

Isabella Marques - Brazil - Experiences about Elas Definem 01-10-22

Good morning, everyone! I want to thank you for inviting me to share some of my experience with the Elas.Definem (they define) profile, an Instagram page built by me and Thais, a colleague, a radical feminist. The idea of setting up the page arose because we realized that many feminist women, elected with platforms supposed to protect women's interests, although located in the progressive political field, were not, in fact, defending the rights of girls and women, but were collaborating with the dilution and loss of our rights, because many of them didn't even understand what a woman is.

Thus, in Brazil, many of our candidates, who today represent us in the Chambers (Municipal and Federal) and also in the Senate, do not know what a woman is. They don't know exactly who they are going to build public policies for, because I believe they never stopped to think about it. Others, "consciously" defend that anyone who declares himself a woman should be considered as such. They defend that woman is a merely declaratory class. And for that reason, they endorse the discourse that any man can be a woman, as long as he wants to, and whenever he chooses to do so.

I believe that in both cases, we have a gigantic problem. On the one hand: women alienated from their own history. On the other: women who, even knowing all the implications behind their choices, are opting for the dismantling of our rights (which is also a form of alienation).

It is in this context that the profile appears. In a period of elections and in a bleak moment for radical and materialist feminist women or gender critics, or simply ordinary women, who on the Right are faced with an essentialized vision of women and on the Left, a performative vision.

Also, Elas.Definem appears in the imminence of our criminalization. Our silencing. Invisibility. Hostilization. Persecution. Threats.

So first of all our intention was to vote for women who knew at least what a woman was. Although we are aware that knowing what a woman is does not represent all of our needs. However, we understand that it is a start. As Célia Amorós would say, we need to conceptualize well in order to politicize well.

At the same time, some posts began to circulate on feminist social networks, warning: "Ask your candidate if she knows what a woman is". They were rhetorical posts, but we decided to put this guideline into practice.

So, we created a page, and asked our followers for suggestions of female candidates to send this question to, and then we published the response of the nominated candidates.

In less than two days our page was blocked. We even had the page blocked twice, not to mention threats from candidates, emotional blackmail from trans activists and several questions about our goals. We received several messages such as "You are exposing women", "thanks for helping us", "ask the men too".

Yes, we also asked some men, and to our immense sadness they knew exactly who they were.

I haven't had time yet to do a deep analysis of all the material collected, but I realize that, in general, we can organize the answers into four distinct groups:

1. Group one: candidates that reinforce stereotypes of femininity as a woman's nature. These answers usually come from women on the Christian right.

Examples:

"Woman was the last being created by God, she was the apex of creation: full of beauty, sweetness, delicacy, spiritual strength, she was created to be a mother and wife, affectionate and sensitive"

"woman is an intuitive being, with an integral vision, concerned with others".

"A woman is a born leader"

2. Group two: candidates who define women as a social construction based on characteristics that were denied to women through the masculine definition. So we got things like: we are warriors, or the woman can be whatever she wants, whoever names herself limits herself, we are strong, we are resistance, among other things. This group of candidates may even use terms such as "cis women" or "trans", but I believe it is thoughtlessly, in an attempt to reproduce a "politically correct" discourse.

Example

"Being a woman is never giving up"

"A woman is to have, above all, courage, to seek to impose herself"

"Woman is resistance, affection and courage... It's putting the body to play, swimming against the current for ourselves... woman is politics."

"Woman is strength, courage, sensitivity. Woman is resistance. It is fighting daily to have your rights."

3. Group three: Candidates who are aware of the tension that exists in the feminist movement, and of the dispute over the term "woman", but who sides with the queer movement. And they understand "cis women" as privileged and "trans women" as the most oppressed among women. These candidates think that claiming that a woman is a human female is a conservative and "colonizing" idea. These candidates also appeal to the idea that women have diverse experiences, that there is no such thing as a woman, but women, in the plural. And that there are different types of women (including male "women"). From this perspective, it would be impossible to define what a woman is, because according to them, we are diverse.

Example:

"Actually, there is no definition of a woman, we are many, we are diverse"

“a woman, whatever her biological sex, is part of a historically oppressed group”

“To be a woman is to feel like a woman, to identify as a woman. We are plural”

“You're asking me about agendas that extinguish trans women from what I can see. I understand your position as a radical feminist, but in my approach the need for women goes much deeper than diagnosing or categorizing women.”

4. Group four: Candidates who claim that women are female human beings and understand gender as oppression. This group is a minority formed by only four candidates.

Example

“Woman is the female of the human species.

“A woman is a person who, because she was born as a female, is socialized from birth to present certain gender stereotypes and occupies a subordinate place in society”.

It is worth mentioning the prolixity of the answers, many were even true poems. I make this consideration, because the question directed to the candidates was an objective one: What is a woman? Could you define objectively?

Another caveat is also about the frequent use of Beauvoir's phrase (even if wrongly): “no one is born a woman, they become”.

Example:

“Simone de Beauvoir would say that no one is born a woman: they become a woman. Clarice Lispector said that a woman's destiny is to be a woman. And I tell you that to be a woman is to feel, touch and experience life intensely.”

Finally, I want to say that this project is important because it showed our weaknesses as a class. It showed that we still have difficulties defining ourselves. It showed that we have a lot to advance in political terms. But it showed us that radical feminists, materialists and gender critics are building themselves as a political opposition inside the Left, and that they are increasingly strengthening themselves to guide a real feminist agenda.

Thank you very much.