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REVIEW

Hegemonic masculinity based on the American presidential model

Masculinidad hegemónica desde el modelo presidencial norteamericano

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ABSTRACT

Hegemonic masculinity seeks to subjugate femininity through the legitimization of power provided by patriarchy. At a structural level, hegemonic masculinity normalizes inequalities between genders and within the various factors of intersectionality. These inequalities lead to the exclusion of human rights for vulnerable groups, both non-hegemonic men and women. The effects of hegemonic masculinity will be analyzed from the particular case of the power dynamics exercised by President Trump and the factors that, from his position of power, cause him to exercise this model of masculinity. From the actions and policies of the US government, a discourse and ideology that seeks to preserve power where it is can be seen. Through governance, a president can establish and preserve a system of domination such as hegemonic masculinity. The reflection of this research is: how is the position of power used to continue feeding the system that defends hegemonic masculinity? A critical sense in these reflections is essential in order not to reproduce a hegemonic model of masculinity. That said, it is important to note that there can be no human rights without the depatriarchalization of the discourse on rights and the material sphere, recognizing the structures that hinder the guarantee of substantive equality.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity; Social Movement; Politics; Resistance; Power.

RESUMEN

La masculinidad hegemónica busca el sometimiento de lo femenino a través de la legitimación de poder que brinda el patriarcado. A nivel estructural, la masculinidad hegemónica normaliza las desigualdades entre géneros y dentro de los diversos factores de la interseccionalidad. Estas desigualdades generan exclusión a los derechos humanos para grupos vulnerables, tanto hombres no hegemónicos como a mujeres. Los efectos de la masculinidad hegemónica serán analizados desde el caso particular de la dinámica de poder ejercida por el presidente Trump y los factores que desde su posición de poder lo hacen ejercer este modelo de masculinidad. Desde las acciones y políticas del gobierno norteamericano, se puede visibilizar un discurso y una ideología que busca preservar el poder en donde se encuentra. A través de la gobernabilidad, un presidente puede instaurar y preservar un sistema de dominación como lo es la masculinidad hegemónica. La reflexión de la presente investigación es ¿cómo se usa la posición de poder para seguir alimentando al sistema que defiende a la masculinidad hegemónica? El sentido crítico en las reflexiones resulta indispensable para no reproducir un modelo hegemónico de la masculinidad. Con esto dicho, es importante destacar que no existen derechos humanos sin la despatriarcalización del discurso de derechos y la esfera material, reconociendo las estructuras que obstaculizan la garantía de la igualdad sustantiva.

Palabras clave: Masculinidad Hegemónica; Movimiento Social; Política; Resistencia; Poder.

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INTRODUCTION

This research is part of a study of hegemonic masculinity as a structural phenomenon that affects the guarantee of human rights. The overall objective is to analyze how the patterns of power and domination associated with hegemonic masculinity, sustained by the patriarchal system, operate as an obstacle to the practical realization of these rights.

The analysis starts from the recognition that state structures—both in economic and political powers and in peripheral countries—reproduce specific forms of power that reflect and reinforce patriarchal logic. In this sense, it seeks to identify the characteristics of these structures and their role in consolidating hierarchical relationships that perpetuate gender inequalities and social exclusion.

This article focuses particularly on the case of the US presidential model represented by Donald J. Trump, a figure who embodies multiple dimensions of contemporary hegemonic masculinity. Trump, a white, cisgender, heterosexual man, currently 79 years old, has an estimated net worth of $5,1 billion according to Forbes.[1] His family biography shows a trajectory marked by social and economic mobility within the context of American capitalism: his mother, of Scottish origin, emigrated to the United States, where she met Fred Trump, a businessman who, according to BBC News Mundo,[2] benefited from state financing programs for housing projects. Donald Trump acknowledged that he followed his father's business model, thus consolidating an identity based on the inheritance of economic and social power. On his father's side, his grandfather emigrated from Germany,[3] while his first wife, Ivana, came from the Czech Republic, and his current wife, Melania, is originally from Slovenia.[4]

As a representative of the Republican Party, Trump reflects the traditional values of a political organization historically linked to conservatism, strong religious beliefs, and a nationalist vision of American identity.[5] His public persona and political discourse allow us to observe how hegemonic masculinity is articulated around authority, economic power, and symbolic control over the narrative of human rights.

From this perspective, three analytical axes are proposed to understand the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and the exercise of power in the US presidency:

- Power, authority, and violence, in relation to the political structure and the dynamics of domination.
- Economic power is a manifestation of structural privilege and social legitimation.
- Discourse on human rights is understood as a tool for symbolic construction that reinforces the position of power and the exclusion of the "other."

To contextualize this analysis, we return to the theoretical perspective of Raewyn Connell,[6] who defines hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of gender practices that legitimize patriarchy and ensure the dominant position of men, subordinating the feminine and other masculinities. According to the author, understanding this phenomenon is structured around three dimensions: power relations, relations of production, and cathexis (or emotional charge).

Power relations reveal the social hierarchy of patriarchy, where hegemonic masculinity occupies the pinnacle of domination. Relations of production, also traversed by these hierarchies, are expressed in the wage gaps between men and women, the inequality between urban and rural work, and the persistence of unpaid domestic work. Such inequalities, linked to the sexual division of labor, affect the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, favoring the accumulation of capital in specific sectors.

Overall, this approach seeks to examine how hegemonic masculinity is reproduced through political, economic, and discursive structures, conditioning the effective guarantee of human rights in contexts of institutionalized power.

DEVELOPMENT

Power, authority, and violence

President Trump's authority is reinforced by all that he has evaded his responsibilities as a leader and public servant.

His various conditions of privilege and the social structures of domination work in his favor. Among the notable cases in his long career, we can see a tendency to control the media through lawsuits, lawsuits for sexual abuse, convictions for fraud, accusations of electoral manipulation, withholding of classified documents, wars with other states, destruction of natural resources, and speeches promoting racism, misogyny, and homophobia, among others.

Relationship with the military and police

Among recent news, Trump seeks to establish "specialized units" in the National Guard that would be responsible for mitigating public order problems.[7]

In previous cases, the Guard was deployed this year with around 5 000 personnel in Los Angeles to support immigration operations in the face of protests against the raids, despite not having the governor's consent. The last time the Guard was deployed in Washington was during Trump's previous presidential term, when 4 000 troops were ordered to be deployed in 2020 to contain demonstrations against police brutality and racism in the United States following the death of George Floyd.[8]

The US president's actions regarding war with other countries call into question his criteria for declaring war, which is based on the Constitution and warning of a real or anticipated attack, or similarly, promoting other important national interests such as preventing nuclear proliferation.[9,10] This, coupled with the fact that when the Capitol was stormed in 2021, fewer than 400 troops were deployed, reinforces the idea that Trump is calling on the National Guard in this case to legitimize his political interests and justify police violence. In this way, he can validate his virility as a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity through the extension of state force by the police, the National Guard, or the army.

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Perception of his political opponents

Hillary, Biden, and Kamala

Speaking about his opponent Clinton in the 2017 race, Trump pointed out that she does not have the appearance or physical stamina to negotiate trade agreements, reinforcing gender stereotypes of men occupying positions of power and belittling the abilities of women.[11]

Trump lost the race to Biden, his direct competitor in the 2020 election, and his refusal to accept defeat led to the events at the Capitol a year later. Biden represents the opposite of Trump's ideals, favoring environmental awareness and public health. The former president would return to the Paris Agreement and avoid leaving the WHO.[12] However, on the first day of his second term, he would withdraw again from the agreement on fossil fuel production and from the WHO due to high fees.[13]

Finally, something interesting happened with Kamala because she was the first African-American, Indian-American, and Asian-American woman to become vice president of the United States, in addition to having been District Attorney of San Francisco and Senator for California. Despite being better prepared than Donald for the position in terms of public service, Trump became president.

In doing so, Trump reflects his idea of superiority over women and even that his ideals are more valuable than those of his opposition, even though he finds no basis for his position other than to continue to uphold his privilege.

Elon Musk

Musk, as head of the Office of Management and Budget, did not appreciate that his automotive company would be harmed by the Republican initiative to eliminate tax credits for electric vehicles, despite having invested millions in Trump's presidential campaign.

After the altercation, Trump threatened to use the Department of Government Efficiency to attack the subsidies received by the tech giant's companies.[14]

Nationalism and state paternity (image of patriotism and protector of the nation)

MAGA

Through the MAGA movement, Trump imposes a policy based on a nativist ideology that, from a partisan standpoint, seeks to restore the perceived greatness of the United States before foreign influences in the form of immigration and multiculturalism. This goes hand in hand with a notably discriminatory policy regarding racial and religious diversity. This includes the event where Obama was asked to prove his nationality.[15]

An air of superiority reinforces such actions through the intention to repress or subdue opponents by insulting them based on their gender, ethnicity, disability, religion, etc.

Personification of the male figure

Emotionality

Among the events analyzed from news articles, interviews, and reports, President Trump's belligerent, confrontational, and competitive nature stands out. Extending political rivalries from former presidents, members of the press, immigrants, and even leaders of other world powers reflects the intention to make Trump's masculine power visible by extending it through his political power as the leader of a nation.

Economic power

The United States is a country that was initially inhabited by Native American communities before being colonized by England and later gaining independence.

Productivity, competitiveness, and national wealth

Trade policy

"A US appeals court ruled that most of the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump are illegal".[16] Within economic policies, protectionism can be seen through the imposition of tariffs on its trading partners.

Revenue and expenditure

In terms of the US government's priorities, we can contrast spending on the US military with the excessive cost of belonging to the WHO. While federal revenue in the current US fiscal year is $4,35 trillion, $5,98 trillion has been spent, with $1,56 trillion allocated to health care, $719 billion to military defense, and another $310 billion to the Department of Veterans Affairs.[17] Meanwhile, the WHO's "excessive" quota was $264 million, and the WHO expects the United States to contribute $442 million for the current period voluntarily.[18]

Human rights discourse/Justification and language regarding structural violence

Immigration policy

"An American city that was once a great city, Los Angeles, has been invaded and occupied by undocumented immigrants and criminals," President Donald Trump said on Sunday, June 8, about the situation in Los Angeles (USA).[19]

I think it is important to remember the origins of US territory, such as Los Angeles. Both Los Angeles and the rest of the US

have a long history of colonization, expropriation, and exploitation of resources from native peoples and, currently, immigrants. The desire to deport, prosecute, and imprison immigrants unjustly represents a vainglory of power and a rejection of other types of masculinity, that is, non-white, non-wealthy, indigenous masculinities, etc.

Habeas corpus, understood as a principle that allows illegal detentions to be challenged, represents a means of control to curb an immigration policy that seeks to accelerate deportations without the need to explain the reasons for the authorities' actions.[20]

Among the nationalist policies are arrest warrants issued by the US Immigration Service, ending birthright citizenship for people whose parents were not US citizens at the time of birth, and mass deportations of immigrants to their countries of origin.

People with disabilities

At an event in 2015, Trump mocked New York Times reporter Serge F. Kovaleski for his physical disability. This reveals a lack of empathy and respect for this sector of the population, as well as, once again, a violent reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity as a representation of a person without disabilities.[21]

Black Lives Matter

Trump's rhetoric regarding the movement carries significant weight, characterized by his portrayal of protesters as "thugs," "terrorists," and "anarchists," while refraining from using such labels for his Republican supporters when they vandalized the Capitol.[22,23,24,25]

Religious freedom

In 2017, an executive order signed by the president would ban people from six predominantly Muslim countries from entering the country. This decision would deny asylum to people who are trying to escape serious human rights violations where returning to their country of origin is not an option and they are criminalized based on unjustified prejudices.[26,27,28]

Gender policies

The Trump administration's political agenda includes classifying gender ideology as extremist, denying the expression of gender identity considering gender as a social construct that takes into account individual identity and not a biological ideology imposed by the government.[29,30]

Misogyny

The figure of hegemonic masculinity represented by Trump and his sexist stance, with a range of attitudes that go from objectifying and insulting women to presenting himself as their protector and provider.[31,32,33]

Hegemonic masculinity, understood from a position of power exercised by a person who replicates or allows the maintenance of a system of patriarchal domination, is key to understanding the dynamics and hierarchies of power in today's world.[34,35,36]

The discourse on human rights allows us to understand how violence is legitimized and the guarantee of human rights is obstructed. Hegemonic masculinity is sustained by the subordination of other masculinities and population diversities, male complicity or the patriarchal pact, and the marginalization of those who choose to exercise a masculinity different from the hegemonic one or attempt to question it.[39,40,41]

Nativism as an ideology is an efficient way of understanding how the conservative discourse of the power elite in the United States is maintained.[42,43] Opposition is sought through discourse, attributing social problems to the actions of political adversaries without the need to present compelling evidence (such as the discourse that criminalized Mexicans by saying that Mexican immigrants were rapists to justify the implementation of the border wall during his administration).[44]

Executive orders, appointments of officials, presentation of political and legislative agendas through enactment or veto, military leadership, and foreign relations leadership represent immense power when it comes to deciding on the possibility of people enjoying rights in a country or the rest of the world in a globalized country.[45] It is vital to understand and question ideology from a critical perspective to reveal the anti-rights discourse that allows for the oppression of vulnerable sectors of the population, including men themselves, who choose not to exercise this model of masculinity by recognizing their privilege.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

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