

A Theoretical approach to the contradictory role of the cultural feeling of love in the inequality of the Spanish woman

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ABSTRACT

The “becoming” has replaced the “being” as the main category in European thinking. In philosophy, the awareness of this triumph of the becoming has ultimately given rise to two main paths, drawn by Kant and Hegel, respectively. So much so that sociologists, despite our attempts to move from the philosophical reading to the sociological one, are also forced to think about permanence and change in our research object. That dispute between structure and change, so complex and possibly endless, is deeply and inseparably linked to the one that opposes structure to action, another traditional sociological debate. After all, changes are driven by the significant actions of individuals that determine the success or failure of the transformation, as well as its scope, through the interaction with social structures. Our sociological tradition has equally taught us that we must also bear in mind that socio-cultural structures are visibly full of fractures, diverse change rates and contradictions.

For all these reasons, my intention here is to explain that the situation of women in Spanish contemporary society, the object of the present study, can be better understood in the light the context of the debates on the link between structure and change and between structure and action. of the two debates mentioned above and the contradictions that they present.

Key worlds: Love, Inequality, Culture, Sociological Theory, Sociology of Emotions and Sociology of Gender

1. Introduction

1.1. Theoretical foundations, objectives and structure of the article

The “becoming” has replaced the “being” as the main category in European thinking. Unlike ancient peoples who aspired to be, to achieve stability and permanence (Eliade 1952: 22 and ff.), modernity seeks the becoming, which consists in a way of thinking that considers everything –Nature, Man, Society, History and God himself – *subespecie temporis*, i.e. not only as changing but also in constant evolution (Baumer 1985: 33 and ff.). In philosophy, the awareness of this triumph of the becoming has ultimately given rise to two main paths, drawn by Kant (2003: 77-8 and 217-9) and Hegel (2000: 12, 100 y 202), respectively: that of change from permanence and that of pure change, or to put it in another way, that of transformations compatible with continuations and that of those transformations which do not permit stability. In this way, the act of thinking becomes inseparable from temporality (Steiner, 2001: 121).

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In my view, these two visions about the problem of change represent one of the most striking and defining quandaries of modern society. So much so that sociologists, despite our attempts to move from the philosophical reading to the sociological one, are also forced to think about permanence and change in our research object. For us, it is the classical debate which arises every time we analyze the link between structure and change, between order and change, between social structure and history; a conflict which, on the other hand, constitutes one of our essential goals (Mills, 1999: 66). That dispute between structure and change, so complex and possibly endless, is deeply and inseparably linked to the one that opposes structure to action, another traditional sociological debate. After all, changes are driven by the significant actions of individuals that determine the success or failure of the transformation, as well as its scope, through the interaction with social structures. Our sociological tradition has equally taught us that we must also bear in mind that socio-cultural structures are visibly full of fractures, diverse change rates and contradictions.

For all these reasons, my intention here is to explain that the situation of women in Spanish contemporary society, the object of the present study, can be better understood in the light of the two debates mentioned above and the contradictions that they present.

The analysis about the situation of female inequality carried out in this paper is going to be based on a number of specific theoretical conceptions. The first one is the sociology of emotions, according to which, together with objective and cognitive structures, the structure of the love feeling represents one of the useful and possible ways to approach the inequality phenomenon. Obviously, I am not saying that this is the only explanation, but it is actually an attempt which complements (Sarrible, 1995: 46) objective and cognitive proposals, more traditional in the sociological context. As a matter of fact, emotions have received a residual, generic and irrelevant treatment precisely in sociology; we can only speak about the birth of the sociology of emotion from the pioneering North American works published after 1975. Since then, there have been three main lines of work which regard the emotional reality of human beings and social structures as one of their study objects: the sociology "of" emotion; the sociology "with" emotions; and the emotion "in" sociology (Bericat, 2000: 147-149). I will adopt the first of these three alternatives here.

At the same time, the development of our research work will be basically supported on Weberian comprehensive or interpretive Sociology (Weber, 2006: 13 and ff., 43-4 and 172; González García, 1992: 37 and ff.; González García, 1998: 208), according to which the social world as well as the relationships –in this case, love relationships– it generates are full of sense, of meaning. This is the information sociologists work with, the one which –through the concepts of "correspondence in meaning" or "elective affinities"– additionally allows them to find the common links between the different cognitive dimensions –aesthetic, economic, political, religious and social– and structural dimensions –objective, cognitive and emotional– that modernity has fragmented and, therefore, to make up the sense, the "cosmivision" (Muñoz, 2001: 23-26) of post-modern love culture.

Starting from these theoretical foundations and trying to understand why inequality between men and women still exists as well as the role that the love feeling plays in that, I set myself the following aims: first, to analyze what changes have occurred in the situation of Spanish women and what elements from the dominant patriarchal system still survive (structure-change); second, to draw a conceptual map of love, that is, to outline the main characteristics which define it; third, to understand what role the love feeling plays in the meaning that women assign to their actions (action-structure) and in the changes or permanencies operated around equality (structure-change); and fourth, to identify the most striking contradictions which surround this situation of inequality.

Seeking to achieve these aims, I have decided to divide the present paper in two parts –dedicated, respectively, to changes and permanencies in the situation of inequality that affects Spanish women and to the role that love plays in it– preceded by an introduction and a conclusion.

2. The situation of inequality of Spanish women

2.1. Structural features and change trends in the situation of Spanish women

The core components of female identity in Spanish society are motherhood, the couple relationship and work, which women try to reconcile without relinquishing any of them (Ilizarbe, 1999) without that precluding the emergence of deep contradictions. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that women are enjoying personal autonomy for the first time (Alberdi, 2005), which is why some scholars have gone so far as to state that they are living a true “golden age” (García de León Álvarez, 2009: 209-213). However, the dark side of such an apparently bright reality lies in the fact that the social and professional situation of women, as well as their situation at the household, still reveals the inequality existing both in unpaid work and in the labor market (Carrasco, 1997: 87-91). Let us now examine in more detail what has changed and what has survived in the structures of family and labor market which –as has been pointed out above– are the two worlds around which the identity of women moves.

Industrialization in the Western World has fractured the family little by little, giving rise to three successive models at least: the extended family, the nuclear one and the “negotiating one”, characterized by plural coexistence modes or plural love games. The extended family fulfilled the main role of production; in the nuclear model, the family stops being an economic issue to become a residence and consumption unit where the relationships between family members also come to act as a psychological mainstay of identities (Espronceda, 2001: 11; Crego, 2004: 13 and ff.). Finally, within the negotiating family, the nuclear model coexists with other innovative forms which are fully adapted to the context of the individualization society (Beck & Beck, 2008: 19-22.). In this type of society, individuals construct their own biography breaking away from old models and, especially, from traditional gender roles. However, since the ideal lifestyle conception in the labor market is the individual and totally mobile person, and because the industrial society depends on the situation of inequality between men (supposed to work) and women (supposed to stay at home), the contradiction between the demands of the labor market and those related to love relationships arises. More precisely, individuals have to adapt their life to working conditions, as a result of which the rules as well as coexistence in their family become problematic and fragile, which forces a day-to-day negotiation not only of couple relationships but also of relationships between fathers and mothers and their children. Therefore, on the whole, the family has gone from being a community of work to becoming a community of feelings (Beck & Beck, 2008: 76), a community where an emotional fusion focused on happiness takes place (Alberdi, 2005).

The situation of the family in Spain is gradually adapting to the individualization society, though more slowly and not so markedly as in other European countries. In the Mediterranean model where Spain belongs, and unlike what happens in other types of welfare society –the Anglo-Saxon, the Continental and the Nordic one– the family appears as a differentiating, characteristic element determined by the intensity of relationships (Sarrile, 1995: 48) and by the fact that the cultural dimension prevails in it, based on solidarity within the family and the clan (Moreno, 2001: 1-5). That is why, although the types of relationship are becoming diversified little by little, the most widespread form is still coexistence within the family: about 86.5% of the households are family-base –the highest rates in Europe (Del Campo & Rodríguez, 2002: 108). Therefore, the family has reduced its institutional aspects but still keeps its importance insofar as it is very widespread and highly valued, i.e. it has significance not only factually but also ideologically (Alberdi, 2005). In this respect, it is worth remembering that in Spain, and despite the changes experienced, the degree of satisfaction with family life and marriage is high; that the population’s satisfaction with the functioning of couple relationships is quite considerable; that the number of conflicts within marriage is relatively low; that marital harmony is acceptable and that marriage breakups have not reached the European level (Del

Campo & Rodríguez, 2002: 139-141); and finally that marriage continues to be the step before procreation for the vast majority of citizens (Delgado, 1993: 126).

In any case, important changes have undeniably taken place within Spanish families during the last fifty years. This is related to the overall demographic, economic, social and cultural changes which have had an impact on the family institution too (Carrasco, 1997: 90; Iglesias, 1990: 236). Thus, we have gone from the patriarchal family to another more egalitarian one, dissociated itself from structural parameters and turned into that cultural type that coexists with various types of coexistence (Del Campo & Rodríguez, 2002: 104). We can consequently identify two essential family models in present-day Spain: one more institutional and the other more optional, emotional and unstable, and more strongly influenced by the satisfaction of personal needs (Alberdi, 2005). This last model is in keeping with that of the “negotiating family,” (Meil, 2006: 11-15; 2003: 1-16). The woman who lives inside this type of family adapts to the context of the individualization society, which brings about a number of effects, on the one hand, that the traditional definition of marital roles according to gender has lost its legitimacy and, consequently, that the patriarchal ideology has been seriously weakened too; and, on the other hand, that the distribution of responsibilities now requires a negotiation between the parties.

There have also been changes in the market structure as far as women are concerned, although these changes are sometimes contradictory too. On the one hand, women represent a majority in professional sectors such as education, healthcare and justice, and are increasingly entering politics in an almost egalitarian way. However, employment is still concentrated on the main five traditional branches considered “female” –services, financial services, trade, agriculture and the textile and food industries (Carrasco, 1997: 89). Furthermore, women still have not fully joined the world of work, and more specifically, in the professional world and in artistic and intellectual practices. Neither have women achieved their full admission to the highest economic sectors –entrepreneurs, executives– or to advanced research in the fields of pure sciences and engineering. To this must be added that their labor participation is significantly higher in the public sector than in the private sector (Moreno, 2001: 9), that their activity rate in Spain is the lowest one and their unemployment rate the highest one in the EU (Salido, no date) and that, whereas 66.4 % of active men are working, the percentage of active women working only amounts to 53%, a figure that is below the European average (according to INE [Spain’s National Statistics Institute] sources). This is in keeping with the fact that, although both spouses work in half of the Spanish households, the situation is radically different in the other half. In fact, Spain – together with Italy and Greece – is the country with the highest number of households where only one person works (usually the man). The percentage is more than twice as high as the one recorded in the Scandinavian countries and twice as much as that of France, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Germany (Eurostat, 2003). The main cause lies in the cultural conception of the family, which also explains why the reasons adduced by women at interviews to justify why they only devote themselves to domestic work “are [always] closely linked to the family,” i.e. because it gives sense to their life situation –I will comment on this topic again later on. This additionally helps explain the lack of professional qualification, the scarcity of quality jobs available to women, the low pay –women’s salaries are 20% lower on average than those of men– and the number of children, which makes their participation in paid work more difficult, particularly if there are three or more. In any case, what really matters is that, regardless of whether both or only one of the spouses have a job –mainly the man– the distribution of domestic and family responsibilities is far from egalitarian in practice. Children education is certainly the task where men participate to a greater extent, though never reaching equality and, therefore, children care is not an egalitarian task, just like the distribution of domestic chores, which is not egalitarian either. If we add to this the existence of high gender violence rates (it increased by 2% in 2009 in contrast with the decrease registered in the rest of violent acts), everything seems to suggest that the assumption of women’s equality on the part of society is not complete (Meil, 2006: 11-15; Meil, 2003: 1-16).

In short, what we can usually see is that women dedicate more time than men both to paid work and to work at home and that, consequently, inequality forms part of the standard conception of the family, even in “negotiating families.” Thus, although it is true that the shape of the family has changed, it is unclear whether this has led to a correlative change in the distribution of tasks. This contradiction in relation to the situation of women illustrates the coexistence of change and permanence which can be observed nowadays. The surprising thing, however, is that this situation contrasts sharply with the awareness of equality among men and women, as 83% of Spanish citizens support that equality, this being one of the highest rates in Europe.

Researchers do agree, though, on the fact that patriarchy has weakened or collapsed as an ideology but survives as a set of practices or, expressed in an illuminating way, what has happened is that, if the ‘head’ of the situation can be defined as modern, its ‘heart’ continues to be patriarchal (García de León, 2009: 209). Indeed, although socio-cultural transformations –the economic changes, the institutional ones (in the State, the Family and the Church) and those related to privacy, sexuality and love– have actually made the Spanish socio-cultural system start to teeter, they have not managed to overthrow it in its practices. It therefore will come as no surprise to check that, although a majority of Spanish women have joined the labor market and their life has been transformed, the mental and family structures of the patriarchal culture have actually not varied much or are changing less quickly (Castells & Subirats, 2007: 22-5). And this leaves us at a loss wondering how it can be that women have not reached full equality in a country with one of the highest rates of awareness of equality between men and women.

2.2. The structure of feelings, along with cognitive and objective structures, another key to understand the situation of Spanish women

In my opinion, it is necessary to overcome perplexity and analyze the few existing sociological theories or produce new theories which can adequately explain the complexity of this phenomenon and be tested empirically. Certainly, equality between both sexes cannot be achieved in the institutional structures of family and work, since the basic scheme of industrial society presupposes inequality between men and women. Therefore, that inequality is not a superficial phenomenon which can be solved at structures, but only bringing work and life together (Beck & Beck, 2008: 51 y 226-227). It is true that it is in the field of education where we can most directly determine the fate of the new cultural model driven by women and, consequently, the future “society of women” (Touraine, 2007: 156). It is necessary to examine both objective structures and cognitive ones if we want to understand the processes of change and permanence regarding the situation of women and highlights the fracture existing between both types of structures. In this respect it does not suffice to convert consciences and wills –cognitive structures, the symbolic revolution demanded by the feminist movement– it is also necessary to carry out a historical deconstruction of objective structures and vary the conditions of domination (Bourdieu, 2007: 7 and ff.). But this is not easy to reach successfully because it must be remembered that objective structures have been built for centuries, that there are powerful agents and institutions constantly acting to ensure permanencies – the Church, the School, the Family– that we also need to understand the actual nature of power and, above all, that the distinction between dominated and dominators is not always so easy because traditions, customs and values are very deeply assimilated and internalized by the society as a whole.

According to my thesis, along with cognitive and objective structures, it is essential to know the role played –if it does play one– by the structure of feelings –particularly the love feeling– in the situation of Spanish women. In this respect, if we want to explain the individual behavior, we need to understand it, which implies having access to the mind and feelings of social agents so that emotion and values on the one hand, and rational calculation on the other hand, play equally essential roles; (Campbell, 2007: 198 and ff.). In fact, affections, together with instrumental reason, shape a

normative concept required to know human actions (Giner, 2004: 181-2). And therefore, attention must be paid to non-logical actions (Pareto, 1987: 285; Giner, 2004: 207).

When we talk about women, affects and emotions become main incentive in their behavior. In this sense, for them, "being" and the idea are the same, since "femininity" means being, care and affection, uniformity, integration and personalization. That is why the woman is a "fusion-seeking" human being who promotes union, integration and the life of the species as a whole (Simmel, 1984; Simmel, 1923a: 42 and ff.; Simmel, 1923b: 218 and ff.; Simmel, 1923c: 336 and ff.; Simmel, 1925: 273 and ff.; Simmel, 1911; Beriain, 2000: 163; and Osborne, 1987: 97-103.). In other words, woman is more concentric; she is more collected within itself, or to put it in another way, she is more unified than the male because it pays a lot of attention to others (Ortega, 2009: 62).

Which is really important is that the transformation of privacy and the love-feeling is a product of women that meant the creation of the home; a change in relationships between parents and children; a reduction of the power owned by males derived from the separation between home and work; and the invention of motherhood and free love, where affections and emotional bonds prevail. As a result of this type of love, women manage to control children education; in other words, we go from patriarchal authority to motherly affection, which is complemented with the identification of romantic love with feminized love, men becoming passive and excluded (Giddens, 2006: 43 ff.) before this new type of love and focusing their identity on work until that love goes into crisis.

With the dismemberment of the nuclear family built around social differentiation and within a context of a functional differentiation characterized by high contingency and individual autonomy, love becomes more necessary and important than ever before, although it may also become more unlikely than in other periods, because the fewer referents we have at our disposal to reach our stability the more desperately we head for a couple relationship which we hope will give sense and rootedness to our existence (Beck & Beck, 2008: 16; 72-77). That is the contemporary tragedy of love, as the love relationship which legitimizes the search for happiness is more fluid, fragile, transitory and uncertain than ever before (Bauman, 2005) and with it, happiness becomes an unattainable and incommunicable good, which activates even more the need for love (Mascarello, 2006: 1). In this context, love becomes the framework for personal and intimate communication (Luhmann, 2008: 36), makes it possible for society to exist within an individualized world (Mascarello, 2006: 7) and becomes the sense of current modernity (Beck & Beck, 2008: 14).

Summing up, I believe that the feeling of love (towards the children and towards the partner) created by women and which seeks fusion can help explain the meaning that they assign to their actions and also that some aspects of the changes or permanencies operated around equality are probably related to this fact.

3. Conceptual map of love

3.1. Love is a cognitive and cultural feeling oriented towards action and structure

But, what is love? Everybody agrees that love is unexplainable, ineffable and elusive through words (Mernissi, 2008: 31). Furthermore, its concept is as complex as all the concepts we sociologists usually work with –"work," "consumption," "classes," etc.– with the only peculiarity, of course, that it is a more recent topic in our research work. To this must be added that there are at least two dozen different meanings for it and that there is no consensus among us, social scientists, when it comes to determine its meaning (Scheff, no date: 13). Furthermore, the same difficulty arises when we try to define the different types of love: brotherly, motherly, erotic, love of oneself and love of God. That is why, rather than trying to give a more personal vision about what I understand as love, which would swell the already numerous list and would emphasize the ineffability and blurred boundaries of this

concept, I much prefer to design a conceptual map that is as precise as possible and can clarify its specific and essential parameters. I am going to focus on the free romantic love based on feelings which is present in post-modernity, a type of love with a historical origin (Luhmann, 2008) which breaks down into at least five dimensions –emotions, ideals, cultural practices and its expressions as a relationship model and a form of interaction (Costa, 2006: 765)– which I see as a cognitive and cultural feeling oriented towards action and structure and full of internal and external contradictions.

Above all from the field of social psychology, love has usually been understood as an emotion and a behavior (Sangrador, 1993: 183). As a sociologist, I am particularly interested in these last two aspects –love as an emotion and love as a behavior– although I will focus on the first one now, leaving the second one for a later section in this paper. I do not fully agree with those who say that love is a symbolically standardized means of communication, a symbolic code which stimulates the origin and expression of feelings (Luhmann, 2008: 24, 37; 39), i.e. that it is essentially a language which comes before emotionality, because that would mean taking love into the exclusive abstract world of the *logos*, placing reason hierarchically above the feeling and continuing to disconnect sociology from the nearly unexplored territory of emotions. Instead, I argue that love is a feeling, or rather, a complex network of emotions (Novo & Arenas, 2008: 4) which, despite being used in different ways (Scheff, no date: 12), are linked to a single person. And it is precisely the feelings that make the subjects' perception selective, since they direct them towards the object they have placed within a privileged perceptive field (Escudero *et al.*, 2005: 4211), isolated from the rest of the world (Illouz, 2009: 165). For this reason, love is both individual and emotional (Beck & Beck, 2008: 264), understanding emotion as a phenomenon situated halfway between the human body and culture, that is, a phenomenon which in turn reflects the characteristics of individual personality and the determining factors related to a specific social context and the cultural heritage received (Costa, 2006: 766). That is the reason why love is equally associated with cognition (Torregrosa, 1984: 186; Hochschild, 1979), as lovers, because their world has become smaller and because they identify with their loved ones, adopt a more focused approach and have the impression that their conscience is more intense and richer (Ortega, 2009: 44).

Romantic love is therefore a cognitive feeling culturally built as a result of social structure and relationships (Torregrosa, 1984: 185-191). And that is so in two ways, insofar as it is a cultural feeling and also because a “love culture” exists (Ortega, 2009: 10). Thus, in the context of intimate relationships, this type of standardized love is culturally oriented (Luhmann, 2008: 7) and consequently involves us in relationships which are not natural but cultural (Ilizarbe, 1999), because it constructs a cultural symbolic world (Beck & Beck, 2008: 250) and because it is determined by cultural rules (Illouz, 2009: 208). More precisely –love– emotions are cultural actions learnt and carried out in specific moments, which we should express and which make possible relationship processes mediated by cultural instruments and resources which have a symbolic nature and are provided by social contexts. For this reason, feelings draw a moral landscape and suggest guidelines for the relationships (Rebollo *et al.*, 2006). From this perspective, love –as a reflection and a product of a certain time and society– is to a great extent socially constructed, which is why we cannot possibly define it as a material entity but as a psychological and socio-cultural construct which is specific to our western civilization and facilitates interpersonal relationships, which assumes the role of a guide for behaviors and reveals the social rules governing those social relationships and those behaviors (Sangrador, 1993: 182-5).

It is then understood that love is the intention behind behaviors (Cervantes, 2005: 22), the emotion which causes individual and collective actions (Novo & Arenas, 2008: 7) and the activity principle that finds its ultimate purpose in culturally oriented action (Luhmann, 2008: 7, 63; 94). Everything is activity in it, as love enables individuals to get out of themselves and address others: it is “gravitation towards what is loved”, it is “pure sentimental activity towards the loved object” (Ortega, 2009: 15;

39). More precisely, love means giving and not receiving, the fact of giving to the loved person representing the highest expression of affirmation and power, an active and vital power which fills individuals with joy or happiness in an impassioned way (Fromm, 207: 30-31). However, because what is loved is not reflected in a completely accurate way in the behavior of the loved one, love expresses a confirmation of will, which is really complex (Frankfurt, 2004: 73). This happens to be determined not only by the loving subject or the loved object but also by a specific situation, which forces researchers to integrate these three elements if we wish to build a good theory about love (Sangrador, 1993: 185). It should additionally be remembered in this sense that human behavior is inserted and modeled by institutions –especially by the family in the case of love– organizations and groups and that, for this reason, it inevitably and constantly faces a tense and difficult fight between what is traditional and what is modern, between what is rational and what is sentimental, between necessity and liberty (Espronceda, 2001: 5) and, in short, between love-driven action and social structure.

It is true that –love– emotions obviously participate in action, in social structure (Bericat, 2000: 146) and in the more or less complex relationships established between both of them. Firstly, because love is mediated, not only by gender –as will be seen later– but also by the social structure (Novo & Arenas, 2008: 3) which its meaning is linked to (Beck & Beck, 2008: 251). And, secondly, because love in itself is a “structure of feelings” (Illouz, 2009: 49; Williams, 1977), insofar as the latter relate individuals to others and establish deeper relationship frameworks and also because these relationships are structured according to feelings. In this sense, love becomes an institution (Ortega, 2009: 244) which fixes will and also specifies it spiritually and materially because, despite being fragile at first, it gradually transforms itself into principles, rules, agreements, regulations and commitments, that is, into institutions, into permanent social structures (Alberoni, 2005: 57, 156; 159).

However, if we consider that inequality is a defining feature of social structure and that this includes the unequal distribution of what is socially regarded as rewarding or frustrating, it is easy to assume that an unequal distribution of emotions and feelings exists within the social structure (Torregrosa, 1984; 188-92), particularly –as will be seen later– between men and women.

3.2. Love is full of internal and external contradictions

Precisely because love participates in action, in social structure and in the links existing between both –and because that social structure is unequal– opposed feelings (Sarrible, 1995: 45; 52) and numerous conflicts, contradictions, ambivalences and paradoxes –consciously (Illouz, 2009: 265) or unconsciously– arise. And they do so both in the internal or immanent dimensions and in the external dimensions of love, in its own logic by means of which social actors assign a single, mythical sense to love or in sociological externalities –inequality, mobility...– or institutional ones –objects, regulations, rituals...– (Beck & Beck, 2008: 43, 225; 236; Costa, 2006: 772). Among these numerous contradictions, the most outstanding ones in my view are those which contrast individual and social spheres, personal and impersonal relationships, rationality and irrationality, and intensity and fragility.

Although some people think that the sociability model proposed by romantic love is not formal or contractual but organic and anti-institutional and that, therefore, it is closer to the mode of emotionality that the anthropologist Turner calls “*communitas*” –a state of intense emotional fusion which defines members of the same group (Illouz, 2009: 195)– the truth is that, when it eventually becomes structured, the couple shapes an institution that gives rise to the smallest of all communities. So much so that the presence of love leads to the intimate and subjective creation of a new collectivity, an incipient society, a new world and, at the same time, of a new original self, the individual. And that is what takes love to the dialectical fight between the force which tends to fusion and the one which leads to individualization, the first one needing compliance by the group, and the second one, compliance by the individual (Alberoni, 1991; Alberoni, 2005: 21, 57, 147; 234). No

wonder love constitutes the unity of a duality (Luhmann, 2008: 189) and –as I have already said– permits the existence of society in such an individualized world.

But we can go even further in this matter, as love not only creates a society but also the cosmivision or worldview on which it rests, insofar as it is constituted more by the power than by the love object because –contrary to what we usually suppose– it does not essentially represent a relationship with a specific person but, above all, an attitude, a kind of character orientation which influences the way in which a person becomes linked to a love object and to the world as a whole (Fromm, 207: 52). And, from this perspective, love emerges as a matchless reality power, more real than any other thing (Ortega, 2009: 44); it is consequently the most axial resource for the social construction of reality (Beck & Beck, 2008: 119). At the same time, the society of leisure and consumption generates a way of understanding love structured around values such as strong feelings, fun, uninhibited sensuality, immediate reward and spontaneous pleasure which suggest an escape from the world far from the routine of everyday life and, more specifically, from professional life (Illouz, 2009: 131-2).

It all adds up to the fact that romantic love can be passionate and rational at the same time and that, when referring to it, we can speak in an ambivalent way about passion in reason and about reason in passion. The truth is that love, because it has its sense and its purposes, is not –as we usually say, perhaps too hastily– irrational (Ortega, 2009: 162), or at least it is not irrational in an absolute sense, since it values its own rational motives (Luhmann, 2008: 138) and, within the framework of the rational institution of marriage, it shows the reasons for passion along with a practical, cognitive rationality (Illouz, 2009: 251; 277 ff.). Nevertheless, this does not prevent love from strengthening more irrational aspects too, among them the quality of affections, the love feeling and the present and the short term over the essentially rational character of the medium and long term (Alberdi, 2005). Therefore, because it invokes such values and principles, love entails a very high cost, insofar as personal bonds become weaker (Illouz, 2009: 205), which also has to do with the ontological insecurity that, on the one hand, encourages the search for intensive love, which involuntarily but inevitably allies itself with contingency and fragility (Costa, 2006: 775-8) and, on the other hand, favors the absolute character of love, which tragically raises such great hopes and expectations that they can hardly ever be fulfilled (Beck & Beck, 2008: 133).

3.3. Love provides sense and meaning to life; it confers identity, it is creative and free

In fact, we still love and we do so, above all, because love gives sense to our existence (Beck & Beck, 2008: 238), because it makes the world go round, because it explains the value that life itself has for us and because it allows us to live with a feeling of greater fulfillment. Love compromises us to ensure that our lives make sense, and we develop activities for some specific purpose. After all, if value gives things an intrinsic and absolute importance, it is precisely love that assigns this type of value to the loved object and encourages its ultimate goal: the identification of interests with the loved one, the reasons behind the loving acts of care and devotion, the concern and selfless dedication to the existence of what is loved and the unflagging search for good things for the loved one. We should not forget that the love object is full of value for the subject exactly because it is loved; in other words, value depends on love, this being the original source of the ultimate value and, consequently, loving already constitutes a reason, an essential reason. However, love not only encourages us to achieve the ultimate aims but also to possess them because, without them, we would not have anything important, anything valuable to do in life and, therefore, without meaningful objectives to fulfill by ourselves, no activity that we may undertake will make any sense at all (Frankfurt, 2004: 52).

Moreover, love grants individual happiness and personal reaffirmation (Illouz, 2009: 56), as it expresses our most intimate and basic personality and becomes an essential space to achieve, define or build the individual's specific inner identity (Beck & Beck, 2008: 119; Luhmann, 2008: 16; 96; Rebollo *et al.*, 2006; and Frankfurt, 2004: 64-5). In it stands out the creative aspect of love (Bauman,

2005; Alberoni, 2006: 35 Ortega, 2009: 15, 83, 74; 155) that requires choice and, consequently, puts individual freedom under strain with culture prescriptions (Illouz, 2009: 208).

3.4. Love represents a transforming utopia; it seeks fusion and breaks social differences, and constitutes an earthly religion

Love precisely adopts one of its identity signs in the emancipation with respect to the traditional rules of life (Beck & Beck, 2008: 12), insofar as it is a “love-revolt” which has a subversive charge and becomes a utopian hope that seeks either to make the dream come true within reality or to model taking the dream, the idea of heaven on earth, as a reference. Furthermore, it triggers a mutation process oriented towards the future which replaces the old society with a new one and which consequently generates a completely new order (Alberoni, 2005). It is a type of social order that wishes to do away with chaos (Mernissi, 2008) and also wishes to be alternative, because it projects a halo of transgression, and promises –but also demands– a better world through the liberating potential contained in its most outstanding values and principles: individualism, self-realization, the ratification of personal features, and equality between sexes when they experience pleasure together (Illouz, 2009).

The love state means the union derived from the attraction exerted by the difference (Luhmann, 2008: 15) or, to put it in another way, the fusion of the lovers (Alberoni, 2005: 97), of their individual bodies and souls in physical and emotional intimacy (Illouz, 2009). This is so because love, which is centrifugal, makes us flow constantly towards what is loved and, in this way, it succeeds in bringing the subject and the object together. After all, staying next to the loved one, by his/her side, in a deeper contact and proximity than the purely spatial ones, represents the unmistakably sign of true love: it is “being vitally with the other,” “being ontologically with what is loved” and, in short, the way in which lovers manage to dissolve their individuality into that of the loved one and vice versa, the way in which the individuality of the loved one impregnates their own individuality. Otherwise, the height of this fusion is reached by means of sexual love, an indissoluble union meant to improve the species which can procreate a child, the fruit of this fusion and the most intense yearning for human perfection (Ortega, 2009: 34-5).

Perhaps, love in modern societies is so strongly linked to solidarity because it protects individuals against painful emotions, against separativity and alienation (Scheff, no date: 18, 20; 63). From this point of view, it represents the ideal counter-ideology of individualization because, whereas individualization reinforces attitudes based on the masculine role, the fusion of love rather embodies femininity and, since it stresses uniqueness, it promises a community of the singular ones and proposes to transcend distance and the world’s alienation (Beck & Beck, 2008: 55, 249; 263). And, if it is true that the deepest necessity of human beings consists in overcoming their separativity and if the wish for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful human impulse, the most essential passion, then love might represent the most effective strategy to achieve it. It is worth remembering in this respect that the unity reached by means of productive work is not interpersonal, that orgiastic fusion is transitory, and that conformity to the group represents a false unity, i.e. that these are more or less partial –but never totally satisfactory– answers to the problem of human existence, of its immanent separativity. That is why the most fulfilling solution lies in interpersonal union, in the union with another person, in love (Fromm, 2007: 20, 40).

Whether it is a perfect fusion or a not so perfect one, no hierarchies actually exist when people fall in love, and the dichotomies of everyday life have no value either (Alberoni, 2005: 58; 105). It is true that love puts lovers on a level with each other –as has already been said; it erases all differentiations based on social class (Luhmann, 2008: 138) and blurs social boundaries, as it revives the primitive authenticity lost in the self and focuses on what is common and universal in mankind. It additionally harmonizes two utopian ideals: that of relationships without social or gender-based inequalities and

that of opulence and abundance in free time. How does this happen? Firstly, through the mutual access of lovers to leisure, which temporarily cancels responsibilities and merges the self with nature, thus erasing gender divisions, social identities, and class inequality. And secondly, when men, in order to be romantic –also temporarily– suspend all control over their emotions and their firm authority and women continue to be what they are by “nature.” And in this way, placing both men and women in the female territory of feelings where gender differences are neutralized, we pass from personal identity to the fused identity, beyond what is masculine or feminine (Illouz, 2009: 142, 150, 166; 243).

Love somehow situates itself beyond this world, as both the lover and the mystic reach the conclusion that this life stops being a relevant matter for them (Ortega, 2009: 56), or it could be better expressed saying that love confirms and transgresses, unites and separates, links to and isolates from this world, thus acquiring the features of the religious liminal rites through which rules of conduct are diluted, hierarchies are inverted and the energies which usually remain repressed are released. Therefore, love escapes from everyday life to enter a scenario of ritual meanings where the couple relationship represents the center and objective of interaction and things happen more slowly. However, something else can be added in relation to the conception of time in love, since everything starts and finishes in the loved person, the beginning and the end of time converge in that loved being (Alberoni, 2005: 69). What is more, in order to underline the complexity of time, the latter is not projected towards the typical linearity of messianic utopias in love; instead it mixes three different time categories: the –yearned-for– past of the lost authenticity, the –existential– eternal present of intensity and the –transcendent– timelessness of what is sacred. And these three categories refer us back to a kind of substitution of religiousness as a central element of everyday life or to a deep affinity with the experience of what is sacred (Illouz, 2009), or to a proximity to the religious feeling (Alberoni, 2005: 242). In this sense, we could describe love as an earthly religion, since it is clad with daily religiousness, with hope in the afterlife, in earthly life, without forgetting that it contains the same utopia as religion: escaping from the prison of normality (Beck & Beck, 2008: 3, 233; 248).

4. The role of love in the situation of inequality of Spanish women

4.1. Differences between men and women before love

Once the conceptual map of romantic love has been developed, after outlining its essential characteristics and following the objectives sought in this article, we can now try to find out what role love actually plays in the situation of inequality that women have to suffer. This is something which – as is going to be checked below– cannot be separated from the fact that this is, first and foremost, a feminized type of love, that when we speak about it in an abstract way, we are speaking above all about women; after all, women invented it. This can be attested in the numerous empirical and theoretical works that I have employed and that highlight the differences between men and women as far as the love feeling is concerned.

In fact, although it is true that men and women agree on what love is in some aspects, differences usually prevail. The points of coincidence can be seen, for example, in that both sexes claim that love is the main reason why they decide to make their relationship official (Cervantes, 2005: 25). Similarly, 76% of Spaniards believe in love as a guarantee for the couple and also young people currently prefer an egalitarian organization of the family, with equal opportunities both inside and outside the home (Novo & Arenas, 2008: 3-7).

In any case, leaving aside these areas of coincidence, men and women usually differ in nearly all the issues related to love (Alberoni, 2005: 61; 219; Cervantes, 2005: 21-28; Del Campo & Rodríguez, 2002: 120; Ilizarbe, 1999; Luhmann, 2008: 189; Touraine, 2007: 73-7; Townsend, J., 2000; Yela, 1998: 121-6).

In men, dominates a certain difficulty in expressing verbally about what they mean by love, if not indifference or even refusal to compromise love. They, who live less under the forces of life and death and that identify more with their role in society and especially with his work, exert an "instrumental role" in their loving behavior. That means that they adopt assertive, direct, physical, analytical behaviors, based in the task, the purpose or the aim of the situation. Therefore, they confer love less emotional and more rational meanings as far as they conceive it as something more abstract, impersonal and universal. Moreover, they understand it as something more than making up the universe, directing it to the entire world -to their parents, their siblings, their fellows, and God - and defining it as a "feeling typical of human beings". On the other hand, they love the fact of loving, put love in the domain of pleasure and of everyday life, and do not give love much importance to marriage, which is certainly not considered the ultimate destination of their lives. It is understood then that they committed themselves less with their partners, they were more independent and separate love and sex. In this sense, their behaviors are more specific sexual and, when they get jealous, they do mainly for sexual purposes.

In women, however, predominates a more concrete and romantic idea of love, but also more abstract and ideal, as they understand this as a positive and moral act. In fact, most of them argues that love is the deepest and the ultimate meaning of their life, assuming an absolute and almost-religious character as long as, from their point of view, it has the faculty to power, bear and believe everything. At the same time, in women who live longer with the forces of life and death, who are less social and who are less defined by social roles than men, their love behavior has an "expressive role"—as they also do in sex— . That means that they show emotional, verbal and intimacy-related attitudes focused on personal and communicative relationships. In other words, they show greater intensity in the love style, expect expressions of affection and love from their partner, as well as greater intimacy and more romanticism, and suffer mainly emotional jealousy. This is also related to the fact that women love the beloved subject, which means that they love deeply and primarily and, therefore, his attention on personal relationships is more directed to the affections, to the care of others and, in short, to the merger. Indeed, they are more linked to the object of love, since they confer love an altruistic and disinterested meaning, even though, in compensation, they expect expressions of affection and love, as well as a more intimate and more romantic attitude. However, they feel "Is me who give more, which does everything for her partner" and they are also conscious that the main obstacle in obtaining autonomy is inside of themselves and that "we are not yet who we want to be." In any case, women see love as a devotion to the loved without expecting anything in return, and link it with the couple, expressing that love is very important for marriage and that it represents the highest fulfillment in their lives. Finally, in marriage, women are more willing to maintain sexual fidelity, since they tie love and sex, which idealize and consider the highest form of human interaction and communion.

4.2. The love feeling in women, a priority which relegates other worldly matters and hinders equality

Therefore, female fusion-seeking love becomes essentially obvious in couple relationships and in children. In France, although the type of woman devoted to her husband or lover has come into decline, the woman is still defined by her personal ties, especially those related to the traditional family (Touraine, 2007: 194). And the same happens in Spain, just like in Italy, Portugal or Greece, as we saw in the section dedicated to structural features and change trends in the situation of Spanish women, because women mostly choose marital union as their preferred form of family (CIS, 1997, Estudio 2248; in Moreno, 2001: 5-9.). In any case, nothing is more important to women than the love relationship (Scheff, no date: 22), and particularly the love that a mother feels for her child because it has special connotations, something that becomes evident even during pregnancy, which they see as the most powerful experience in their lives as women (Touraine, 2007: 76).

The union with children is truly more intense than all the other relationships and motherly love is the deepest core of a woman and her nature, as they have declared themselves: "Everything for the love of a child" (Beck & Beck, 2008: 110-145 and ff.). So much so that their love for the child is closely associated with their own neglect (Alberoni, 2005: 49), to which must be added that it leads them into a sort of nostalgia for paradise, gives them self-experience, grants them emotional value and becomes a counter-world opposed to the world of work, where instrumental reason prevails (Beck & Beck, 2008: 148-151). Finally a mother's love for her children –like love in general– represents an important creative facet insofar as, thanks to this type of love, the mother can give sense and significance to her life, feel creative and transcend herself (Fromm, 207: 56). And she does so because giving birth to a human being allows her to have a more direct relationship with that child, reflecting on this event and being aware of herself (Touraine, 2007: 55), and because she loves what she is creating and what at the same time is recreating her (Alberoni, 2005: 234). Finally, another important consequence of motherly love –a sociological one in this case– is that, whereas the patriarchal system has its foundations in hierarchy, the matriarchal system is based on equality (Fromm, 207: 69).

What we should ask ourselves –following the objectives of this work– is, on the one hand, if this equality, if this absence of hierarchies in motherly love and in the love that women express towards their partner reaches the level of reality or stays only on an ideal dimension and, on the other hand, if it can even become a hindrance to achieve that practical equality. Regarding the first question, the answer is far from easy and it could actually be "no" or "yes." The answer could be negative because –as I have explained in detail throughout this article– love refers us to the ideal intensity, to the ideal of paradise lost, to dreams of happiness, to a flight from the world and from routine –especially at work– and to the ideal of counter-individualization; and because women conceive love in a more ideal way than men. Likewise, because the love utopia develops within an imaginary domain where social conflicts are solved symbolically or eliminated through the promise of total harmony, both for political relationships and for interpersonal ones (Illouz, 2009: 81). But the equality that love expresses does not only take place on an imaginary context but also in real life, at least in what refers to the autonomy of female sexuality because it has managed to escape the control of men and, consequently, to advance towards equality (Touraine, 2007: 16). Furthermore, love –the same as death– puts us on a level and makes us all universal in the feelings and in the deep existential solitude and separativity that we live in and that we want to escape from through love.

The second question –'can love become a hindrance to equality?'– is not easily answered either. It is true that, on a stage that could be described as post-feminist, and even above their demands for liberation, women mostly prefer to be the starring characters in their personal life and not in the political universe which they see as something separated from the life experience. In other words, despite bearing always in mind the domination exerted by men over them, at the same time they define themselves in their relationship with themselves and, besides, they defend both equality and difference, refuse to choose between one and the other and, in short, find themselves in a position of ambivalence (Touraine, 2007). However, it is equally true that in terms of love practical reasoning, priority lies in what the woman considers important –what is loved– and to a lesser extent in moral issues (Frankfurt, 2004: 75). On the other hand, some empirical works have more or less directly dealt with the role of love in achieving equality. In one of them, for example, young Spanish women point out that they try to avoid conflict (Novo & Arenas, 2008: 7). The same happens in another research work where the women who take care of people as a profession in Catalonia make it clear that love is the main reason for their work and also that the feelings of love and tenderness make up for the sadness and lack of freedom that their duties entail (Sarrible, 1995: 50). Furthermore "even when our loved one treats us badly, we are always ready to find a justification" (Alberoni, 2005: 16), something that is also confirmed empirically in women mistreatment cases because, although the love feeling cannot be created by violence, that feeling often plays a major role in the maintenance of that

mistreatment, since women strongly believe that their partner can change through love (Escudero *et al.*, 2005: 4212-15).

Therefore, although romantic love is most probably a positive element for women's affirmation insofar as it has largely contributed to the legitimization of their rights, to their self-realization and to their emancipation, it can delay gender equality, since the combination of democratic and utilitarian contractualism is likely to weaken women's fight for equality (Illouz, 2009: 274-5). Along these same lines "the secret of the intimate relationships which keep human beings together thanks to the magic of passion ties can even make them forget the duties that are characteristic of social dignity" (Novo & Arenas, 2008: 7). In this respect, what sometimes happens is that, on the one hand, the woman gives priority to love feelings over the yearned-for situation of social equality, i.e. she prefers to take less fast steps in order to avoid compromising –or being disconnected from– the emotional threads with their loved beings. Even if she works, the woman wants to look after her children and wishes to maintain the emotional relationship with the person she lives with, sometimes even when that person does not fulfill all his duties. On the other hand, this would also explain why the woman momentarily and voluntarily leaves aside her rebellion against objective structure despite the fact that her cognitive structure, her awareness of the need to achieve equality is very strong; and it all because affections are really deep and intense, and because –as women have often recognized– these affections give them a sense of life and happiness, these two being the supreme values in a woman's existence.

5. Conclusions

I had set myself some basic objectives for this article: first, to analyze what changes have taken place in the situation of Spanish women and which elements from the dominant patriarchal system still survive (structure-change); second, to draw a conceptual map of love, that is, to identify the essential characteristics which define it; third, to understand what role the love feeling plays in the meaning that women assign to their actions (action-structure) and in the changes or permanencies occurred around equality (structure-change); and fourth, to identify the most striking contradictions which surround this situation of inequality.

Regarding the first objective, in my opinion, this article has shown that the relationship between women and the structures which shape the family and the market announces the decline or collapse of patriarchy as an ideology, but its tenacious survival as a set of practices. This means that the situation of women is complex and contradictory, that they are immersed in deep changes and immovable permanencies, from which can be inferred that, if total equality between men and women is finally achieved, if there are no regressions –something likely considering the conservative trends in western societies– it will possibly happen slowly because the objective structures on which it is supported have worked for hundreds of years to maintain the patriarchal system and because the changes operated have not been revolutionary enough for those structures to crumble completely. For all these reasons, I consider that the situation of women within the context of post-modern Spanish society could be explained through a synthesis between Kant and Hegel, i.e. reconciling what is permanent and what is changing –contradictions.

Developing the conceptual map of love has shown us as important characteristics of love that it provides sense and meaning to life, that it confers identity, that it is creative and free, that it represents a transforming utopia, that it seeks fusion and breaks social differences and constitutes an earthly religion which tries to recover the paradise lost in this world. This all refers us to its deep and intense affirmation of life and its spontaneous and female fertilizing and fusion-seeking role in society. However, although love –like life itself– wishes to transcend and overcome death, the contingency, uncertainty and fallibility that characterize our present time do not allow love to be

eternal but only to smell the aroma of intensity of the moment. For this reason, we find in love one of the possibly deepest reasons showing why the individual and the society, the kids, are so heavily marked –just like their parents– by the short duration of life and by its fragility.

As for the role that the love feeling plays in the meaning that women assign to their actions (action-structure) and in the changes or permanencies experienced around equality (structure-change), it can firstly be said that women do not perceive love in the same way as men and, secondly, that women see love as a cognitive, cultural feeling oriented towards social action and structure. The numerous theoretical and empirical works cited in this paper have actually stressed that, although there are coincident elements between men and women as far as love is concerned, what prevails is the differences and, above all, the depth with which women look at this matter as opposed to the superficiality shown by men. In fact, speaking about love is first and foremost speaking about women, as love is better defined and has deeper, more absolute and ideal features for them, unlike what happens in the case of men, where love is less defined and can be described as more superficial, more abstract and closer to routine. But, why do men and women feel love differently? In my opinion, the first reason for these differences lies in the fact that romantic love –as A. Giddens claims– is feminized. The other reason can be found in the fact that, since love is a response to human separativity and the pain that it causes, it seems logical for women to love more intensely because they have more often suffered the injustices derived from hierarchy, from inequality and, in short, from separativity.

The love feeling leads women to a way of doing things that is potentially creative and transforming but, at the same time, inhibits and delays liberating behaviors, particularly those which affect the achievement of equality for them. And this has to do with the fact that love in women is simultaneously determined by the structure and by the need to build structure. On the one hand, the love feeling in women is influenced by the individualization society and its consequent extreme separativity, which leads it to its highest intensity and to acquire ideal, absolute and nearly sacred features. Female love is additionally determined by the market, which generates a form of understanding it focused on consumption, on hedonism and on the ethics of work. On the other hand, female love with its liberating, creative, transforming and utopian elements somehow rebels against the social structure, against the traditional authoritarian family and against the market, weakening the traditional impersonal, authoritarian and static relationships and replacing them with another type of relationships which are certainly more fragile, uncertain, random and negotiation-oriented in everyday life, but also more personalized, nuclear, solidarity-based and, in short, more social in the true sense of the word.

In any case, this article has confirmed that the structure of women's love feelings –the same as action– plays an ambivalent role because, although it reinforces equality, it simultaneously slows down the changes through which women could fully achieve that equality. After all, when they give priority to love feelings over social equality and when they momentarily and voluntarily abandon their aspirations and, although their awareness of equality is very strong, their rebellion against the objective structure, the structure of the love feeling ends up becoming a sort of shock-absorbing mattress between objective and cognitive structures.

Finally, feminized romantic love is deeply contradictory, both internally and externally, because both the reality and the escape from the world are present in it; because it is determined by rationality as well as by irrationality, by pragmatism and by affections, because it is identified by intensity, fragility as well as hope and tragedy and because it generates individual and social aspects. In this last sense, love has an essential relevance for the segregated and solitary individuals that we all are, as it helps remind us how easily we forget that we cannot live without society. That is why it would be advisable to bear always in mind that love ultimately symbolizes both our individuality and our perennial need to create society, to live in it, no matter how fragile it may seem to us at present.

On the other hand, although the love and sexual roles of lovers have changed –as shown throughout this paper– and they theoretically defend a greater degree of equality and democratization in the couple relationship now, behaviors associated with inequality are still visible and, most importantly, we equally find differences in the way of understanding and experiencing love feelings. Contradictions consequently exist between the cognitive, structural, behavioral and emotional levels, and that basically makes it clear that the structure of the love feeling is an essential factor when it comes to elucidate inequality between men and women.

Coda. What shall we do with love then? How can we boost its liberating, transforming facet and prevent its shock-absorbing function? In order to answer these questions, it seems appropriate to remember, firstly that, without love, we all human beings –and particularly women– would be lonelier, more alienated and separated, we would show less solidarity, human interactions would be colder and more impersonal and, therefore, less personal and emotional and, in short, we should have less society. In other words, love is not the problem. That is why I argue that perhaps we should promote the potentially creative aspects of love so that they could work for gender equality, a possibility that has still not been sufficiently taken advantage of. More precisely, the idea would be to explore new, more symmetrical forms of understanding relationships, which would probably open the way to transformation and to the adoption of more practical actions, of behaviors based on facts – and not only on words– meant to achieve full equality.

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