).

Furthermore, Rosin seems to associate the stability of marriage not only to the fact that wives work but also to an economic stability exclusive to the top layers of the American social stratum. In order to characterize these layers of society, she uses expressions such as “the ambitious class” or “the creative class” (Rosin, 2013:66-67). Rosin seems to universalize the new marital set up of our era. While considering it “progressive”, and the ground for “self-fulfilment”, she also notes the “fluidity” that is present in the possibility of the transition from jobs to home. However, on one hand, she seems to not establish the direct relation between these facets of the “seesaw marriage” and the exclusivity of its attainment by what she considers to be the bohemian bourgeoisie. From her findings, it might be possible to attribute this new form of union much more to the presence of money, and the choices it gives people. Therefore, maybe these choices are not exclusive to the married “ambitious class”, but may be extendible to those singletons who are blessed with economic stability (Rosin, 2013:66-67).

On the other hand, the author uses the concept of “instinctive gender-blindness”, associating it to these “progressive” couples, as they are inserted in a “culture that privileges self-expression over duty”. These terms used by Rosin can be seen as contradictory. Gender is a social construction, just like race and class. So, how can “gender blindness” be instinctive? Concepts such as “instinct” or even “biology” can be considered slippery terrain when associated with gender, to say the least. Intersectionality theories are therefore mandatory in a context as complex as this one, but they seem to be missing, not only from the literature Rosin notes the “college-educated” men of this era have been exposed to (i.e. Judith Butler), but also in Rosin´s own

narrative (Rosin, 2013:60 and 67). Privilege is the key for this new equation, and the so-called "culture" that comes with it. Rosin refers to it as the culture that privileges self-expression over duty. Rosin uses the word "culture" in a very "global-North" kind of a way. If one contrasts this concept with Merry's work around the concepts of culture, one may conclude that Rosin´s view of culture is similar to the concept of those neo-liberal transnational elites who sit in UN meetings and create what Merry calls a "human rights culture". In doing so, just like Merry´s UN Treaty Bodies, Rosin can be considered to be disregarding most of the rest of the world, and their respective "cultures", by considering them "other cultures", per opposition to the "West". So, even as she announces the "End of men and the rise of women", Rosin herself notes that even science (i.e. biology) is prone to "cultural" manipulation (Rosin, 2013: 67-68). What also seems to be contradictory in Rosin´s narrative regarding the fact that women are excelling professionally and financially is the idea that their new rule of the global economy is somehow of an "upside down" global economy. Maybe it is now the right way up, and it was upside down before? Possibly, this is the way it would always have been if it were not for the oppression of women. There are other contributing factors that need to be taken into account, like colonialism, racism, and class discrimination. These slowly disappearing impediments may well have contributed to the upside down world throughout history, and Rosin does not include these perspectives in her work. (Rosin, 2013:121).

Apparently, there was no time for intersectionality at the CEDAW Committee either, according to Merry. When considering the existence of the so-called "personal laws" in India, only one member of the Committee dissented from the mainstream opinion, noting that the desired uniform secular legal code of laws was not possible or necessary in this local context (Merry, 1994: 113). These nuances are complex, and involve a deeper look into religion, culture and minorities that goes beyond the idea these concepts are static. The "ethnicization" of women´s subordinate status in India due to contemporary political struggles was therefore ignored at the CEDAW hearing in question, as they limited themselves to juxtapose "the secular modernity of uniform civil law to a religion-based and oppressive set of family laws", according to Merry (Merry, 1994: 113).

Merry points out British colonial rule as having contributed to the disjuncture of local social and political contexts, which she considers to have had a part in the inequalities and discrimination on an ethnic, political and religious level in both India, with its personal laws, and Fiji, with its traditional practice, bulubulu. In both cases, colonial presence contributed to situations

of communal conflicts (Merry, 1994: 110 and 128). However, according to Merry, none of these issues came up at the CEDAW discussion. The reasons she points out for this are interpretative on one hand, and structural, on the other, as she noted the lack of specific and detailed knowledge was inevitable in transnational forums on one hand, and also linked to the nature of law itself, on the other (Merry, 1994: 129-130). Merry notes that culture in the UN seems not to exist among transnational elites, as it is used to describe the "way of life of ´others´", and those others are usually the urban or rural poor. Much as Rosin classifies those with no college degrees in the USA as the "moderately educated middle", per opposition to the college-educated class.

Merry contrasts conceptions of rights to conceptions of reconciliation, sharing and mutual responsibility, almost as if culture was collective and rights were individual. Even though her final equation theoretically makes sense, as she believes in a theory of culture including more local cultural practices interacting with global legal principles, it is the way she considers they should be seen in context that may raise some issues. The collective has been pointed out by Merry as ignoring the individual, as the bulubulu custom involves the apology to the family of the victim of rape and not to the victim directly, who is often forced to accept it due to social pressure. So, is Merry not also reproducing a binary contrast between rights and practices, the individual and the collective? Merry further elaborates on the meanings of culture in the context of social service strategies that circulate globally in order to fight violence against women, and the way these strategies are appropriated by local settings. She notes there seems to be a shared discourse of feminism and social work, as the activists who develop the strategies at stake are part of what she calls the "transnational feminist movement". She observes that despite the recognition of the need to "indigenize" the approaches at a local level, there is no real difference between the feminist ideas and techniques, which were simply "rephrased" in local cultural terms (Merry, 1994: 177-178). However, Merry concludes that people working at the local level as activists do seem to see this as an advantage and not an impediment. The fact that they involve local leaders in these processes is a sign that they are allowing local groups to create their own definition of culture in this context. So, according to Merry, one can find positive examples of how the tailoring of the transnational domain to local groups can be done along with the recognition and participation of the power relations on a communal level. In conclusion, Merry´s perspective is that this makes a world of difference. A "top-down" approach with an essentialist idea of culture and only mild ambitions of being culturally adapted is not the same as a "bottom-up" approach, with locally controlled programs and local cultural

ideas (Merry, 1994: 163-164).

Merry finalizes by pointing out what she considers the great paradox of translating human rights to local context, as in order to be accepted they need to be tailored to local settings but must emphasize concepts such as individualism, choice, equality which are integrated in human rights law, and these core values that belong in this realm endure even after they are transposed to the local cultural framework (Merry, 1994: 221). So Merry leaves the open question of whether or not this is the best approach in order to contribute to end violence against women and to promote social justice. One thing this author is certain of, however, is that it plays an important role in the expansion of a "society embedded in the global North" and of a "modernist view of the individual". (Merry, 1994: 221).

Comparing and contrasting Rosin and Merry´s narratives, their respective lines of thought become clearer where culture is concerned. Even though Merry is much more analytical and balanced in her global-North and global-South descriptions than Rosin, she sometimes uses the same words as Rosin to describe what she seems to consider the exception. In Merry´s case, this is one of the rare occasions where you see a very timid moral identity given to the global-North, as she notes that "[…] even in the United States, reputed to be a highly rights-conscious place, research indicates considerable reluctance to assert rights […]" (Merry, 1994: 179). Merry and Rosin also somewhat coincide in their perspectives of local and global where the idea of culture as contested and shifting is concerned. Even though Merry used India´s personal laws as an example of a difficult situation where the women´s movement suffered some backlash due to the political context in India, she still recognizes the need for change in order to further protect women (Merry, 1994: 113). Rosin describes a similar scenario, when she notes that it was the rise of women in education and the workforce in Korea that stimulated this very fast change, but notes the economic and cultural crisis between two systems "at war", as patriarchy resists the modern meritocracy established by the government (Rosin, 2013: 235-236). Merry notes this same "war" (even though she does not classify it as such) between the UN human rights global system and local context. The point of both authors is similar where personal or family laws are concerned: how to bridge the gap between so-called "modernity" (Rosin´s meritocracy in Korea and Merry´s international human rights standards on violence against women) (Rosin, 2013: 235-236) and more traditional, local set-ups (patriarchal Korea for Rosin and communal cultural systems for Merry) (Merry, 1994: 113).

Rosin, on the other hand, can be considered to have a somewhat more unbalanced narrative when describing the global-North and the global-South, often referring to what she considers "the culture" in the United States, and then extending it to the rest of what she considers the "West", particularly when she goes into more culturally slippery concepts such as marriage (Rosin, 2013: 55). So, even though Rosin considers culture to be changing and not static, as she notes there is a "quiet revolution underway" in America´s colleges, she still seems to consider American culture one single culture (Rosin, 2013: 149). Following the same line of thought, Rosin refers to "Asian countries" as a homogeneous group, and "Islamic countries" as another group, classifying this last group as "developing countries" (Rosin, 2013: 150-151).

Another parallel may be established here between Merry´s concept of "educated urban elites of the global North" with Rosin´s classifications of the college-educated minority and the majority population in the USA without a college degree (70% of the population, according to this author). The latter is often associated by Rosin throughout the book not only to geographical areas within the USA (i.e. the Midwest) but also to the "blue-collar" working class. The privileged 30% with college educations are, on the other hand, often portrayed as a "smug" "bohemian" bourgeoisie by Rosin, just as the national elites which participate in the international realms are seen by Merry as juxtaposing their urban world to the unchanging traditional culture of rural areas.

As for Rosin´s perspectives on the fact that boys are falling back in education, the explanations and studies forwarded by the author are interesting and valid. However, the fact that women have progressively been less oppressed might also have an influence in the fact they are excelling in education and in the workforce. Education curricula might have changed in order to adapt to the demands of a more feminized economy, but has it really changed that much? Men used to be doctors and lawyers in the past, so, whatever the contributing factors, maybe the fact that women can now compete without the stereotypes and constraints of the past may simply mean that their "team" is winning. The fact most of the better paid executive officers in companies in America are women makes the presence of men at CEO level a chronicle of a death foretold, as men´s grip on power is slipping on a yearly basis, at the same percentage women executive officer in the ranks immediately below them are multiplying. However, she still uses expressions related to the gender reversal to women´s advantage as an idea of a world flipping upside down. Once again, why is the previous situation

where men were dominant in boardrooms “the right way up”? Rosin herself says that men have been in charge for 40 thousand years, in comparison to the 40 years women have been starting to overtake them. So, who was “the wrong way up” after all? (Rosin, 2013: 204).

Furthermore, Rosin considers that one of the internal factors that is holding women back is what she calls “a catholic notion of satisfaction that encompasses much more than climbing the corporate ladder”. What can be considered striking in this affirmation was the fact that non-economic satisfaction is associated to a religion, and, on the other hand, this kind of satisfaction or fulfilment that is not inherent to money is considered something undesirable for the future of a successful woman. The choice of religion that was given as an example of holding women back by Rosin is also highly questionable, as Rosin may be interpreted as associating the catholic religion to the idea that family is a priority for women, who are therefore more likely to give in to this lesser form of lifetime wishes. Possibly, it may be useful to ascertain how many countries from the global-South and global-North are catholic, in order to contrast and compare economic development with religion (Rosin, 2013: 216).

There is something that may be connecting the idea of religion and moral identity in this part of Rosin´s narrative. The fact that she considers that it is some sort of catholic notion of satisfaction that is keeping woman back may lead one to think that moral identity interferes with success in economic terms. This may indicate that Rosin considers job satisfaction that is not translated into more money a waste of time in the climb up the corporate ladder for women, and that the “moral identity” component in their equation is negative in her concept of the rise of women (Rosin, 2013: 229). Moreover, Rosin’s references to gender when associated to educational attainment and nationality may lead one to understand that “up” is more education and upward mobility, but also global-North, in Merry´s terms. Men from the north of Europe (Germany, Sweden) are the “men from the future”, while men from Spain want “a woman from the past”, and that woman is Latin American, from the global-South. These light assumptions around origin, nationality, gender, education and class, related to concepts of past and future and global-South and global-North may be considered contestable (Rosin, 2013: 237).

Rosin often refers to the USA and to the UK as countries symbolizing the “West”. They are the norm, the standard where scientific studies and statistics about gender were gathered, and she often considers the results

of this evidence applicable to "Europe" and "Asia", while not so often transposable to "Latin America", and definitely not to "Africa". While the USA and the UK have a place of their own at the basis of Rosin´s analysis, other parts of the world are reduced to being designated as continents, with what may be considered as a disregard for the specificities of the countries which compose them. So, is the American exceptionalism referred to by Merry present in Rosin´s work? In one of the only occasions Rosin uses an anthropological example that is not focused on the global North, she compares the Khasi´s matrilineal society in India to the patriarchal context of the Maasai in order to illustrate that competitiveness was greater among women in the matrilineal society, per opposition to the patriarchal society model, where men were more competitive, in order to note that lack of competitiveness in women was not universally true of all societies.

Rosin makes a reference to aid agencies homing in on the fact that economies are depending more and more on women's success, by noting they have recognized the importance of power in women´s hands and their influence on economic progress, and are making aid get to certain countries "through women" or "instituting political quotas" in order to force women to be in power, with the final objective of "improving those countries´ fortunes". In a consideration comparable to Merry´s, but with a much more economically based backdrop, Rosin states that: "In many countries, advancing women requires delicately tiptoeing around local customs that put men in charge of money or trust only men to be leaders" (Rosin, 2013: 237). However, all the context Merry describes sends us in a different direction, as "tiptoeing" is not the most recurrent image in her narratives of the dialogues between the global and the local. Too often, Merry points out the fact that the global overpowers the local, imposing itself culturally and financially on people in local contexts. It is not therefore necessarily those who set the international human rights standards that are tiptoeing around local cultures, but more like "treading" on them, and leaving little space for negotiation (Merry, 1994: 176-178 and 216-217).

Even though human rights are rarely imposed nowadays, Merry concludes by raising the issue of whether or not they are a form of imperialism, and draws a parallel between the process of the introduction of international human rights law to American and European colonialism (Merry, 1994: 225). She notes that concepts such as civilization and slavery are some of the binaries which slipped into the practice of human rights, considering there are similarities between the colonial era and today's human rights system, as it is also shaped by inequalities of power and resources, between global

North and global South (Merry, 1994: 225). Moreover, much like Rosin's view on aid agencies and women, Merry points out that donors often promote reforms that " […]further neoliberalism and capitalist expansion rather than diminishing social class inequality", and end up not changing the economic and political structures that generate global inequality (Merry, 1994: 225-226).

In conclusion, both Merry and Rosin point out the link between women and global capital. However, Rosin can be considered to have taken the side of the global North as the norm to be followed, while Merry considers this an imperialistic perspective. They also both believe that the undergoing efforts around women are leading to change, in the process of women gaining more autonomy over their bodies and their lives.

However, Rosin's view is that the success of women is very much centred in their success in this global market economy, while Merry thinks it is precisely the job of the human rights system to provide constraint on the relentless operation of markets. In the end, Merry does not give up hope as, even though she still sees human rights as a tool in the hands of those in power (mostly from the global North), she still believes human rights may eventually stop being manipulated by neoliberalism and end up working in an emancipatory manner for women (Merry, 1994: 231).

One final question may be considered to remain unanswered in Rosin's work:

will women's rise in the context of capitalist economy emancipate them in the end?

So far, it seems to be enslaving them.

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List of acronyms:

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEO — Chief Executive Officer
CHR — Commission on Human Rights
Committee — CEDAW Committee
Convention — CEDAW Convention
CPR — Civil and Political Rights
CSW - Committee on the Status of Women
ESCR — Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
EU — European Union
ICESCR — International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
OECD — Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development
NGO — Non Governmental Organization
UN — United Nations
UNESCO — United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization
UNGA — United Nations General Assembly
USA — United States of America