

In saying that gender is equal to biological sex, Ministry ignores science

The Foreign Ministry has instructed diplomats to reinforce that, in the view of the Brazilian government, gender and biological sex are the same thing. The information was reported on Wednesday morning (26) by the newspaper Folha de S. Paulo. According to the publication, the instruction was passed during meetings with diplomats.

From the point of view of science, there is no way to state that biological sex (the one designated at birth) and gender (as the person identifies) refer to the same concept. "This is an ideological statement, without a scientific basis," says Maria Cristina Cavaleiro, a professor at the State University of Northern Paraná (Uenp) and a researcher on gender studies.

In both the human sciences (such as anthropology and philosophy), where the term is most commonly investigated, and in other areas (such as medicine and psychology), differentiation is a consensus. "Medical science itself, for more than half a century, has recognized that biological sex is not synonymous with gender," says Richard Miskolci, coordinator of Quereres - Center for Research on Differences, Human Rights and Health of the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp).

One of the first to conceptualize gender was the American psychiatrist Robert Stoller (1924-1992), in the book "Sex and Gender", 1968. Today, it is already widely accepted in the sciences that the masculine and the feminine are social constructs. That is why the humanities study the subject so much. "Today, in the scientific area of gender and sexuality studies, we understand gender not as what one is or has, but what one is led to - by social norms and conventions - to interpret," says Miskolci.

From biology to foreign affairs

"Biological sex is anatomy, genitalia," explains Alexandre Saadeh, coordinator of the Transdisciplinary Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Clinic (Amtigos), at the Institute of Psychiatry at USP. In medicine, the differentiation of sex into gender and sexual identity (as each person identifies himself) grounds, for example, the treatments offered to trans people. "It is possible to change sex with a surgical intervention and with hormones. Gender identity is a subjective issue and gender is about what society expects from people," says Saadeh.

In the sphere of international relations, where the diplomats instructed by the Itamaraty act, the debates about the difference between gender and biological sex seemed clear until now. "At least since the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, the term gender is used, including in United Nations resolutions," says Maíra Kubik, a professor in the postgraduate program in interdisciplinary studies on women, gender and feminism of the Federal University of Bahia (Ufba).

She explains that using the term gender (rather than sex) is to recognize that the differences between men and women in the world today are not only due to biology, but because there are cultural and social aspects involved. "It is a step backwards that Brazil starts to position itself differently in international discussions", says the expert.

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