

*“Won’t Somebody Please Think of the Children?”  
The Conservative Creation of a Childhood in Danger  
in Latin America*

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ABSTRACT

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Based on interdisciplinary research on the conservative “gender ideology” trend that has appeared in several Latin American countries in the last five years, this article argues that childhood(s) are at the centre of this trend as captive subjects and hostages of a symbolic struggle. The documentary analysis of different judicial, legal, political or educational elements, focused on three specific cases –Brazil, Peru and Mexico–, allows an examination of sexual difference as an unquestionable truth and of the parental hierarchy as the foundation of the generational power struggle.

**Keywords:** Gender ideology, childhood, sexual difference, parental hierarchy, neoconservatism.

Basado en una investigación interdisciplinaria sobre la tendencia conservadora en torno a la “ideología de género” experimentada por varios países latinoamericanos en los últimos cinco años, este artículo sostiene que las infancias se encuentran en el centro mismo de tal tendencia como sujetos cautivos y rehenes de una lucha simbólica. El análisis documental de elementos judiciales, legales o educativos, especialmente enfocado en tres casos –Brasil, Perú y México–, permite examinar a la diferencia sexual como una verdad incuestionable y a la jerarquía parental como fundamento de la relación de fuerza generacional.

**Palabras claves:** Ideología de género, infancia, diferencia sexual, jerarquía parental, neoconservadurismo.

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Despite studies from different scientific disciplines such as anthropology or sociology that have contributed in recent years to the demystification of childhood –in the singular– as a cultural hegemonic model (Gaitán Muñoz 2006; James and Prout 1997; LeVine 2007), the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is witnessing a set of political and social trends that go in the opposite direction. One example of this is the trend called “gender ideology”, which is not exclusive to Latin America, as it has also appeared in European contexts, and recently in African and Asian contexts (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Garbagnoli and Prearo 2017; Awondo 2016; Reis and Eggert 2017). In this article I analyse a set of strategies and tactics recently implemented by different conservative groups in a large number of countries in Latin America calling for the “defence” of “traditional values” and warning against the “danger” that gender ideology poses to childhood as a monolithic and reified entity. *Gender ideology* is a discursive object mobilized by conservative groups in order to refer –in a pejorative and distorted manner– to a set of studies, policies and practices concerning several issues such as sexuality, gender, family, childhood, etc. Several researchers have already documented its genealogy in some Vatican texts and other works (Anatrella and Catholic Church 2011; Fillod 2014; Katholische Kirche 2005). I focus here on the way in which this trend conceives of childhood and places it at the centre of its symbolic struggle, at the same time that it makes its particularities and diverse experiences invisible.

This article is based on interdisciplinary research conducted on education and health policies for children and adolescents in the Latin-American region. Based on a cross-national comparative study especially focused on Brazil, Peru and Mexico, a heterogeneous set of 32 elements was analysed through a detailed documentary research: laws, regulations, initiatives and bills, supreme court judgements, national and international programs, memorandums, and several studies focused on the gender ideology and the Latin American region; documentary elements date back five years (2014-2019). The study was structured in three phases: the first consisted in the selection of the documents to be analysed; the selection criteria were a) to address the issue of “gender ideology”, b) to address controversies or contentious issues around gender or sex education policies in the countries of the region, and c) to address notions of family and childhood in relation to gender policies at the educational or health level. The second phase consisted of a detailed analysis of each text based on a genealogy of discourses (Foucault 2008), where it was mainly sought to examine

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of this article was presented at the 15th Historical Materialism Conference, held in SOAS University of London, in November 2018.

the premises, the absences, and the gaps of each discursive object. The third stage finally led to the identification and drafting of the convergences and differences that can be found in the conservative trend in the region. The research was carried out over four years and was funded by the National Science Council of Mexico (Conacyt) Fellowship, as part of a doctoral thesis at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

The article is structured in three main parts. Throughout the text, the analysis of different cases that reveal the emergence of a transnational tendency of conservative movements in Latin America is presented. The central characteristic of these movements is a focus on education as a target, and a reduction of childhood to a captive subject and hostage of a symbolic struggle. First, the educational arena is presented as a symbolic battlefield for this trend, where conservative movements place childhood as a subject to defend from external actors and discourses. Second, I show how sexual difference is at the centre of the debate in many documents; specific cases in Brazil, Peru and Mexico illustrate the strength of this social and anthropological principle, as well as the relationship between the family and childhood as reified discursive objects. Finally, I present the most recent judicial case in the region, which took place in Mexico, and that shows the conflict between parents and children as a consequence of the inclusion of the “sexual preference” notion regarding children and adolescents in the law. I show how the conservative trend seeks to legitimize and consolidate the parental hierarchy vis-à-vis the possible freedom or divergence of childhood(s).

### **Latin America as a fertile ground for a global trend**

Gender ideology is a catch-all term with a particular discursive elasticity that allows it to be compatible with other discursive objects. It also has a singular operability, as it can mix or join with other discursive objects, thus investing them with new symbolic power. For this reason, we see “gender ideology” being related to abortion, atheism, communism, Marxism, and even evolutionism or environmentalism, in different contexts (Rondón 2017, 140; Amaya 2017, 161; Kováts et al. 2015). To the extent that an intensification of movements around this term has been observed in several societies across the globe in the last years, we can define it as a global phenomenon which has been connected to several local networks, organizations and discourses (Kuhar and Zobes 2017; Muelle 2017; Guerrero Mc Manus 2017; Correâ, Paternotte, and Kuhar 2018). In this text I examine the chronological development around the conservative movements and strategies that seek to defend childhood from the “dangers” and “harm” of the so-called ideology, particularly in three Latin American countries: Brazil, Mexico, and Peru, although I also analyse material from other countries in the

region where the conservative trend has emerged, such as Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, or Paraguay. These cases were selected not only because of their shared geo-political conditions, but also because they allow us to observe several interesting convergences related to this subject. I especially focus my attention on examples that evidence the ways in which this movement has direct effects on the practices and representations of childhood(s).

What makes it possible to distinguish this trend and to define it as transnational is the convergence of a set of discursive and pragmatic tactics whose coherence and cohesion is manifested through a heterogeneous set of elements: written and digital publications, media and press content, marches and public gatherings, lobbying in parliament, religious events, among others. These convergences are not only observable in terms of timeframe, as they coincide in their development in a recent historical period and have a synchronous sequence of events, but they also take place simultaneously in multiple social fields in each society. Through an analysis of social fields inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1989; 1994), this text reveals a number of dimensions of the magnitude that “gender ideology” —related to childhood issues— has reached in these countries in the last five years.

One of the main characteristics of this trend is that there is one social field conservative groups are focusing all their attention and efforts on: sex education and the recognition of a new “right” to decide what to teach in schools regarding sexual issues, a right which supposedly belongs to parents, and which must also be stated in the law. It is significant that the national curricula programs of at least seven Latin American states (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru) have been accused of promoting gender ideology: in Colombia, in August 2016, several associations organized public protests against certain textbooks from the Ministry of Education (Amaya 2017, 154); in Paraguay, the *Resolution 29664* of October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 was published by the Ministry of Education and Science, which prohibits the teaching of “gender ideology” (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencias 2017); in Chile, in March 2018, several groups of parents protested against the new Education Program which introduced new content on gender equality (Robles 2018); in Costa Rica, several groups have organized protests against the *Education for Affectivity and Comprehensive Sexuality* programs of the Ministry of Education of 2018<sup>2</sup>; finally, in Mexico, a lobbying meeting between conservative groups and the Ministry of Education took place on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018 concerning the new contents of the 2018

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2 The call for signatures “No a la ideología de género en Costa Rica” [No to gender ideology in Costa Rica] was launched in August 2017, it was addressed to President Guillermo Solís, retrieved from: [<https://www.change.org/p/presidente-de-la-rep%C3%BAblica-no-a-la-ideolog%C3%ADa-de-g%C3%A9nero-en-costa-rica>].

National secondary school program, which included the subjects of homosexuality and masturbation (Ramírez-García 2018). In addition, in some cases such as Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru a campaign of deliberate misrepresentation and defamation of official textbooks has been carried out on social media.

The Brazilian case is a good illustration of this trend. On August 20, 2015, the bill nº 2.731 was presented to the National Congress, in which it is stated that the Brazilian National Congress had already “decided to reject the incorporation of Gender Ideology in national education, considering it harmful for children and youth” (Câmara dos Deputados 2015, 3). According to this bill, this was decided during the preparation of the National Education Plan (Law 13005 of June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014) containing the educational guidelines for the next 10 years. That is to say that the discussions and debates in the national congress before 2015 had resulted in the censorship of the contents considered as “ideological” due to an alleged “irreversible damage” towards childhood:

It is not up to the school to sexually indoctrinate children, lacking the necessary understanding and maturity, especially when this doctrine goes against all the usual and majority behaviour of society, as this can cause irreversible damage to them in terms of sexuality and of psychological aspects (Câmara dos Deputados 2015, 4).

The bill is a reaction to the publication of the Final Report of the National Conference on Education (CONAE) of 2014, in which gender equality is taken up as a cross-cutting principle for education in the country. The promoters of the bill argued that it was urgent and necessary to “ensure the necessary protection for children against the harmful effects of gender ideology” (Câmara dos Deputados 2015, 5).

This coincides with the same idea defended in Peru regarding the national education guidelines for 2016-2017, where conservative groups maintained that the so-called ideology “threatens the development of children and adolescents” (Muñoz and Vanessa 2017, 205). Without providing further specifications on what such “irreversible damage” would be or in what sense they affect the “development” of children and adolescents, these campaigns managed to have a significant impact thanks to their dissemination in the media and social networks in the aforementioned countries. It is the discursive plasticity of “gender ideology” that allowed this ambiguous and diffuse “dangerousness” to be attributed to social issues with a long history of social stigma, such as homosexuality, abortion, or teenage pregnancy.

### The big issue: sexual difference at stake

Several actors take part in this trend: political parties, parental associations, churches of many creeds, international organizations, ministries, and supreme courts. Despite these differences in terms of political, economic, and cultural context, several similarities can be found. One issue present in each case is that of sexual difference being the centre of debate in law texts and educational programs. Conservative groups fear that this difference will be diluted and perceived of as a social construction by children and youth. This is the reason why conservative groups seek to have sexual difference written expressly into the law, a clear example being the constitutional amendment bill of 2016 in Mexico, which stated: “Male and female, being different and complementary to each other, are equal before the law” (Confamilia 2016, 45)<sup>3</sup>. The case of the Municipal Chamber of Manaus, in the state of Amazonas in Brazil, illustrates this aspect too: the municipality promulgated a law that prohibits the insertion of gender ideology in schools, stating that: “For the purposes of this law, gender ideology is considered to be the ideology according to which the two sexes, male and female, are considered cultural and social constructions” (Câmara Municipal de Manaus 2017, art. 2).

Another example of this is the *National Basic Education Curriculum* of Peru of 2016-2017. In June 2016, the Ministry of Education published the *Ministerial Resolution No. 281-2016-Minedu*, which approved the *National Basic Education Curriculum* (Ministerio de Educación 2016). Shortly afterwards, conservative and religious groups began a campaign against this document. This case is particularly striking, as a 26-word fragment in a 227-page document not only caused the resignation of a minister of education, but also mass mobilizations in several Peruvian cities (Muñoz and Vanessa 2017). The fragment, in a document destined to regulate the national education of primary school children, says: “Although what we consider ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ is based on a biological-sexual difference, these are notions that we build day-by-day, in our interactions” (Ministerio de Educación 2017, 26).

This case went all the way to Peru’s Supreme Court: in August 2017, the First Civil Chamber of the Superior Court of Justice of Lima declared as well-founded the request for the annulment of Ministerial Resolution N281-2016-Minedu, and the national curriculum of Education was declared null. In addition, in March 2018, the Chamber of Constitutional and Social Permanent Law of the Supreme Court voted for the admission of the Appeal requested by the Ministry of Education against the annulment of the national curriculum (Superior Court of Justice of Lima, First Civil Chamber, file No. 00011-2017-0-

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<sup>3</sup> Emphasis in the original.

1801-SP-CI-01). This example is a revealing illustration of the symbolic power that is triggered by the treatment of sexual difference based on gender equality policies in the educational field. While conservative groups affirm that teaching children and adolescents that the social effects of sexual difference are neither eternal nor determined by biology is “harmful” and “dangerous”, the notion of childhood remains unquestioned, making its ethnic, religious, economic, and other particularities invisible.

In the documents analysed, sexual difference is not only defended as a universal truth that sustains the social life of all individuals beginning in childhood –hence the importance that children do not question it at school–, but also as the material basis of the heteropatriarchal family. This explains why many actions of conservative groups relate the educational field to the family environment as the two axes of their strategies. This is illustrated in the *Resolution No. 29664* of October 2017 of the Paraguayan Ministry of Education and Sciences, through the resolution “the dissemination and use of printed and digital materials, referring to gender theory and/or ideology is prohibited in educational institutions dependent on the Ministry of Education” (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencias 2017). Among its arguments, the resolution establishes that the Ministry of Education and Sciences “must integrate the efforts of the family, the community, the state, teachers and students to strengthen the family as a natural environment for education” (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencias 2017). It is precisely because –according to these groups– gender ideology questions the naturalness of the family, that another of their strategies is to re-naturalize it; they seek to establish the family as a “natural institution”, that is, as a trans-historical entity that precedes the state and every social contract. In order to do this, they seek to “re-naturalize” the law and “re-naturalize” society in general, mobilizing what Juan Marco Vaggione calls a “strategic secularism” (Vaggione 2017, 16). Indeed, they mobilize the same international treaties of human rights<sup>4</sup> defended by pro-equality organizations in order to justify their demands.

Initiatives in the legal field seeking to “defend” the family –always in the singular– from gender ideology illustrate this close relationship between childhood, as a discursive object, and sexual difference, as a supreme value. Such initiatives have multiplied in recent years in parliamentary bodies in the region: for instance, two initiatives that seek the “naturalization” of the family in order to amend the 4<sup>th</sup> article of the Mexican Constitution were presented to the

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the principal articles and documents quoted in the Amendment Bill in Mexico are: Article no. 16.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the Organization of the United Nations (1948); the article no. 23.2 of the International Agreement on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the article no. 17.2 of the American Convention on Human Rights or Pact of San José (1969) (Confamilia 2016, 46).

Mexican Congress in 2016 (Confamilia 2016; ICRA4C 2016); one of the amendment bills in the Mexican case seeks to write into the law the following statement: “There is only one type of family, the natural family” (Confamilia 2016, 45). In addition, a *Family Protection Bill* was presented in the Paraguayan Congress in October 2017<sup>5</sup>.

The fact that a large majority of organizations and groups —from a diverse range of causes— fighting against gender ideology and gender mainstreaming policies label themselves as “pro-family” is therefore not a coincidence. Family as a discursive object is presumed to be an omnipresent notion in almost every social field. As a juridical term, it is present in a large number of constitutions of modern states. As an anthropological and sociological term, it is thought of as an entity of reference in the social order of Western societies; and the household is still considered to be the primary basis of economy. This apparent ubiquitousness produces a naturalisation process. Furthermore, if some works have addressed the issues around the most recent transformations and configurations of kinship (Mason 2008; Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Carsten 2004), I sustain that the conservative trend in Latin America illustrates how the family is presented as a naturalized entity that supposes childhood as a natural attribute, based on and sustained by the kinship ties between parents and children. In the claims of conservative groups, family is reified as if it were a homogeneous unit, lacking internal hierarchies or conflicts. Nevertheless, family is the locus where a continuous tension of forces and several hierarchical relations coexist: between husband and wife, between parents and children, or among siblings, just to name some examples. Further, family is the fundamental site where, as Patricia H. Collins has stated, social hierarchies and social arrangements are naturalized; where individuals “learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class [...]” (Collins 1998, 64).

Recent studies in the field of anthropology have contributed to discussions about the hegemonic nature of the family model imported to Latin America from abroad. These works reveal that kinship practices tend to be more fluid and elastic than is commonly held (González Díez and Viazzo 2016; CLACSO and Robichaux 2007). Sociological and legal studies have also contributed to the denaturalisation of childhood(s) (Qvortrup 2011; James and Prout 1997; Ba’ 2021); according to some scholars like Frances E. Olsen, we may be witnessing the most recent stage of a long historical process of liberalization of the family, since liberal state regulation of the family has undermined its “hierarchical ideology

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5 ABC, « Presentan proyecto de protección a la familia », October 18, 2017, retrieved from: [<http://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/politica/presentan-proyecto-de-proteccion-a-la-familia-1641561.html>].



and at the same time promoted individualism” (Olsen 1983, 1527–28). As maintained by Olsen, individualism is thought of as incompatible with the supposed altruistic ethic attached to the ideal family unit, in spite of that individualism is at the same time a fundamental condition for the neoliberal governmentality of societies.

It can be stated as a hypothesis that in the countries where these campaigns are taking place, gender mainstreaming policies in conjunction with same sex marriage have caused a revival of conservative agendas; however, it should be noted that the ideology of the traditional family remains an important feature of hegemony even in contexts where same sex marriage has been approved (Gramsci and Sacristán Luzón 2007). Indeed, since capitalism has embraced the nuclear family ideology (Olsen 1983), some gender mainstreaming policies as well as some LGBTIQ policies pose no threat to the moral economy encouraged by capitalism, whose cultural models of family and childhood are not questioned. Social reproduction and patriarchy are safe in that those policies promote similar values through the assimilation of different groups of populations into traditional economic and lawful forms (Duggan 1994; Puar and Cervulle 2013; Warner 1991). Nevertheless, conservative groups regard comprehensive sex education programs as a threat to traditional representations of society, given that questioning sexual difference as natural –as it is sustained in gender equality policies– would imply weakening one of the pillars of social reproduction itself.

### **The family hierarchy must survive**

In this historical trend that has childhood as its centre, not only are the particular characteristics of children and adolescents invisible, but a logical relationship is also assumed that is based on the anthropological principle of kinship: namely, the syllogism that assumes that parents are the ones who know best and can best defend the interests and needs of minors simply because they are their parents. This presupposes that childhood has as its “natural” sphere of belonging in the family, and that the family would defend childhood from the inappropriate influences and actors that seek to harm it: the state, teachers, and international organizations. A reification of actors takes place, where parents, children, and the state are thought of as unitary, coherent entities, devoid of internal power relations; it should be noted that conservative groups should also be understood as a set of actors who have tensions between them. Another particular characteristic of the discursive elasticity of gender ideology is related to the notion of family as private property. The study of Ana Cristina González Vélez *et al.* (2018) analyses how “throughout the campaign Leave my kids alone [*Con mis hijos no te metas*] fear was mobilized towards the issue of the

‘nationalization’ of private property, equating this with the supposed ‘indoctrination’ of children on gender issues” (González Vélez et al. 2018, 129); therefore, family is not only defended as private property, but it is specifically the children – as parents’ property – who are defended from a State accused of becoming socialist and/or communist.

With this in mind, one of the conservative groups’ tactics on social media, the hashtag #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas [*Leave my kids alone*], is especially illustrative as it reveals some of the most important features of the conflict. First, there is a clear sense that children are thought as the property of parents (“*my kids*”). What these groups consider to be at stake is one of the most legitimized and naturalized ways of appropriation: They are *my* children, and therefore, it is *my* right to raise and educate them however I see fit. The idea of parental ownership of children is, in fact, one of the most ancient forms of property, as several works have shown (Engels 2010; O’Donovan 1996; Tylor et al. 2012).

According to this trend, the so-called gender ideology would require children and adolescents to address issues and concepts related to sexuality in the school environment, as established by the Brazilian bill, which prohibits the treatment of “citations related to the so-called Gender Ideology, such as: gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and its derivatives” (Câmara dos Deputados 2015, 3). This is relevant because, according to this logic, the mere fact of addressing these issues and concepts in a public space where adults interact with children and adolescents – either in educational or health contexts – has been the subject of judicial controversies that are framed in this context. One of the most important cases in the Latin-American region is the Mexican Supreme Court ruling of 2016.

This was the amparo process that resulted in the resolution of the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice in 2016 [SCJN-AR-203/2016]. This judicial process began on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in the 1<sup>st</sup> district court in the state of Aguascalientes, when an individual filed a legal claim “against acts of the Mexican Congress and other authorities” regarding the *General Law of the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents* (hereafter LGDNNA), promulgated on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The accuser was a woman who, in legal representation of her son, maintained that the LGDNNA “is contrary to the best interests of the minor and restricts the parents’ right to the education of minors” (SCJN 2016, 2). She argued that several articles of the law “implicitly discriminate against parents in their role, regarding the guidance and teaching of their children according to their moral and religious convictions,”<sup>6</sup> and denounced the inclusion of the term “sexual

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6 This coincides with some European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case law: In ECtHR cases *Dojan v. Germany* and *Folgerø v. Norway* several parents sued states for the sex education provided in public establishments on the grounds of ethical and religious beliefs. In both cases,

preference” —regarding children and adolescents— in the Mexican law “since such a concept can be linked to certain acts that do not correspond to the age of a child, thereby violating the best interests of the minor” (SCJN 2016, 8).

By this logic, according to the complainant —mother of a minor child— sexual preference “does not correspond” to childhood, since individuals under the legal age do not —and cannot— have a sexual preference. The second chamber of the Supreme Court established then that the mentions of the “sexual preference” of children and adolescents in the LNDNNA “are limited to protecting the equal exercising of the rights of girls, boys and adolescents” (SCJN 2016, 17). In response to this mother’s reified vision of childhood devoid of sexuality, the Supreme Court sought to define childhood and adolescence from a hybrid legal-biological-health point of view relative to each individual, as each person in a childhood or adolescence state is thought of as a developing subject who has rights, who requires sexual health care, and whose vital dynamics place him/her only momentarily in dependence on his/her parents. In this way, and given that the person who initiated the judicial process did so with the intention of invalidating the LGDNNA by pointing out that the rights recognized by such a law are contrary to the rights that she has as a mother, the judicial process culminating with the Court’s resolution contributes to the debate on the issue of the generational power relationship and of children as subjects of agency (James 2007; Qvortrup 2011). Through this resolution, the Mexican judicial system has reaffirmed children and adolescents’ rights and has reinterpreted parental rights. Quoting United Nations documents, the text states that “parents or any other persons legally responsible for the child are obliged to carefully comply with their rights and obligations” established by the Mexican Constitution (SCJN 2016, 44). It is in this sense that the family is defined as a “sphere of protection” of the sexual aspects regarding children and adolescents:

The family, as the immediate environment of minors, is essential for their rights to be safeguarded; it is the sphere where minors should feel most protected, where they can establish a relationship of trust and safety and issues relating, for example, to sexuality, sexual behaviour and dangerous lifestyles can be discussed openly, and acceptable solutions can be found (SCJN 2016, 45).

The Court then reminds parents of their obligations, while recognizing their “parental rights”, including the “right to intervene” in education:

The state is not capable of substituting the protective and guiding function of

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the Court upheld the state’s duty to protect children’s interests by providing sex education. ECtHR. (2011). *Dojan, and others v. Germany* (application nos. 319/08, 2455/08, 7908/10, 8152/10 and 8155/10); ECtHR. (2011). *Folgerø and Others v. Norway* (application no. 15472/02).

parents regarding the health and development of minors, but both parents and authorities have different and complementary functions that are necessary for the holistic protection of children and adolescents (SCJN 2016, 45–46).

The Supreme Court then concludes that the Mexican *General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents* does not violate the exercising of parental authority. It establishes that parental authority:

is not configured merely as a parental right, but as a function entrusted to them for the benefit of the children and which is aimed at the protection, education and comprehensive training of the latter, whose interest is always prevalent in the parent-child relationship, emphasizing the vigilance of the public powers in the exercise of that institution, where the consideration of the minor's interest is a priority (SCJN 2016, 53).

In this way, not only is the best interest of the minor reiterated as the supreme guiding principle, but it is established that in the parent-child relationship, the interest of the child or adolescent will “always” prevail before parents. The importance of this ruling lies in the precedent it establishes in matters of policies aimed at children and adolescents in Mexico. Before a conservative trend in which parents position themselves as defenders of the interests of their own children, the role of the state —as a set of institutions that govern the public life of our societies— assumes a key relevance. Indeed, by intervening directly in the family space, the Supreme Court distinguishes two interests that were previously considered as one, namely, that of parents and that of children. The Mexican Court recognizes the diversity of childhood(s), among which sexual preference, and in doing so it opens the door to greater interpretations of future public policies regarding children and adolescents.

## Conclusion

Few times in history can the synchrony and convergence of different social movements be observed across the borders of nations and social groups. This can be clearly observed in the so-called “gender ideology” trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Latin American region. Gender ideology as a discursive object has a particular symbolic force that has gained power of convection in different media and social settings. At the centre of this struggle, childhood and the family are thought of as unitary, coherent, timeless notions that must be defended from the “damage” and “dangers” to which they would be exposed. The educational arena appears as a strategic battlefield of such a struggle, since it is not only the social environment in which childhood(s) are integrated into a second phase of

socialization, but it is also one of the spaces in which sexual difference is reinforced. It is therefore unsurprising that sexual difference should be at the centre of the debate.

Cases such as the Brazilian, Peruvian, or Mexican ones show different facets of a complex phenomenon in which sociological, political, and anthropological aspects have to be considered in detail in each context. A closer look at each case must be made to distinguish in detail the political and social divergences and coincidences that reinforce or weaken the neoconservative tendency: the weight of evangelical Christianity is a factor to study, for instance, since Mexico has very recently experienced the growth of this religious movement, while in Brazil and Peru it has a greater political and historical weight; political currents and electoral times should also be taken into account, the recent changes of government in the three countries place gender equality policies as a political currency to be exchanged, Mexico has, for example, a historical record of gender perspective inclusion in public policies dating back to the 1990s, which has strengthened and legitimized these policies, for their part, leftist governments in Brazil have included sexual diversity since the 1990s as well, while Peru seems to have taken longer to include both. On the other hand, one of the most notable characteristics of this trend shared by the three countries, and the entire region, is the symbolic consolidation of “the family” as the social entity targeted by gender policies. If this recognition is effective, then the conservative actors would be winning a greater symbolic bet; otherwise, if in each country, people do not associate with the idea of family a unicity, a timelessness, or a positive representation —as the conservatives propose— then we will observe in the future the fading of a reaction that, although it has managed to be historical, it would weaken little by little as one of many conservative reactions in the region.

One of the anthropological-political foundations that the conservative trend reveals is the survival of the parental hierarchy, since among the judicial actions of the conservative wave, parents seem to be concerned that their children’s practices and representations will diverge from their own. That is, by questioning sexual difference as natural and forever determined, or by knowing the existence of sexual preferences, each child could become someone completely different from what his/her parents are (having another sexual preference or following other gender patterns or models). Deep down, a fear of difference lies on the conservative discourse; in this case, it is not a fear of an external other, since children —as we have seen— are thought of as an extension of the parents’ self, it is then the fear that this extension of the self becomes something so different that the initial subject (the parents) is no longer recognized in the children. Interestingly, by defending “natural” and “timeless” facts, conservative actors reveal the malleability, the fluidity, and the susceptibility to change between generations, since if their assumptions are true, no policy or action

could modify such an “intangible” reality. This would reveal a greater change in our societies, since social reproduction — which usually takes place because of generational inertias in terms of values and world views— could be changing at such a speed that the divergence between two or more generations appears more evident in comparison with decades and even centuries ago. Ultimately, this leads us to think that conservative actors recognize that what is at stake with gender ideology is social reproduction itself.

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