

Special Issue Intersectionality

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Mariella Nocenzi

Università degli Studi di Roma "Sapienza"

Silvia Fornari

Università degli Studi di Perugia



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Editorial manager: Carmine Urcioli

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Intersectionality as Militant Concept

While it would be far-fetched to suggest that everyone, in social sciences communities, is talking about intersectionality, it is certainly an idea in the process of burgeoning. Indeed, the idea of focusing a *Fuori Luogo* special issue on intersectionality emerged from the AIS-Italian Sociological Association end of term conference recently held in Naples.

Why are so many social scientists both attracted to, and repelled by intersectional analyses? In various ways, the articles in this special issue provide insights into this question. Together, they make clear that the concept is popular because it provides a concise shorthand for describing ideas that have, through both scientific and political struggle, come to be accepted in feminist thinking, gender and women's studies scholarship. Long before the term 'intersectionality' was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept it denotes had been employed in feminist work on how women are simultaneously positioned as women and, for example, as black, working-class, lesbian, or colonial subjects (Brah, Phoenix, 2004). To understand what intersectionality is, and what it has become, one needs to look at Crenshaw's body of work over the past 30 years on race and civil rights. A graduate of Cornell University, Harvard University, and the University of Wisconsin, Crenshaw has focused in much of her research on the concept of critical race theory. As she detailed in an article written for the Baffler in 2017 (<https://thebaffler.com>), critical race theory emerged in the 1980s and '90s among a group of legal scholars in response to what seemed to Crenshaw and her colleagues like a false consensus: that discrimination and racism in the law were irrational, and that once the irrational distortions of bias were removed, the underlying legal and socioeconomic order would revert to a neutral, benign state of impersonally apportioned justice.

The importance of intersectionality for modern society lies in its ability to unveil the complexities of human experiences. Rather than treating identities and forms of discrimination as isolated and one-dimensional, intersectionality invites us to consider individuals in their entirety, recognizing that various identity categories influence each other mutually. This approach challenges us to think critically about how systems of power operate and interact, making it an essential tool for social justice work. The current debate over intersectionality is really three debates: one based on what academics like Crenshaw actually mean by the term, one based on how activists seeking to eliminate disparities between groups have interpreted the term, and a third on how some conservatives are responding to its use by activists.

By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of oppression, intersectionality ensures inclusivity and that no one is marginalized in the fight for equality. It is an analytical tool that we use for the purpose of equality and human rights monitoring to show the distinct forms of harm, abuse, discrimination, and disadvantage experienced by people when multiple categories of social identity interact with each other.

It compels policymakers, activists, and communities to consider the diverse needs and challenges of individuals, fostering a more nuanced understanding of social issues. This, in turn, leads to more effective and inclusive solutions that address the root causes of inequality rather than just its symptoms.

Certain subpopulations under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella are frequently confused while talking about lesbian, gay, transgender (women and men), non-binary, intersex, and queer realities. As a result, by combining all the groups together, certain unique experiences become invisible.

An intersectional lens, on the other hand, can highlight the distinctions between these groups. Social research about that (Hennekam, Dumazert, 2023) showed that the type and intensity of violence faced by bisexual men can differ from that of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. It also reveals that transgender women can experience far more severe male gender-motivated violence than transgender men do, as is the case in most global contexts.

The application of an intersectional lens in LGBTQIA+ advocacy ensures that no one is left behind. It compels us to examine how societal structures of power—such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity—converge to create overlapping systems of oppression. This understanding is crucial in crafting policies and interventions that address the specific needs of the most vulnerable among us. For example, addressing the epidemic of violence against transgender people, particularly transgender of color, requires not only a condemnation of transphobia but also an active dismantling of racial and gender-based prejudices.

Furthermore, intersectionality fosters solidarity across diverse social movements. By recognizing the shared roots of oppression, individuals and groups can unite in their efforts to achieve justice and equality for all. This solidarity is potent, offering a foundation for collective action that transcends individual identities. When the LGBTQIA+ community stands in alliance with other marginalized groups, they amplify their voices and extend the reach of their advocacy, making a more profound impact on society.

Embracing intersectionality also enriches the narrative of the LGBTQIA+ experience. It allows for a more authentic representation that honors the complexity of people's lives. In media, literature, and public discourse, acknowledging intersecting identities provides a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and triumphs within the community. This visibility is vital in combating stereotypes and fostering a culture of empathy and respect.

In summary, the concept of intersectionality is not just an academic theory; it's a vital framework for social change. Its emphasis on the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression and identity categories enriches our understanding of the human condition, paving the way for a more just and compassionate society. As we move forward, embracing intersectionality in our policies, practices, and personal lives will be critical in creating a world where everyone, regardless of their intersecting identities, can thrive. Together, the articles of this special issue make a productive contribution to feminist, gender and LGBTQIA+ studies understandings of intersectionality. However, as militant sociologists, we need ongoing organized political and scientific articulation, revolt, debate, and deliberation - particularly since both no concept and no method is perfect and none can ever accomplish the understanding and explanation of all that needs to be understood and explained within the field of women's studies. We hope this special issue will stimulate further debate.

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Intersectionality and Sociology: Theories and Methodologies Applied to Studies of Gender and Sexuality in Italy. Dilemmas and Perspectives

Introduction

Why a Conference on Intersectionality in Italy?

When in December 2021 the Gender Studies Section of the Italian Association of Sociology dedicated its end-of-term conference, held at the University of Naples Federico II, to the theme of intersectionality, the time was ripe in our country to make it the subject of a conference, the focus of the social sciences - and of sociology in particular - on its definition and application and also the term of comparison with scientific communities such as the American and British ones that had baptised it and were developing it for decades. Yes, because in Italy its initial manifestations in the first decade of the 2000s were too few to attract the attention of the scientific and public community and, in any case, too late compared to the affirmation, a few decades earlier overseas, of an approach, theoretical framework, method and vision of society that only recently has progressively taken on an Italian, and more broadly European, character. For those who know intersectionality from having encountered it in the headquarters of North American movements and colleges where, as early as the end of the 1960s, so-called black feminism claimed its own dimension with respect to the feminism of white women and the protests of black men, its arrival in European universities, and then in Italian universities, seems to have altered it. There are too many cultural differences between European societies and that of the United States, which owes the affirmation of an approach such as the intersectional one to some of its specificities, including multiraciality, links with the colonies and deep social inequalities, especially of an economic nature. Yet, especially in recent years, that gradual diffusion of the concept of intersectionality, to the point of becoming common to many human and social disciplines developed in the other West, has drawn its most recent configurations to be read, not only with the incredulity, if not the scepticism, of some purists, but with all the strengths and weaknesses it proposes as any vision of society.

The aim is to understand what intersectionality is today and beyond, the two priority dimensions in the opinion of the writer introducing the editorial project of this special issue. In fact, intertwined are a) the developments of intersectionality now a few decades after its emergence and subsequent institutionalisation, posing dilemmas that cannot fail to be answered as well (Anthias, 2021); b) the later experiences of theorisation and application outside the Anglo-Saxon world, focusing on the case of Italy (Corbisiero, Nocenzi, ed., 2022). It is no coincidence that the scientific project of the conference, from which this monographic issue also originates, set out to take stock of the contribution of our sociological community to these studies. And it has only been able to do so by taking into account that their application prospects cannot disregard the answers to those dilemmas that have emerged with the consolidation of the intersectional approach in societies subject to constant change

In order to argue these starting cognitive questions - and through these to read both the dilemmas and the extra-American contributions - it is necessary to dwell on those constituent elements of intersectionality that characterise it, but at the same time can allow us to outline its future perspectives today. Far from retracing its history - texts such as Crenshaw's (1989) or Lutz's (2014) are points of reference for those wishing to explore this aspect in greater depth

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- the earlier identification of the black women's movement at the end of the 1960s as one of its earliest manifestations sheds light on a founding element of intersectionality. Proposing an alternative vision to the already revolutionary vision of feminism and the African-American rights movement, in fact, has an innovative scope that goes far beyond the proposition of a further identity profile, social position or point of view in the society of the second half of the last century. Certainly, the mature age of modernity revealed the composite social stratification that had taken shape as a result of the process of industrialisation, urbanisation and technological innovation, thanks to the connection of which more and more subjects shared the same space and time, held diversified social and labour roles, could know and differentiate themselves from others, and had the possibility of publicising and disseminating their identity specificity. And an avant-garde society such as the North American one provided the objective conditions for this conjunction of processes and effects to take place sooner than elsewhere (McCall, 2005). But it is certain other dynamics connected to intersectionality that have hollowed out the theoretical framework of modernity from the outside and from the inside that have a bursting significance.

What epistemological challenges to/from intersectionality

It must be said that part of the literature dedicated to intersectionality considers it a "consequence" of modern thought and some of its chosen themes (McCall, 2005; Carastathis, 2014), starting from that of social structure and position to that of the relations established between individuals and groups (Weber, 2001). Concepts such as class, class, power, social division of labour, state and rights constitute a basic dictionary common to that used by classical social science theories and to that referable to intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Davis, 2018). They are so much so that an object of study such as Max Weber's identified in the area of overlap between the spheres of economics, politics and state order does not seem so different from that positioned at the intersection of the concepts of class, race and gender by black scholars analysing the condition of women workers in North American companies (Crenshaw, 1989). While confirming something more than a simple affinity of approach or method, the specificities of intersectionality also overcome this commonality and place alongside this continuity in the critical analysis of society also a point of caesura, manifested in several aspects.

The first relates precisely to the critical scope of intersectional analysis. It is not the writer's task to establish the level reached in Weber's analysis of modernity or the advanced modernity of the first black feminists who came to the forefront of the scientific community's attention. It is the approach of analysis that changes that is of interest in establishing that the fathers of sociology were moving within a theoretical and methodological framework of reference for the newly born sociology, based on the principles of Western rational science and according to a hierarchy of knowledge (Weber, 1920-21). Even when challenged, these fundamentals were updated to the transformations taking place, adopted a paradigm more shared than the previous one within the scientific community, but nevertheless remained within that framework. By attesting to the presence, the values, the position of another identity, which was not only feminine, but also the bearer of cultural heritages and existential approaches that were not indigenous, those who proposed an analysis of intersectional society demonstrated that another vision was possible, even without abandoning the scientific rigour and object of study of the social sciences (Hill Collins, Bilge, 2016). A vision in which objects were not studied in isolation from their context, taking one of their dimensions as characterising with respect to the others, for the sole purpose of "simplifying" the actual connections and connections in a linearity in which they were arranged by rational scientific rigour. An approach that managed - and still manages - to hold together the scientific method developed by the natural sciences and western culture in one of its elementary forms of representation.

The reference to non-Western cultures materialises with the coexistence of people of different races in a land of indigenous peoples conquered by Westerners and populated by them, by practising the slave trade, with African peoples, then becoming a destination for ethnic groups from all over the planet. Such a socio-cultural context became the ideal scenario when processes such as industrialisation developed there, reformulating the effects of the economy on society, as well as scientific revolutions such as those that opened up knowledge produced outside the academies. The time was ripe at the end of the 1960s to finally structure even the critique of the Western model of knowledge production, after having recognised equal rights to the black people freed from the yoke of slavery and having laid the economic, technological and political foundations of a process such as globalisation, effective a few years later (Spivak, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). The confrontation with western culture, in fact, had long since taken off across the Atlantic: the imposition of the civilisation of the conquerors was only partly made more acceptable by the ecumenical character of the "American dream", already in its full phase, and then especially when it began to falter. It was in 1850 that the first Women's Convention was convened at Brinley Hall in Worcester, Massachusetts, which brought together almost a thousand delegates from the American states to demand not only the right to vote, but also the right to land ownership, to study, to family law reform and to equal pay for women. Demands that had already been made in similar social events, such as Seneca Falls in 1848, converged and intensified there, effectively proposing a paradigm shift in the observation, description and interpretation of the changing society. On the basis of these experiences, which were also multiplying in Europe in those years, the thought of Sojourner Truth-Isabella Baumfree, expressed in the well-known speech *Ain't I a woman?* on the occasion of the following Convention held in Akron, Ohio in 1851, marks an intersectional turning point: the black activist born slave added racial equality to the claim of female equality, but connecting them together and bringing them to a level of epistemological dignity, even before the juridical one, equal to that of the white male (hooks, 1981).

This became even more evident as the normative and political aspects of equality came to the attention of the public, jurists and policy makers, acquiring the much sought-after formalisation in laws and practice, but not without unexpected consequences that seriously challenged the cornerstones of American culture. More than a hundred years after Sojourner Truth's speech, in 1977 the Combahee River Collective Statement, the Manifesto of Thought of black lesbian activists gathered in Boston after similar experiences, posed one of these central questions (Combahee River Collective, 1982). The recognition of different identities, those of women and blacks, had paved the way for the demand for equal process in favour of other identities, starting with sexual identities, which, however, in turn suffered the same oppressions from those social groups that had been subordinated before, and the distribution of 'power' emerged as the key concept for understanding and analysing social structure and relations.

As Black feminists we are constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires/requires among other things that they have a less superficial understanding of Black race, colour, history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition a job for white women to do, but we will continue to speak out and demand accountability on this issue. In the practice of our politics, we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive actions have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political ends. As feminists we do not want to mess things up in the name of politics, positioning ourselves above people. We believe in collective processes and a non-hierarchical distribution of power within our groups and within our vision of a revolutionary society. We are engaged in an ongoing examination of our politics as it develops through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice (Combahee River Collective, 1977, 8).

The frontal critique of the scholars was not only of the traditional Western male-centric cultural system, but of its fundamental substratum placed in the distribution - or rather centralisation - of power.

As soon as women, particularly [...] privileged white women, began to acquire class power without getting rid of the sexism they had introjected, the divisions between women became more intense. When black women criticised racism within society as a whole by drawing attention to the ways in which racism shaped and influenced feminist theory and practice, many white women simply turned their backs on the prospect of sisterhood, closing their minds and hearts. And this was equally true when it came to classism among women (Id., 10).

A second element of intersectional specificity with respect to the theoretical framework of modernity is that of the re-signification of certain categories, essentially those that 'intersect' and, of all of them, precisely that of gender. The properties that each identity category brought with it, when analysed in their intersection with others, proposed conditions so articulated and connected with the properties of other categories that they could not be ignored in a rigorous scientific study.

This process was doubly bursting, however, as it also followed a different path from that of linearity as the supreme attribute brought by scientific rigour in the study of the object of research. It is possible to have an emblematic configuration of this in the development of studies on the representations of the gender variable, especially of the less advantaged. In analysing the phenomena of claiming equal rights, first political, then civil and social, the female condition has always been reduced to a unicum, despite the growing evidence, already reported, of the different conditions reserved for black women - intersectionality owes much to feminist and anti-racist history. However, it was the same essentialist representation of women that was called into question, which contributed to relativising, at least on a theoretical level, the sex/gender difference central to feminist thought (Butler, 1990, hooks, 2000). The outcome of theoretical and empirical studies on the feminine condition thus became not taken for granted within the acquisition of an alternative between opposition and parity with the other of the binary identities - the dominant male identity (Bourdieu, 1998) - and could prefigure a plurality of gender and sexually non-normative identities, the subject, for example, of queer studies, according to which queer history cannot and should not be analysed through contemporary perspectives that reduced, this time to a 'minority', all those who rejected heteronormativity - thus also heterosexual people (Bryson, de Castell, 1993; De Lauretis, 1999; Gibson, 2013; Mayo, Blackburn, 2020).

The re-signification of concepts and categories that intersectionality has promoted, starting with that of gender, recently defined (Rubin, 1975), has been - and still is - disruptive because it not only calls into question the existing paradigms that had delineated those concepts. It is the very sense and function of the paradigm for knowledge production that are being reconsidered. Although research and publications that explicitly manifest this are not frequent, intersectional studies punctually calibrate their critical view of society using content and methods established in the scientific community after updating them. It is a 'toolbox', in fact, in which only those tried and tested tools find a place, which are adapted, not without difficulty, to new 'interventions' to which the research is called. In this sense, the first image with which intersectionality was presented to the scientific community by Crenshaw was already effective: a crossroads where several cars converge, all potentially responsible for an accident, out of metaphor a case of discrimination; but

It is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: sometimes braking marks and injuries simply indicate that these two events occurred simultaneously; saying little about which driver caused the damage (Crenshaw, 1989, 151).

It was not only the certainty of science that was being debated, but also its reliance on cognitive paradigms from which only reference assumptions could be made and not all those other elements that social transformations and reflexivity of knowledge made emerge. Over the last few decades, this process has led to a redefinition of concepts and methods that has continued perhaps more because of its inevitability than because of any convinced action on the part of the scientific community to question the paradigms themselves in the face of the increasing protean nature of the object of their studies. The risk that scientists do not want to incur even today, besides being

banned as dystopian visionaries, has been courageously addressed by scholars such as Helma Lutz, who has envisaged a number of research results to the nth power: think of the declination and intersection of concepts such as geographical, demographic, global, translocal, transnational, post-colonial, and anti-capitalist difference (Lutz, 2014). In the potentially infinite intersections of dimensions that contribute to the discriminations traced by Lutz by adopting established and non-established perspectives of analysis, portions of reality, previously unseen or neglected, are represented: science may find itself adapting them to its long-proven tools or chasing them with the need to prepare new strategies when they impose themselves as objects of study.

This is the case with the more recent use of the intersectional approach by supranational decision-makers such as the United Nations and the European Union in equality policies and funding. As the EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 demonstrates, this is a principle to be adopted that requires both an overall (horizontal) and in-depth (vertical) view of society for its application without sacrificing complexity in favour of a few prevailing elements according to the dominant theoretical perspective of the moment. In addition, the analytical vision to be adopted must be able to indicate in which times, places and situations intersections occur and which intersections lend themselves most to policy attention and development. It is, therefore, an approach that has always been required of decision making because it is based on social analysis, but only in recent years has it been institutionalised by extending to seemingly unrelated equality issues such as the transport system or sustainable development policies.

The most invigorating challenge: the definition dilemma

Extraordinarily, intersectionality receives formal recognition from those who benefit from its application, while the scientific community still questions even its definition. Is it perhaps that the questions that are being asked and remain without shared answers are set according to an obsolete paradigm of study? While waiting for a clarifying answer - if one ever comes - scholars and scholars hesitantly discuss the mutual construction of categories such as gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, age, ability...: to which activity can this be ascribed? Maybe, to an analytical strategy that provides new insights into social phenomena? Or rather to a critical praxis underlying social justice projects? Or, finally, to a genuine field of study aimed at bringing to light the power relations that arise in social interactions? (Hill Collins, 2015).

You can first explain the extraordinariness of the lack of a shared definition of intersectionality in the scientific community by pointing out how, according to the traditionally adopted sense of paradigm, when one does not agree on a given element one recognises it when one sees it. In the absence of a definition or reference guidelines, the process of recognition is reversed and the answer to the question of what intersectionality is provided by interpretations, methods, practices, policy applications - for example the European ones already mentioned - in which intersectionality appears to be in the making even though an interpretative framework is lacking. From this set of practices manifested over more than four decades of scientific observation through an intersectionality-sensitive perspective, an initial element of theoretical consensus can be said to have matured: entities such as gender, class, race, age, ability and others cannot continue to be conceived as unitary and exclusive. On the contrary, they are mutually constructed, thus giving shape to plural constructions of social inequalities. These are precisely the ones that are at work in practice in politics, for families, in social welfare programmes, in recovery communities, in hospitals, for legal defence, in the world of associations and, last but not least, also in the centres of knowledge production, academic and otherwise, that operate in those very fields (Collins, Chepp, 2013). In short, the last decades have not passed in vain to work in an increasingly systematic way on social asymmetries, knowledge has been produced to also give scientific rigour to policies and interventions against inequalities, but now the process is ripe for a shift from the recognition of intersectionality in its visible manifestations and in the evident

objective connected to a scientific consensus on its definition in more abstract terms, then, applicable to certain practices.

At this stage of maturation of the process, there are at least three elements that can justify the scientific community's 'wavering' and three results that could be arrived at in the search for the defining framework taking into account the current mode of knowledge production.

In order, what prevents the conceptualisation of intersectionality can be found in the following, and the sequence of argumentation is not coincidental:

1. In process of abstraction of practical knowledge of intersectionality could alter its meaning by making dynamics related to practices of one rather than other domains prevail, given the extreme complexity and variability of the field of application. Anyone who has embarked on an inductive process from practices to the defining framework has experienced the effect of a "short blanket" and the risk of knowledge asymmetry in not considering entities or axes of oppression that are mutually generated and under changing conditions. Something, therefore, difficult to represent within a circumscribed construct shared by the scientific community (Collins, 2019).
2. The determination of a defining framework is the highest of knowledge production projects precisely because of the objectives it must achieve, as described in the previous point. Applying this to intersectionality emphasises the criticality of such a process, which takes place in a global, changing dimension and is connected to the exercise of power by those who design, implement, manage and control social asymmetries. Attention to power relations and social inequalities is the focus of intersectional knowledge: it 'participates in the very power relations it examines and, consequently, must pay particular attention to the conditions that make its knowledge claims comprehensible' (Collins, 2015, 8). All these elements lead one to think that more correctly, intersectionality is an interrelated set of knowledge production projects that change with the transformations experienced by the very communities within which these projects are launched and within which the conditions for a defining consensus are established. One can therefore understand how knowledge production is plural, because it is determined by specific social contexts and actions, within which relationships of over- and under-ordination operate. Knowledge is also not freely produced, but within social relations regulated by the distribution of power in terms of availability of economic, intellectual, participatory resources; of social position and function; of prevalence of one cultural system over others. The explanation for the lack of generalised consensus begins to become apparent (Hancock, 2016; Hearn, Louvrier, 2016).
3. The "power" factor associated with knowledge production stimulates a reflection on the concept of paradigm and how this affects the definition of intersectionality. For the production of knowledge, in fact, it is considered indispensable to use a theoretical perspective shared by the scientific community on the basis of the previous acquisitions of science because it defines the relevance of the object of research and determines the processes of formulating hypotheses, the choice of methods and techniques of analysis, and the interpretation and presentation of results (Kuhn, 1970). This knowledge is evidently constructed, transmitted and reproduced in social contexts from which it is elaborated and in which there is a reciprocal influence with power structures, as understood in the previous point (Mannheim, 1953; Foucault, 1980). It is an influence that can lead to the exclusion of contributions to knowledge that come from those subjects and groups that do not access its production process even when their discriminated condition is recognised and scientifically studied. One can understand how the entry of 'other' interpretative communities than those entrusted by society with the production of knowledge - and not only when they are the object of scientific research, as in the case of theories of racial formation (Collins, 2015) - entails a radical revision of cognitive processes by bringing other perspectives to the observation of the object of research and thus differentiating the scientific community. It follows that not only will the object of research be interpreted according to a multiple and complex scheme, but also that

the scientific consensus on these findings may not be unanimous. Hence the reflection on a revision of the very concept of paradigm that is applied to define a knowledge production process which, as it stands, does not allow the defining framework of intersectionality to be delineated even from its consolidated empirical application (Nocenzi, 2023).

From these conditions of knowledge production relating to intersectionality derive three different frameworks within which intersectionality itself is defined which, in the opinion of the writer who has compared himself with the literature on the topic (see interview with Hill Collins in the special issue), does not they are exclusionary, can mutually influence each other (Collins, 2019) and legitimize current practices and possible future conceptualizations of intersectionality. Their interest lies in the state of progress to which they bring the original and socially constructed definition in the United States:

- *intersectionality as an object of investigation* which is the best-known meaning with which it is recognised, defined and practiced especially within the academic scientific community. It was precisely in the North American academy in the 1980s that it established itself, albeit without yet being so defined, as a perspective of studying society through the categories of class, race and gender. A process of knowledge production was thus proposed which quickly expanded to be a political project for the transformation of society itself and of the academy as its institution according to objectives of social justice and equity. As an object of study, therefore, intersectionality has had a significant revolutionary impact, as already anticipated at the beginning of this article, because the knowledge produced has followed transversal dynamics across many disciplines to the point of founding new fields of study in which the same they collected, compared, combined to create a common language (Cho et al., 2013; Andersen, Collins 2018). These processes were able to benefit from the consensus of the academic community first and, more extensively, of the scientific community, which accepted the political requests of scholars engaged in a wide-ranging knowledge project, allowing its widespread diffusion and substantially institutionalization. rapid in courses, research networks, publications. Despite the benefit that intersectionality has come from being conceived as an object of study, its public and formal recognition has been accompanied by effects that are not as positive, especially for those who were involved in the original project of affirming this new project of knowledge. The diversity of the fields of application and abstraction has led to a selection of some constituent elements over others in each of the different research experiences with intersectionality, which have also favored a contamination of theories and methods. The result has sometimes proven to be far from the initial intersectional purpose, betraying the internal coherence of a critical and transformative project of social structures, including academic ones, which could not fail to arouse mutual resistance and distancing among those who had initiated these studies, those who had continued them and the professionals of intersectional practices. Among these, Crenshaw herself has often complained about distorting readings of her cognitive project for a theory of racial formation within the cultural representations of social structures: for example, the line of studies on black feminism connected to the public recognition of the question of race uses the Crenshaw's thought to interpret contexts and dynamics not known to her and not finalized in her work. A pledge for the acquisition of the intersectional perspective in a wider part of the scientific community, as already identified in the first of the previous points

- *intersectionality as an analytical strategy* thanks to which it is possible to observe and question society, producing knowledge that is grafted onto that deriving from the application of different analytical perspectives. Potentially, all areas of research could adopt intersectionality as an analytical strategy because it brings their constituent categories into mutually defining relationships, but what can be identified as an added value is an analytical attention to these processes which are what really distinguishes it. Those who have shown this attention in their analysis using intersectional frameworks have done so above all in some thematic areas which have proven to be more relevant and more suitable in themselves, without however being so exclusively. In particular, research on social identity and the labor market is among the most frequent in inter-

sectional literature when it has served as an analytical tool. Its analytical scope, in fact, supports research that intends to describe and understand the processes that determine social inequalities based on given categories, such as social and national identification (Yuval-Davis, 2006), the organization of work and functions connected (Hearn, Louvrier, 2016) and, therefore, of all the areas thus structured, from the family to the school (Case, 2016) up to those phenomena whose reading through the categories requires a necessary integration: think of the identifying categories of perpetrators and victims of violence and, more generally, of deviance (Lombardo, Roland-sen Agustín, 2016). The analytical use of intersectionality, however, is not only that applied to the objects of study, but to intersectionality itself, both with respect to its epistemology and methodology. In the first case, the literature on intersectionality is littered with analytical proposals for its definition, already partly explored previously. We move from its identification as a type of analysis (Nash 2008), to a perspective (Steinbugler et al. 2006), from a concept (Knapp 2005) to a paradigm (Hancock 2007), underlining the distance of intersectionality from the outcomes of an analysis that is conducted according to traditional paradigms. But also, from a methodological point of view, his analytical contribution proceeded following a new use of cognitive categories compared to the already consolidated repertoire. The most sedimented case in the experience of intersectional studies is once again the North American one in which research on social stratification uses class as an analytical category (Dill, Zambrana, 2009). However, it is an acquisition also determined by the object of study, the context of investigation, the field of research which, by modifying themselves, preserve the critical potential of the intersectional analysis conducted. In Europe, certainly, the cultural dimension has prevailed more recently over the economic one and so in postmodern global contexts some central intersectional categories such as race are referred to in descriptive rather than analytical terms. Even as a strategy, therefore, intersectionality has developed over the decades, moving away from the original project, but not always for this reason abdicating its critical function

- *intersectionality as a critical practice*, traditionally connected with social justice objectives. These can be achieved with policies and interventions, but also with the theoretical and empirical knowledge that guides and feeds on intersectional practices. The mutual exchange is validated by practically all the studies in which intersectionality has supported intervention practice with research, especially where the objective of social justice could be achieved with the identification, understanding and removal of social asymmetries: poverty, illiteracy, violence, protection of human rights (Davis, 2011). Stakeholders in these processes of production and application of knowledge include operators and social workers, families, teachers, volunteers, but also decision-makers, jurists, as well as those who study and do research. These are therefore composite processes, as well as complex, due to the different contributions of knowledge made, but also due to the distinct levels in which the action for social justice is articulated - from the analysis of the case and the research field to the collection and selection of theoretical and methodological tools, up to deviant protection, contrast, reduction and prevention actions. Specifically in intersectional research experiences, one of the main problems that has made this meaning of intersectionality less popular is precisely the conciliation of strategies, languages and meanings between the different recipients, to the point of configuring real role conflicts for those who, especially as scholars, have seen strategies and analytical results welcomed by some groups and rejected by others. An inevitable outcome in a common scheme of opposition between different groups with respect to a project of social justice which, however, with its heuristic strength intersectionality intends to overcome.

In light of the composite path of intersectionality from its first public recognition in the scientific community up to its institutionalization, the questions that are currently open in this phase of its development have emerged: the first of the two points of these reflections, necessary to understand what added value the Italian experience can bring to the debate, equally and differently from the many others exogenous to the original North American context.

The Italian experience on intersectionality

The structure of society and the analytical sensitivity of the intellectual class are factors that can determine the level of luck in the diffusion of intersectionality in a given scientific community. Certainly, in Italy they have delayed its introduction into the debate and scientific production together with other conditions characterizing our country which have ended up obscuring the rare attempts at reflection on the topic. Among these, we include those of Vincenza Perilli (2009) and Sabrina Marchetti (2013) and those associated with the research and social commitment experiences of Maria Laura Corradi (2003, 2018) are well known. Thanks to her doctoral studies conducted at the University of California in Santa Cruz, she had the opportunity to meet and collaborate with scholars of the caliber of Teresa De Lauretis and Angela Davis, and to work with Raewyn Connell (2014). His socialization with intersectionality occurred in a phase of progressive maturation in North American society in which he was already able to experience the risks of institutionalization as the emptying of his transformative charge and of academization as the "domestication of subversive knowledge" which also prefigures for the Italian reality (Bello et al., 2022).

The point of closest proximity between the work of research and social activation in Italy and intersectionality was, in reality, constituted by feminism which has centralized its attention on the category of gender for a long path of claiming the connected rights that have been achieved at an advanced historical stage. This is almost coincident with what in the United States between the Seventies and Eighties projected feminism to take on a self-reflexive attitude and open to intersections with multiple categories. There was, therefore, a temporal gap between the two cultures which was partially filled in Italy when the echo of North American and international studies spread to the more "sensitive" offshoots of the scientific community and the association world, providing new perspectives of analysis of a reality in transformation also in Italy.

Some phenomena have been more decisive than others in stimulating a production of knowledge that is no longer mono-categorical and in suggesting rethinking social structures and institutions through an intersectional approach. In particular, the arrival of migrant women and queer identity models combines "other" gender identities with the female one, for which factors such as race and sexual orientation pluralized the constitutive categories. It was a process that started from the bottom, from social facts, from their affirmation and from becoming an object of research for the scientific community which conducted studies on the identity representation of migrant women, on microcredit or on mixed associational life (Battistoni, Oursana, 2012). Sometimes, thanks to this research, debates have started on the definition of policies in favor of the empowerment of discriminated migrant women.

The last decade has certainly been the most significant in favoring the introduction of intersectionality not only in the scientific debate, but also in the dimension of political and social practices which, in a mutual process of construction, have encountered an unexpected cultural opening. Yes, because the degree of maturation - public recognition and institutionalization - of intersectionality in Italy has not had the sedimentation of its primordial place, the Anglo-Saxon one, but precisely from there it has received stimuli and models which it has grafted into a context almost completely devoid of useful experiences. Those of migrant women and the first queer identities were followed by the issues brought to public attention by specific discrimination against transsexual subjects and then by global feminist ones with movements such as *#MeToo* (2017) and *Ni una menos* (2015), one started from the United States, the other in Argentina more or less in the same years and capable of overcoming national borders with objectives of social justice and intersectional planetary languages. Connected to the demands of these movements are the environmental and sustainable development ones, even more recent, which have benefited from the awareness of the former by providing a platform of objectives for society whose key is the intersection between categories, the interdependence between living systems, the elimination of intersectional inequalities. These programmatic plans are inspired by

other more local projects such as the Green Deal or the Gender Equality Index in Europe and the PNRR in Italy which quickly forced research protocols to adopt intersectionality as an approach, perspective, concept, method and much more.

The accelerated institutionalization now seems to impose a phase in which to give substance to intersectionality by applying it in research and political and social practices with scientific rigor, with a declination that is inevitably adapted to the social context of reference, as demonstrated by the essays that make up this issue thematic.

Objectives and proposals of the thematic issue

In the development of studies on the female condition, then on gender and sexuality in our country, sociology certainly had a role that was not decisive in the early stages, but increasingly significant as the epistemological and methodological questions gradually became articulated in the light of parallel transformations. and integrated systems of society and science. Today, the specific attention on the added value that can come from intersectionality brings gender and sexuality studies to a level of greater maturation by addressing development prospects while also dealing with the dilemmas that intersectionality itself, as we have seen, experiences within it. The six contributions that make up this thematic issue can be introduced precisely as some of the intersectional perspectives with which the Italian social science community observes, and then interprets, different phenomena and conditions in which the categories of gender, but also age, class, residence, skills, cultural level meet in a mutual construction at the basis of proposals for intervention projects; those that the authors advance as the objective of their essays.

Alina D'Ambrosio Clementelli is convinced of the critical and transformative impact of intersectionality in her essay *Mapping Safety through an Intersectional Perspective. The Case of Wher* analyzes the composition of the elements of sociological relevance in an app designed to offer services to women who live in urban spaces in order to guarantee safe use of them. The study of the factors that contribute to the production of insecurity in public space does not take gender as the only key category and does not intend all the others connected to it as descriptive variables - from nationality, to residence, from the level of education to digital literacy. In a cultural context represented through the contingent meaning given to those categories, the analysis of the relationship between urban space and gender violence presents the new meanings that the aforementioned categories acquire reciprocally and how these are the ideal ones for preparing the app.

The theme of gender violence also returns in other essays, starting with that by Angela Maria Toffanin, entitled *Intersectional Approach within Italian Anti-violence Centres. Challenges for Research and Policies* to underline the relevance that intersectionality can have for the study and practical intervention on a social phenomenon that does not seem to stop despite the amount of scientific research, funds invested, and action plans implemented. Toffanin uses an intersectional approach for the specific reading of the form of male violence against women in the identity representations of perpetrators and victims in the international literature on the topic. The aim of his work is to trace a possible intersectional profile which, especially for the victims, contributes to giving a different orientation to the intervention methodologies of the Anti-Violence Centres, especially for the aspects of the assistance models they adopt, and which have been ascertained as the most critical.

In *Symbolic Violence against Women as a Social and Cultural System* Milena Gammaitoni completes the analyzes dedicated to gender violence in this monographic issue, focusing on the form of symbolic violence against women to trace its deep roots in the cultural system of our society. To the related cognitive questions that she asks herself, inserting herself into a traditional and very rich line of studies on the specific topic, the Author contributes by bringing an intersectional gaze to read the construction of female identity in artistic and cultural forms, both past

and more recent. To determine and represent the condition of subordination of women through the symbols of art and literature, categories have been "re-signified" from time to time (from that of class to that of age and even race) in light of their intersection with that of gender in a co-formation process that becomes evident precisely thanks to intersectionality. And with it the aims of social control, still perpetrated and legitimized in the disciplinary processes of knowledge production.

Maria Francesca Fobert Ventro proposes in her essay *Gender and Age. The Myth of Eternal Youth in Advertising* is a sort of integration to the issues raised by the previous essay, reflecting on the forms of discrimination that other visible and public images and contents - those spread with the advent of mass media in the past and social media today - favor in advertising messages. In the clear intersection between gender and age, the expected social condition of showing an appearance that responds to certain canons is determined, from the analysis of which emerges the subordination that weighs especially on women. In this way, a sort of cultural oppression is defined which, thanks to the media, imposes itself on a global level through similar models that we recognize in the female images proposed and, therefore, also imposed. The categories they use, especially those of age and gender, intersect, attributing "re-vised" meanings, those actually at the basis of current stereotypes.

Just as for the phenomenon of violence, there is also a particular interest from the sociological community for that of identity and the body because these are recurring and central themes in the current cultural climate which bring to the surface questions that are equally relevant because they are often unresolved. This is the case of the object analyzed by Ester Micalizzi in her essay *Childlessness and disability: an intersectional analysis on access to motherhood for women with disabilities in Italy*, that of the absence of motherhood among women with visible and non-visible disabilities. Comparing the results of the analysis of the structural and cultural barriers that society opposes to the motherhood of these women with the model proposed by the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from an intersectional perspective, the Author proposes the results of an investigation conducted by her. The self-representations of women with disabilities and without children fit fully into the profiles of marginality that social institutions prepare within relations of power which, precisely because of its exercise, put those women in a position to fight oppression by promoting change.

This last factor considered in the intersectional gaze, disability, inserts further ideas for epistemological analyzes into intersectional studies and, in the overview offered by the monographic issue, it seems to reserve little space for that category of class, so central to the original studies of intersectionality and which have always been such in Italy. Mara Sanfelici and Luigi Gui - incidentally the only scholar in this publication and among the not many who dedicate themselves to intersectional studies in Italy - recover Crenshaw's analytical perspective which starts from the category of class, dedicating themselves in *Intersecting injustices: understanding oppression and privilege through the perspectives of parents facing poverty* to families in conditions of economic deprivation. The authors assume that the role of parents is the one outlined in contemporary Western societies by cultural constructs and symbols that hold them responsible for building opportunities for their children and managing the associated risks. An intersectional analysis applied in a field investigation shows how axes of oppression/privilege insist on parents through role expectations that end up determining their identity with unprecedented construction processes because they are seen from a perspective that is not frequent for these studies.

At the conclusion of the introduction of this thematic issue, the contribution on intersectionality closest to its original project is presented, therefore apparently furthest from the Italian social science community, but certainly among the most qualified to respond to the dilemmas and prospects of intersectionality Today. This is the interview with Patricia Hill Collins, a reference source for many studies on intersectionality at an international level and a researcher engaged in her own self-reflexive analysis, right from the defining aspects.

These were, among countless others, the elements that brought Hill Collins closer to the Italian scientific community in this interview and, even before, in the Italian edition of his work *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (2019), edited for the types of UTET by Fabio Corbisiero and Mariella Nocenzi in 2022. This publication, in the opinion of those who contributed to editing it and writes here, has at least the merit of having brought a relevant work on intersectionality to a wider audience and of having promoted its knowledge in a cultural context progressively more and more sensitive. Collins' thoughts on the definition and application of intersectionality in that work are profound and articulated. This interview allowed us to delve deeper into some aspects and those that deserve specific reference here are certainly the centrality of politics and community.

Especially in light of the Italian experience, Hill Collins' reflections on the community as a "dynamic political construct" can trigger a debate that is now urgent with respect to the social transformations underway. Their rhythm is often followed, sometimes anticipated by individual and collective actions - think of those implemented in the face of the environmental crisis or the pandemic - and intersectionality can constitute a useful analytical tool for conceptualizing and building communities that are participatory and also democratic. For Hill Collins, community is a powerful concept because it exploits the power of emotions for political action, which is more necessary than ever in the current local and global scenarios dominated by sectarianism and exclusion. The commitment of this monographic issue towards expected results such as these can only be based on Hill Collins' assumption that "all knowledge is in some way political, because it is based on a social world characterized by social inequality".

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Mapping safety through an intersectional perspective. The case of Wher²

1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between urban space and gender-based violence through an intersectional perspective, focusing on women's safety (Kern, 2019; Castelli et al., 2019). Several scholars have shown how the perception of safety depends on gender (Pitch 2001, Di Fraia 2019) due to different socialisation and sexual vulnerability. Adopting the intersectional perspective (Hill Collins, 2006; Anthias, 2012), based on the contribution of black feminism and postcolonial and decolonial studies, enables critical analysis of the representation of security and the further production of hierarchies according to class, race and gender. This approach allows us to show two aspects: on the one hand, it sheds light on the factors that contribute to the production of insecurity in public space, reinforced by a media narrative that links gender-based violence to neighbourhood degradation³ and the presence of migrants; and on the other hand, underlines the limits of urban policies used to counter gender-based violence. From my perspective, partially and situated (Harding, 1987; Haraway, 1988), I adopt intersectionality to trace the dynamics of axes of power and their structuration rather than a series of static categories within which to fix subjects (Author, forthcoming). Although women's security is rooted in gender issues, it should first be historicised and interpreted in light of the security framework.

Since the Nineties, in Italy, the concept of security has become part of the repertoire of the political discourse of both right-wing and left-wing parties: it begins to take on specific denotations and occupy a central role in the various electoral campaigns by pointing to the figure of the migrant as a threat to public safety and to gradually strip away several social characteristics in favour of its identification with an orderly, white, and clean space (Maneri, 2013). One of the examples was in the last electoral campaign when women's safety was again at the top of the agenda used against the presence of migrants, according to securitarian rhetoric. After one rape in Emilia Romagna, Giorgia Meloni, the far-right candidate and the winner of the last political election, re-posted the video of one rape, underlining the nationality of the rapist to point out the 'emergency security' and reclaiming the fight against decay and illegal immigration⁴. The combined work of institutional and media public discourse constructs a precise idea of security through the homogenisation of various social phenomena.

However, safety should be considered in light of urban neoliberal processes and the restructuring of gender roles, precisely at a time when women have massively entered the sphere of productive labour. Women's safety has become a pivotal issue in political agendas and contemporary urban regeneration processes. As early as 1995, at the UN Conference in Beijing and Habitat II in Istanbul in 1996, women's rights to housing, transport and safe cities were considered a political priority. The European Council played a central role in conceptualising gender mainstreaming policies, a process of political change that would promote women's equality and fight discrimination. In light of political transformations, through the case study of a women's safety app, Wher, I will show what representation of safety emerges and how it shapes urban practices. The article will be divided into three parts. First, I outline the security policies in Italy and how they interlay gender-based violence. In the second part, I will refer to the relationship between

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2 Received: 15/10/2022. Revised: 13/05/2023. Accepted: 09/09/2023. Published: 30/09/23.

3 <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/annalisa-camilli/2018/10/25/salvini-san-lorenzo-desiree-mariottini> (consulted on 15/09/2022)

4 <https://www.dire.it/22-08-2022/778621-stupro-piacenza-video-meloni-letta-calenda/> (consulted on 1/10/2022)

the geography of fear and media-political discourse to framework the case study of Wher. This app is based on user comments and aims to suggest the safest streets for women and community building. The intersectional perspective allows looking critically at the safety discourse to analyse how racialisation processes define perceptions of urban safety and, most importantly, to whom these measures are addressed. In conclusion, I suggest social reproduction (Peake et al., 2021) in everyday life as an approach to deepen investigating women's safety starting from their grounded experience in everyday life.

2. Safe or securitised cities? Urban policies paradigm in the case of Italy

Women's safety gained more attention and became a priority in the city's governance, imposing itself on the European agenda as a criterion to pursue. In Northern Europe, urban planning has long since taken on a gender focus by adopting 'gender-mainstreaming' approaches (Bauer, 2009, p. 64), aiming at achieving gender equality through a synergy between different sectors and fighting discrimination. This approach looks at the people's needs, such as habits and priorities, and then figures out how to improve their living conditions. In Italy, some centre-left regional and municipal governments of Tuscany, Umbria and Emilia-Romagna regions have adopted gender mainstreaming (Zebracki, 2014) for a long time, and the app Wher, the object of this paper, is part of those policies. Considering the Italian scenario on the discourse of security allows us to outline the framework in which women's security fits.

Since the 1990s, the Italian context has witnessed a shift in the meaning of security toward urban security due to the experience of several centre-left party administrations (Martin & Selmini, 2000), in conjunction with a territorial distribution of competencies in public order and local administrative police. The idea was to promote 'integrated urban security' projects at the regional level through the synergy of multiple actors, such as associations, local police and social services, which means understanding security as a 'common good' and ensuring 'the security of rights'.

Because of the increased visibility of migrant flows in Italy, the media represent migration flows as 'invasions' and 'emergencies' (Sciortino, 2017) or the ethnic component is emphasised in a femicide narrative, creating an image of immigration as a social problem. The relationship between representations and policies is a central node in both migration narratives, especially in building the rhetoric of securitisation. Accordingly, the logic of securitisation makes the social phenomenon a problem that creates social alarm and threatens order by identifying specific social categories as threatening (Borghi *et al.*, 2013). In this way, phenomena characterised by a specific social marginality whose ethnic component is emphasised fall under the umbrella category of crime. In this way, the femicide narrative plays a central role in representing the 'foreigner' as a threat, reinforcing the myth of the 'black rapist' (Davis, 1981).

The femicide of Reggiani acts as a watershed in the public discourse on gender-based violence because her femicide was instrumentalised within the frame of public order and immigration. On 30th October 2007, Giovanna Reggiani was killed by Nicolae Mailat, a 23-year-old Romanian man. The media emphasise the characteristics of the perfect victim: Giovanna Reggiani, a 47-year-old white woman of middle-upper class, wife of a retired admiral, a 'respectable woman'. The description of Reggiani as a wife is functional in highlighting adherence to gender expectations. At the same time, the emphasis on the nationality of her murderer leads to the criminalisation of the 'foreigner'. The public debate gives rise to a climate of social alarm with the approval in a few days of Decree Law 181/2007, the so-called 'anti-Roma rule', which gives prefects the power to expel EU citizens from the national territory for reasons of public safety. The narrative about this femicide underlines the process of criminalisation of foreigners to Italian women, and gender becomes central to the process of ethnicisation, «that is, a process of criminalisation of immigrant men about rape, of the migrant-rapist nexus, as well as of the instrumentalisation of

the female body used to legitimise the recrudescence of security policies» (Simone, 2010, p.197) 2008⁵ was a strategic year for urban security in Italy, which opens the season of sheriff-mayors issuing ordinances on security matters. Municipalities issued 600 ordinances, and 16% were concerned with street prostitution. The so-called 'anti-degradation ordinances' refer to a specific idea of public order, which implies an a priori selection (Dal Lago & Giordano, 2016) based on presumed dangerousness in a regime of morality and conformity to the norm. This logic affects those who populate the undesirable categories, such as sex workers, migrants, the homeless, and drug addicts and to whom the sense of insecurity is directed. The criminalisation of these subjects causes the politics of decorum to cross over on fear, which becomes a driving agent that shapes urban space. Underling this logic means to show how both the medial and political discourse reinforce the idea that gender-based violence is an issue of public order based on two specular discourses: the victimisation of women and the creation of a menace (Peroni, 2018). However, the explicit association of gender-based violence and immigration is first found in 'Decree Law 11/2009: Urgent measures on public security and combating sexual violence, as well as on the subject of persecutory acts', which provides for the rejection of irregular foreigners, which was later amended to become the law on stalking. According to Simone (2010), women's bodies become a battleground to produce consensus in the discursive order of the securitarian paradigm. Inscripting gender-based violence in the emergency regime makes it a matter of public order without grasping the specific features and deep-seated reasons for our insecurity. For instance, Decree-Law 93/2013, 'Urgent provisions on security and for the fight against gender violence, as well as on civil protection and the commissioning of provinces', which inscribes violence in a broad legislative matter that has nothing to do with prevention but focuses on protection and ranges from violence in stadiums to copper theft. Those policies consider gender-based violence an order public problem and pretend to resolve it in an emergency approach. To better understand women's safety, look for deep reasons for their unsafety, what types of representation emerge and why some figures became a menace.

3. The nexus between sexism and racism in the geography of fear

Several surveys have shown different perceptions of safety depending on gender (Pitch & Ventimiglia, 2001). While men fear being robbed, the crime women fear most is rape (Whitzman, 2019). However, sexual assaults are underestimated because they are not always reported, and statistical analyses do not consider psychological, economic, social, and harassment violence. Perceptions of safety are also the focus of Istat's five-year multi-purpose survey, which aims to determine the prevalence of crimes and, consequently, their perception. In the latest 2018 survey, there was a decrease in fear of crime but an increase in women's perceptions in all aspects covered. For example, 24.9% of women feel unsafe when walking down the street in the dark, compared to 14.9% of men, or 17.8% of women never go out alone, compared to 5.3% of men. 19.5% of women do not feel safe even at home.

Research conducted by Di Fraia and colleagues* (2019) on women's experience of fear in Milan shows how the media diet of female participants influences their perception of their subjective insecurity and reinforces specific figures and spaces of fear. The results clearly show the teamwork between media, word of mouth and political-institutional discourse that makes the equation between immigration and crime a hegemonic discourse. In addition, the phenomenon appears to chronicle in some places: where the encounters with specific figures characterised by social distress, such as foreigners or the homeless, represent the highest degree of risk of coming across dangerous situations or that are places of drug dealing. This category includes train stations, but also huge streets with a reduced presence of pedestrians and finally, the suburbs,

5 With the approval of the 'Security Package' signed by the former Minister of the Interior, Roberto Maroni

which are described as places characterised by economic misery, and social disintegration and where there is a concentration of marginal social groups. Media representations have played a prominent role in the definition of risk and its elaboration, activating frames within which to read social phenomena. The narrative of femicides uses strategies that activate emphasis or distortions through stereotyped narratives and underline what is not routine, reducing complex issues to simple ones. It is a dangerous bias because the media pay less attention to domestic violence cases or read them as exceptional cases due to a 'crime of passion' or a 'rapture of madness'. Instead, when foreign men commit violence, male violence is considered something that belongs to other, more patriarchal cultures.

Di Fraia (2004) emphasises the normative power of the media as agents in creating specific interpretations of social phenomena in a shared universe of meaning according to the logic of agenda-setting. Many of the researches on the reporting of femicides show how the press does not make explicit the power dynamics (Radford & Russell, 1994), either by de-emphasising the perpetrator or by focusing on the behaviour of the woman who suffers violence that does not correspond to gender expectations (Giomi, 2015).

If, on the other hand, violence is committed by men belonging to ethnic 'minorities', inter-racial assaults are notoriously over-represented, despite this being a 'statistically unusual scenario' (Boyle, 2005, p. 70). According to the labelling theory, if a migrant commits a crime, the association between foreigners and crime will occur. As Di Fraia's research (2019) on women's perceptions of safety in Milan (2019) shows, women perceive the 'Other', the foreigner, as a menace through a series of stereotypes: he is conceived in a context of crime, urban decay and a cause of insecurity. However, this misses the material and cultural roots of women's fear and the risk of falling into the same trap as investigations of fear of crime (Vianello & Padovan, 1999) that reinforce the causality of the relationship between fear and increased security. Feminist geographers and sociologists (Madriz, 1997; Valentine, 1989) have pointed out that women's safety is not a paradox through the analysis of gender power relations and socialisation models in which gender is an 'ordering criterion' of the experience of subjects in a society (Piccone Stella & Saraceno, 1996). Adopting this lens makes it possible to understand the reasons for these different perceptions, which are due to the different socialisation of girls and boys and their relationship with their bodies from childhood. Specifically, girls incorporate prohibitions, precautions, exposure to recommendations, a limitation of their freedom of movement and autonomy, and coming up against a specific sexual vulnerability from an early age with which they have to deal. Women's perception of insecurity is linked to the dimension of vulnerability that constructs female bodies as 'accessible' (Bourdieu, 1998) and exposes women to violence as women. It is precisely for this reason that women develop feelings of fear of men and the risk of being raped, so insecurity and fear have a relationship as consequential. For geographer Gill Valentine, fear for men is spatialised by projecting it onto spaces. It is as expedient to cope with a constant state of alertness and inevitably conditions women's use of public space by implementing a whole series of adaptation or defence strategies (Riger & Gordon, 1981) naturalised, such as avoiding places considered dangerous, going out alone at night, wearing a particular type of clothing.

From childhood, women develop mental maps of places where they are at risk of being attacked as a product of their embedded experience and secondary information, e.g. through the media or other people's stories. The elaboration of these maps leads to limited use of space, especially where they may be in contact with unfamiliar men, as they are exposed to possible attitudes that they have no control over or cannot predict. Furthermore, the daily experience of catcalling, verbal harassment, and constant booing fuels this fear, making women feel like sexual objects in public spaces and reminded that their presence in specific spaces is not expected (Koksela, 1999). Although rape and assault statistics clearly show that women are more at risk in the home with men they know, the public discourse's constructed gender-based violence as something related to public space. The focus on strangers increases women's insecurity outside the home, concealing the dimension of violence that occurs in intimate spaces, involves emotional relationships,

and has repercussions regarding the policies implemented. The characterisation of public space as a space of fear, albeit unevenly, can be considered a spatial expression of patriarchy (Valentine, 1989).

Moreover, it is functional to reproduce traditional gender norms and roles according to which some spaces are inappropriate for women, conditioning their uses and shaping the precautions taken. Parks, alleys, subways, dark streets, spaces with few ways out or those places where women have experienced some violence populate the maps of unsafe spaces and draw the geographies of fear. Many studies show white women in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods tend to view rape in racialised terms because a racist image represents racialised men with uncontrolled and violent sexuality (Valentine, 1989). Therefore, the tangible presence of men belonging to other social classes or specific ethnic groups in some neighbourhoods contributes to their stigmatisation.

Considering the combined effect of all these factors, such as media, socialisation and everyday experience, the reasons why fear is firmly rooted in women are clear from a social and cultural point of view (Kern, 2019). Fear is a crucial element of patriarchal oppression (Walby, 1989) that performs the function of social control (Pain, 1991). In contrast to the social construction of insecurity as fear of crime, feminist analyses have shown how women's fear is closely linked to the fear of being sexually assaulted and, as such, plays a role in maintaining women's subordination in a patriarchal society. In other words, women's fear can be defined as a spatial pattern of male violence, manifesting in an increased perception of insecurity.

4. The case of Wher

In 2017, the centre-left administration of Bologna promoted a mapping of 'safe' areas and streets for women in collaboration with the app Wher. A Turin-based startup created the app based on users' bottom-up urban mapping. Since its release, this app has been downloaded 10,000 times reaching 50,000 users. To date, the mapping has covered five cities, but other European cities are being mapped. According to data from the app⁶, more than 300 women have used it in Bologna, mapping more than 400 km through 2,000 comments. The idea was for areas of the city to be rated by users of the app based on the following specific indicators: perception of safety, brightness, affluence and risk of harassment. The app's self-representation is characterised by an empowering narrative, as the payoff «Maps for Women Made by Women» states, whose mission is mapping the city by female users who define the perimeters of its safety. The target audience comprises different profiles of women (students, entrepreneurs, travellers, etcetera) so as not to homogenise them as a single group. The work of this app is based on building a community through a blog and organising different events. The most active users are called 'Wherrior,' a play on words that upsets the victim's narrative about gender-based violence. Based on their subjective perceptions, users can indicate whether a street is safe or unsafe based on some pre-determined indicators or make explicit what elements make the neighbourhood safe or unsafe. In the city of Bologna, the experimental mapping covered three neighbourhoods: Bolognina, Quartiere Universitario and Cavaticcio. Among the mapped areas, I will focus on the Bolognina area, a former working-class neighbourhood located in a semi-central part of the city. Bolognina is a strategic point of observation, able to map safety issues through neoliberal urban restructuring, discourses of securitisation and women's grounded experience in everyday life.

Multiple games are being played in this neighbourhood: on the one hand, politicians' call for increased security underpins a negative media portrayal of the neighbourhood also due to the large presence of migrants, representing 25.5 per cent of all residents; on the other hand, an urban restructuring aimed at making it an extension of the city centre that, among other effects, causes an increase in rents.

6 Data update refers to March 2020

Methodologically, I draw in home-city geographies (Blunt, 2019) that point out the porosity of boundaries between home and the city, taking seriously how wider processes of urban change impact domestic lives at the same time as urban change is affected by women's home-making practices.

My own experience affects my research as a young white woman who has lived in Bolognina neighbourhoods at different times and for different reasons. Reflecting on my position also allows me to think about hierarchies and power relations in which I am entangled as a white and precarious researcher and has led me to find different methodological tools to overcome the proximity issue.

Through an analysis of local online newspapers⁷ on the occasion of the 2021 local elections, a media representation of Bolognina characterised by insecurity, drug dealing and robberies emerges. Parallel to this narrative, another one gives space to cultural events and initiatives in the neighbourhood, especially in the redevelopment area. One among them is the re-opening of Tettoia Nervi⁸, a redeveloped square used for cultural events between the new municipality and the former fruit and vegetable market. In recent years, Bolognina has been at the centre of a redevelopment project⁹ to extend the city centre to a semi-central area. In 2008, those projects started: first, the municipality's new building, 33,000 square meters, and in 2013 the implementation of the High-Speed Railway. Moreover, the neighbourhood has experienced several evictions of housing squats and social centres such as Xm24 and two 'luxury' student residences opened in the last years: The Student Hotel in 2020 and Beyoo in 2022.

The neighbourhood map from the Wher app features orange/red, indicating unsafety or signalling a state of alert. The comments making explicit the factors of insecurity, which are about 30¹⁰ in the period between 2017 and 2020, confirm the main features of the media narrative. The category of insecurity includes the presence of specific populations, such as drug dealers and migrants and the lack of urban elements reported in the app, for example, «poor street lighting, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood with social disadvantages, the presence of a busy space, XM24»¹¹. In the app, the overlapping of populations and urban elements emerges in the 'use of space' as formal or informal, which determines the safety or unsafety of the streets. Instead, the presence of café, street lighting, and the movement of 'decent' people determine the safety category. In recent years the colours of the map have been gradually changing: residential areas of the neighbourhood, mainly Via Magenta and Via Cignani, are indicated as safe, while the red colour indicating insecurity persists for other areas, particularly the neighbourhood's main square, Piazza dell'Unità.

If the representation of Wher's app confirms the media narrative about Bolognina, fixing the category of insecurity through perceptions that are based on the construction of the fear, the maps drawn by the interviewees¹² who participated in my research, aided by photos, give another representation. This comparison shows, on the one hand, the overlapping of some urban elements concerning safety, such as the opening of bars and the demand for more lighting; on the other

7 I looked at the frequency of certain words in 20 articles using Bolognina as a keyword with google alert during the administrative election campaign in September 2021. The result was that the top five most frequent words associated with neighbourhood were: 21 times dealing, 16 drugs, 13 security, 10 police, 10 robberies, and 9 arrest.

8 https://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/07/05/news/ecco_piazza_lucio_dalla_lepore_cambiera_il_destino_di_bologna-356731318/ (consulted on 4/01/2023)

9 http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/bolognina_trasformazioni_lug2017_def.pdf (consulted on 4/01/2023)

10 Just concerning the Bolognina area.

11 From an app's comment.

12 The sample comprises 15 women, mainly white cis-gendered women who live or work in the neighbourhood, aged 20-60. Only two are second-generation women over 30 years old. The participants do not use the app, nor are they familiar with it, but they use other coping strategies in the city. The pandemic affects my research regarding health safety and the intensification of work. Moreover, I had many difficulties with racialised women, both to lack trust due to my positionality and work reasons, i.e. one of those has a restaurant and has time just in closed hours, but she was cooking and caring for children. What is specific is that comments on the app are made mainly by women who do not live in the neighbourhood.

hand, the elements that produce insecurity diverge. Indeed, for the participants the presence of informal spaces and the multi-ethnic character of the neighbourhood highlights its living character; the darkness contributes to greater insecurity. The category of 'use of space' also shows a different valorisation according to the subjects' role in terms of dwellings and city-app users: the women who live in Bolognina underline more the lack of care in some areas or demand the implementation of some welfare services and green areas, and at the same urban changes are considered differently. On the one hand, the implementation of some services, such as territorial health service as 'Casa della salute' or Municipality hall, represents a benefit for dwelling for the proximity; on the other hand, the eviction of Xm24 and the building of the Student Hotel represent a substantial change that affects the connotation of the neighbourhood.

Instead, app users as city users focus on the presence or absence of specific un/desirable categories where the ethnic component is pivotal, as reported in a comment: «irregular migrant», with the risk to naturalize the 'irregular' dimension and so criminalize specific people.

The research participants' maps are delineated through their daily routes and affective spaces, which make Bolognina a 'home' as an affective and relational space (Ahmed, 1999). This type of map facilitates a biographical narrative and creates 'counter-maps' to the administrative boundaries of the neighbourhood. Women's maps emerge differently depending on the positioning of subjectivities, class, and race. For example, one interviewee told about a racist incident emphasising how her skin colour overrode her class status and affected her perception of herself in urban space.

Temporal dimensions also change the map: according to day and night - when darkness takes over, women find it more challenging to control the space around them and their bodies are perceived as 'available' - and also according to life stages, as the way of experiencing space changes, for example, if one has children. This category emerges differently in the Wher map and the 'counter-maps'. Both maps refer to the daily time and highlight that the dark increases the perception of unsafety, but in the first case, the valuation of area fixes time and perceptions on a synchronic dimension; in the second one, the diachronic dimension makes mobile maps. The focus on women's everyday life shows that maps are not fixed and unchanging over time. Through the mixed use of life stories, daily routes, and photos, maps emerge composed of multiple layers that assemble emotions, experiences, narratives, and images about the neighbourhood and the spaces they inhabit. Also, safety emerges differently: it is not just a neighbourhood issue, but it is linked to gender, economic status and also depends on intimate and relational networks.

Despite the app's stated intentions to build community, the risk is to draw a map in which dangerous areas are produced and avoided. Pain (1991) introduced the idea that space itself is defined by gender through «the construction of fear in women's lives and [...] their behavioural responses have implications for their equal participation in society» (p. 415). Cartography results from political vision and orients and fixes values and symbols, risking the overlap between perceptions and reality (Farinelli, 2009). As comments on the presence of immigrants and homeless people in the neighbourhood report, the result is that this representation is considered objective but is based on subjective perceptions (Olcuire, 2019) that reproduce stereotypes based on class and race by linking them to crime (Smith, 1982).

A central question is how fear conditions women's lives and what effects these maps of danger produce. The responses to these emotional states are often individualistic and consist mainly of processing certain comfort, familiar areas and other dangers, which contributes to the stigmatisation of specific areas. The risk could be that women enact avoidance practices and self-inhibition concerning undesirable situations (Pain 2001). For example, going out at night alone would mean taking responsibility for what might happen according to the logic of 'you brought it on yourself', giving rise to a victim-blaming process.

Another element to consider is that these comments focus mainly on neighbourhoods where urban changes are taking place. Indeed, the construction of blighted areas causes a demand for greater security, and specific neoliberal urban processes play a crucial role in making an area

desirable. These changes can be read in light of global neoliberal urban processes that take different forms and specificities depending on where they occur. Bolognina is one of the areas in which the City Council will invest 16.6 billion euros from the PNRR to regenerate the area as part of the 'City of Knowledge' project and a plan for the 'Economy of the Night', which includes the implementation of night buses and the installation of safe spaces for women and LGBTQ. From this perspective, safety takes on the connotations of a commodity. In the last summer of 2022, the debate on women's safety was at the top of the political agenda after the three rapes in Bologna. The public and institution debate prosed several measures: the implementation of CCTV cameras and street lighting, the closure of public parks at night, and, last but not least, a risk map to counter gender-based violence.

5. Mapping safety in the Social Reproduction lens

Wher, while presenting itself as an app aimed at women, can be seen as an individualising security device that reinforces control and (Koskela, 2002; Macchi, 2006) contributes to mechanisms of self-exclusion (Koskela, 2002; Macchi, 2006) from spaces, making the discourse of women's safety a matter of 'public order'. This view of women's safety is characterised by a situational and decontextualising approach, which aims to prevent or reduce risk through the control of the potential victim and results in a logic that makes safety a matter of individual responsibility, that is, belonging to a regime of choices that are up to the individual. Pitch (1989) argues that the oppression paradigm has shifted to victimisation, coinciding with the transition from a welfarist system to a neoliberal system, where the emphasis shifts from the criminal subject to the victim. The choice of this district allowed me to verify these perceptions, but above all, to investigate how subjectivities experience the neighbourhood and the home daily, which are the affective spaces and those they avoid, and how material conditions influence the production of security. In contrast with cartography and fear maps, one of the results is mobile and dynamic maps that record and assemble porous and multiple levels made by visual, emotional, personal and collective narratives and images about the spaces we pass through.

Most of the studies on women's perceptions of insecurity in Italy (Di Fraia, 2019; Pitch & Ventimiglia, 2001) focus on racist stereotypes but do not consider how women's fears are modified depending on another positioning, with the risk of considering women as a homogeneous group, without considering the intertwining of gender with other social categories (class, 'race', sexuality, etcetera). In this regard, the intersectional perspective shows which dynamics emerge, how processes of racialisation structure the definition of the perception of urban security and, above all, who is the target of these measures. In addition to highlighting the limits of both the discourses and the interventions fielded, the intersectional perspective shows how the gender dimension fails to consider the complexity and intersection of domain axes underlying urban space's (re)production. However, gender, race and class alone cannot explain the fear of crime, but they work together to influence the nature and fear of crime. These terms should not be interpreted as descriptive categories in the analysis of fear maps but help us to understand how fear is structured by age, gender and race based on social relations of power asymmetries. Moreover, fear maps such as the Wher app are also delineated by processes of racialisation and class. They rarely include as dangerous the places where women experience the most violence, such as the home and other private spaces. Indeed, the focus on fear in public spaces keeps intact and reinforces the division between public and domestic, making the home invisible as the place where most violence occurs, as well as the workplace. A second related theme is how wider perceptions and media representations of certain neighbourhoods as unhomey and unsafety counter the lived realities of such spaces. Such dominant narratives reinforce the ideological notion of home as a safe, private, enclosed space unaffected by the wider city. For this reason,

specific proposals, such as mapping safe or unsafe areas, risk crystallising the issue of insecurity, increasing the stigmatisation of specific neighbourhoods and do not grasp women's safety. Moreover, there is no lack of criticism of gender mainstreaming regarding its effectiveness and the meaning of 'gender' (Eveline & Bacchi, 2005). It raises questions about what is included or excluded from the strategy and highlights if gender equality is reduced to 'the inclusion of women in a continuation of previous policies. In this framework, we can see how the securitarian logic is intertwined with gender mainstreaming policies that, on the one hand, reproduce hierarchies of class and race and, on the other hand, target a specific interlocutor: the white, cis-gender, able-bodied, mother and upper-middle class woman. In other words, the hegemonic discourse on women's security lies in the intertwining of a neoconservative securitarian view and neoliberal views. The first identifies the migrant as the 'threat' figure, reinforces pre-established gender roles, as well as a division between public and private space, while for the second one, safety is an individual responsibility whose fear is capitalized¹³. As Kern argues, security features open up risky areas of the city to investments and work to «sell a commodified and privatised» lifestyle to women (2010, 150). In light of these considerations, we outline the risk of gender becoming a mere depoliticised category (Verloo, 2005), as this security logic does not affect existing power relations. Instead, it reinforces gender norms and roles. In this way, neoliberalism redefines male violence against women as insecurity (Gago, 2022). Consequently, it deploys responses that demand greater control, making violence an issue of general insecurity and reinforcing racist, sexist and class hierarchies that respond to patterns of subjective perceptions. Moreover, the literature has increasingly recognised the interactive nature of public and private spaces and how this interaction is historically and socially pivotal in understanding gendered social relations (Valentine 1989, Pain 1991). For these reasons, adopting social reproduction as an approach could break the dichotomy of unsafe/unsafe and overcome the dichotomy of public and private spaces by looking at the reproduction of structures of gender-based violence and showing affective and social relationships in everyday life. Furthermore, investigating safety in everyday life allows us to grasp how safety affects women's concrete practices, in contrast to an abstract idea of 'woman', but also how the meaning of safety changes depending on material conditions. Following the work of Linda Peake (2021), social reproduction is understood as both a feminist epistemology and a method that allows for thinking from a situated and a partial standpoint, which also upsets hegemonic urban theory that focuses on public space without taking a gendered perspective. This approach also recognises the city, including its public spaces, as a 'home' and a place of belonging, not just a private domestic space. This theory and method will enable me to make a critical intervention in ideas of women's safety, how both safety and danger are produced in different ways, in different places, and at different scales, as experienced and understood by women, not as represented in strategic political economy discourses of the media and the state.

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¹³ In the neoliberal system, security becomes a commodity through video surveillance, implementation of technologies and devices targeted for women and by devolving to consumer spaces security for women through public-private agreements.

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Milena Gammaitoni¹

Symbolic Violence against Women as a Social and Cultural System²

Portrait of a woman

She must be a variety.
Change so that nothing will change.
It's easy, impossible, tough going, worth a shot.
Her eyes are, as required, deep, blue, gray,
dark merry, full of pointless tears.
She sleeps with him as if she's first in line or the only one on earth.
She'll bear him four children, no children, one.
Naive, but gives the best advice.
Weak, but takes on anything.
A screw loose and tough as nails.
Curls up with Jasper or Ladies' Home Journal.
Can't figure out this bolt and builds a bridge.
Young, young as ever, still looking young.
Holds in her hand a baby sparrow with a broken wing,
her own money for some trip far away,
a meat cleaver, a compress, a glass of vodka.
Where's she running, isn't she exhausted.
Not a bit, a little, to death, it doesn't matter.
She must love him, or she's just plain stubborn.
For better, for worse, for heaven's sake³.
by Wislawa Szymborska

Premise

By symbolic violence as a socio-cultural system we mean not only the total⁴ social control exerted over the daily lives of women that has pervaded centuries of universal history (with some rare exceptions), but also those subtle forms of violence that legitimized a cultural mindset, which, between the 18th and 19th centuries - fostered by the establishment of encyclopedism and the creation of different specialistic disciplines - not only brought manuals of *bon ton* to set down in writing the roles and status of women but actually excluded them from the history of science, culture and the arts. Both kinds of symbolic violence, social and cultural, are present, even today, in different forms and dynamics, though it is the second type that prevails.

Some very simple bibliographic research permits us to rediscover the intellectual and creative works of women, but before investigating them, we need to overcome a twofold prejudice: if women are not mentioned in reference books it must be because they were unable to produce anything; if and when we discover their productions, we may be led to believe that their exclusion is due to the fact that they were not brilliant enough to be remembered and handed down to posterity.

The exclusion and/or underestimation of the genius and value of women have strongly influenced the construction of the identity of women and men. From their earliest school years, when they enter the world of knowledge, they are not only convinced that their historical iden-

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3 Translated from the Polish by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh (<https://margot-krebs-neale.co.uk/por-trait-woman-wislawa-szymborska/>)

4 Until the 1970s, women could not go out alone, etc. The rare exceptions regard some famous women who achieved greater freedom of movement, like Hildegard von Bingen in the Middle Ages who had the Pope's permission to preach in public, an activity forbidden to women, and travel alone through territories outside of the Monastery. Even today a woman who walks alone down a street may feel she is prey to attention that can be very intrusive, at times aggressive, and even violent. During research carried out in 2020, 77% of the 1057 women and girls interviewed stated being harassed on the streets. See *Lo street harassment e la costruzione sociale dei corpi. Dominio e pratiche di resistenza nello spazio urbano*, a Ph.D. dissertation by Greta Calabresi.

tity owes nothing to what has been sedimented by the presence of women but also fail to comprehend the fact that the legitimization of the absence of the feminine and the lack of historical-social awareness it generates, is unable to counteract male violence and femicide. Today, in Italy one woman is killed every 3 days while, worldwide one woman is murdered every twelve minutes. *Proximity violence*, the prime cause of femicides (Bartholini, 2017)⁵ is simply the product of cultural and family models according to which women, not being the protagonists of grand-scale history have no right to self-determination.

As intellectuals and university teachers, it is our task to help fill this historiographical void and honour our mandate to educate the new generations while also providing adults with lifelong education. The Rape of the Sabines cannot be narrated as a simple episode in the history of ancient Rome. We are duty-bound to explain clearly that it involved the kidnapping and rape of young women, forced into marriage for the sake of demographic expansion.



The Rape of the Sabine Women by Nicolas Pussin (1634-5), da Wikipedia

Although artistic representations are often inspired by a legend, we are all aware of how powerful the mythological imaginary of human history is, starting from Zeus who, availing himself of his power as supreme God, kidnapped and had his way with the goddesses and women he desired. Turning himself into a white bull to deceive her, he made the young Europa his own. In mythical narratives, sexualized violence or non-consensual impregnation led, not only to the birth of new gods or heroes, but also to the foundation of new institutions: for example, the goddess Athena was born from Zeus' rape of Metis (devoured pregnant by the god who feared being dethroned if she bore a male child. Instead, the foetus survived and Athena, the founder of Athens and the emblem of strength and virtue, was born from her father's skull.

The god Hephaestus helps Zeus give birth to the goddess Athen Likewise, Romulus and Remus, the twin founders of Rome, were the outcome of Mars' rape of Rea Silvia., a descendant of Aeneas. The myth of the raping, inseminating god legitimized the authoritarian and violent power men were to wield over women, giving rise to the long history of patriarchy that accustomed women to believe they were destined to play roles of inferiority and fragility and find themselves, most probably, at the eternal mercy of male violence. Today, this dynamic is called the "culture of rape" (definition inspired by the 1975 documentary of the same name) according to which men and women were expected to take for granted that sexual violence was an inevitable fact of life, so much so, that a video game *Rape Day* (fortunately suspended after three weeks) was produced. *Stuprum*, the Latin for rape, means shame, ignominy, dishonour of the victim, not of her assailant, however.

⁵ In 62.7% of all cases rape is perpetrated by the victim's companion while 70% of femicides are committed by a partner. In 2017, in Italy, 4,520,000 women between the ages of 16 and 70 experienced sexual violence (source Istat).

Very recently, we have witnessed the violent reaction of the most reactionary and paternalistic sectors of Italian public opinion when the famous Treccani⁶ Encyclopedia decided to define social roles in terms of the feminine as well as masculine gender⁷. A right-wing newspaper went so far as to publish an article against this important and long-needed cultural change, with an article entitled: «Turn around at the Treccani Institute. The Three Bitches have arrived ... Feminist dictionary» (Sallusti, *Libero*, the 12th of September 2022).

2. Institutionalised symbolic violence

We live immersed in a world of social and public communications that sum up symbolic violence very efficaciously: from the streets of our cities to advertising, to the social media⁸. We are constantly surrounded by images and definitions of female roles, from traditional stereotypes, still noticeably present in the majority of children's fairy tales and many best sellers (a topic we shall deal with in the third section) to actual violent aggression in the social media, especially when famous women speak their minds and express their opinions (as in the cases of Michela Murgia and Liliana Segre, for example).

As regards the sphere of advertising it is emblematic that only a few years ago, Prada invested in a publicity campaign containing an allusion to a probable sex orgy, where even the hypothesis of rape did not seem to intimidate the model, who, on the contrary, wore a seductive expression. The advert was visible everywhere, from magazines to large-scale billboards. Despite this, very few people expressed alarm at the content of the message conveyed. Graziella Priulla has been denouncing this kind of symbolic violence for many years now. «In 8 months, there were more than a million tweets against women, an increase of 1.7% compared to the same period of 2018. In about 72% of the cases we speak of, women were dealt with on Twitter in negative terms» (Priulla, 2020, p. 21).

Now let us turn to the streets we pass through daily here in Italy. *L'Associazione Toponomastica Femminile*, the Italian Female Toponymy Association, has surveyed the maps of the whole of the country and noted that only 5% of all streets and squares are dedicated to women, while 40% are named after men. Let us now bear in on Rome where only 659 of its 16,079 streets and squares are named after women and many of those that are, are frequently located in peripheral areas. Of these 56 recall the Madonna, 89 female saints and martyrs, 25 nuns, 29 benefactresses, 92 women of letters, 17 female scientists, 75 women from the world of show business, 245 businesswomen, 135 female historical figures, 77 mythological/ legendary figures, 2 female athletes, 5 entrepreneurs, while 33 are associated with local customs and traditions (like *via delle Convertite*⁹ or *via delle Zoccolette*¹⁰).

Living in places that are declined, above all, in terms of the masculine gender, has contributed to the construction of a collective reality and identity that has concealed and passivized feminine action and the history of women. This simple everyday phenomenon is akin to and features as an ancillary aspect of the symbolic violence that has expunged the works of women from every

6 The word "Treccani" translates literally as "Three(male)dogs".

7 Unlike English, Italian substantives are either masculine or feminine in gender. Human beings and their activities are also indicated in the masculine or feminine form, while in English they often belong to the common gender category: child *bambino/bambina*, friend *amico/amica*, professor *professore/professoressa* etc.

8 In Europe one woman out of 10, aged over 15 has been the object of cyber violence. There is a galaxy of groups, forums, sites and chat platforms that foster and fuel contempt for the female gender. They exist above all on Telegram chat sites dedicated to the culture of rape, like *Cagnette* (literally "little bitches"), which invites women to send hot photos of their female friends.

9 Literally The Street of the Female Converts, the name refers to prostitutes converted by the church in the XVIII century; for a detailed account see <https://www.romeandart.eu/it/arte-convertite.html>

10 Literally the Street of the Little Clogs. In the Roman dialect «zoccolette» means «whores», although the original reference was to the clogs worn by the female orphans hosted by an institution on that street.

area of culture and excluded them from the textbooks of the various disciplines. As this systemic social denial of the feminine has a strong impact at an unconscious level and undermines it, it is necessary to reconstruct the history of society and surpass the twofold prejudice mentioned above in the premise.

Renzo Paternoster defines this process as a cultural disorder «which has institutionalized a biological difference making it a cultural one; it is a dysfunction of knowledge caused by a poor knowledge of things, which provokes a significant ailment that affects the relational and affective sphere of a person, leading, in turn, to a dangerous form of a-sociality and inhumanity» (p. 223). Mary Wollstonecraft, whom we may rightfully consider a pre-sociologist, is the woman, who in the 1700s, helped clarify and criticise the social dynamics that influenced the education of the men and women of her day. She wrote that the female body as portrayed in the iconography of the time was simply a fragile, helpless, decorative, sickly body because women were prevented, effectively, from developing physical strength: they were not allowed to run in the garden or do gymnastics, much less exercise their minds in rational thought. It is, therefore, evident that not only the pictorial and plastic arts, but also literature and music merely reflected their frailty.

«Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison.»(...) "To become respectable, the exercise of their understanding is necessary, there is no other foundation for independence of character; I mean explicitly to say, that they must only bow to the authority of reason, instead of being the MODEST slaves of opinion». (WOLLSTONECRAFT 2010, pp. 57.58)

Today, Eva Cantarella¹¹ writes that knowledge of that past obliges us to ask how and why, after centuries and in profoundly different contexts, age-old aspects of the rapport between the sexes continue to resurface, often in the guise of modernity and transmitted by the media that implicitly and subtly propose them as models.

In the narrative of history women appear and disappear: they materialise in monographs and non-fiction but vanish from the textbooks used to present the new generations with universal knowledge. This phenomenon characterizes the history of ideas (philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology a little less so), despite the magnitude of contemporary international and national monographic production, and of material regarding the history of the arts (literature, theatre, music, painting, architecture, sculpture). If, for example, Caterina Percoto and Sibilla Al-eramo feature at times in some anthologies of Italian literature, in the manuals of the history of Italian music there is no trace of the female musicians or composers who are extensively dealt with in dictionaries and anthologies of other Western countries. The New Grove of Music mentions 900 women musicians, the Oxford Library 1500.

In the 1980s, Joanna Russ, a science-fiction writer, published a sociological essay, *How to suppress women's writing*, explaining how the writing of women might be stifled. She examined the social dynamics by means of which female writers either remained outside of history, due to denial of agency or were falsely recategorized, therefore, downgraded, excluded from the canon which failed not only to create new criteria capable of mainstreaming them but, at times, actually tarred them with the stigmatizing brush of deviance.

A lack of awareness of their historical-social origins, Russ held, weakened human beings required to address their future and structure their own personalities. She wrote that women had first been described, then narrated long before they were allowed to speak for themselves. She posited that, at times, only literary images seemed to enjoy greater depth, because women, over the centuries, had been confined to the silence of reproduction, appearing as shadows in history, experiencing art within the intimacy of convents, cowed within their homes, creating an art that was not worth passing on¹².

11 Cfr. Op. cit., pag. 10.

12 G. Duby, M. Perrot, *Storia delle donne, L'Antichità*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1990, p. V

Yet behavioural models and values are transmitted by women (nurses, tutors, mothers, teachers). It is they who perform the institutional role of the socialization of children in all cultures and sub-cultures (for example, in the mafia subculture it is the wife and mother who legitimizes disvalues, revenge, and the defence of the honour of men).

It is interesting and significant to note that Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music and the symbol of one of the world's most prestigious conservatories of music, was never a musician. She was a Roman patrician who wished to consecrate herself to Christ and preserve her virginity, so much so, that she converted her husband to Christianity and chastity, a decision which caused both of them to be sentenced to death. Later Cecilia was canonized and portrayed with a musical instrument in her arms.

Female artists have been the object of censorship, prejudice, ghettoizing and marginalizing stereotypes, so much so, that they have undergone the stigma of double deviance: that of being women rebelling against the customs of their times (tared as mad or nymphomaniacs) and that of being artists, that is, traditionally deviant individuals, extravagant at best.

It may surprise you to discover that most female musicians were born into artistic and/or socially elitist families and usually led a fairly traditional private life. They married and, while studying and creating their musical works, they became mothers, opened schools, taught in conservatories and financed the staging of their own musical works.

While in the West die-hard stereotypes continue to survive (see Gammaitoni, 2021, on issues of language and female orchestral conductors), in the Middle East some female musicians emerge to rebel against religious and political domination. Exemplary is the story of Negin Kholwakh, the first Afghan female conductor of an orchestra of which we have information thanks to the mass media and social networks. The twenty-year-old Negin refuses to wear a veil and rebels against the power of the Taliban which has prevented her from studying music. Her protest is so powerful that during one of her concerts a suicide bomber blew himself up in the audience.

These days we witness the rebellion of Iranian men and women following the killing of a young Kurdish woman who failed to cover all her hair with a veil. After her, the police killed and are killing other demonstrators while 90 women are missing.

Social justice needs, therefore, to be redefined, re-imagined and shared, using new narratives and reconstructing our symbolic universes.

It seems to be no coincidence, that, for example, the foremost sociologists of 20th-century art are women: Vera Zolberg, Janet Wolff and Nathalie Heinich, for example, who strive to overcome normative positions and move in a direction closer to anthropology and pragmatics, approaches no longer aimed solely at the explanation of objects and facts, but open to an understanding of representation.

However, it is necessary to retrace the construction and deconstruction of the feminine starting from ancient times, because it is from there that we come. All over the world there exist images of dismembered goddesses, in India, for example, in Mexico, and among the Sumerians. Their destruction and disappearance represent their removal from the world that had formerly revolved around them. The act of dismemberment is always attributed to a male god who, in all of the cultures in question, usurps the position previously occupied by the goddess. In India, Indra killed the goddess and dispersed the mutilated parts of her body all over the countryside. The places where the dismembered fragments of the goddess's body fell became sanctuaries where she is still worshiped today. In Babylon, the hero Gilgamesh killed the dark goddess Tiamat and scattered her limbs so that he might create a new world. In Mexico, the war god Huitzilopochtli killed his sister, the moon goddess Coyolxauqui, and threw her devastated body from the top of a mountain to prove that he had routed her. Too often our textbooks overlook the extermination of nine million witches¹³, traditional healers, during the four centuries of witch-hunting that preceded the Enlightenment. This omission has contributed to the creation of a collective and

13 The term witch or sorceress stems from a root meaning sacred woman or sacred grove.

individual form of amnesia, affecting the social-cultural conscience or unconscious, obliged to sit up and take notice due to the femicides that take place every day all over the world.

Dirdin Robertson (1974) claims that the word *Charis* was originally the name of a goddess. It meant Grace and derived from the term used to indicate menstrual blood, though, later, it became the root of the term Eucharist with which it shares its etymology and semantic assonance. By way of antithesis and paradox, in Western civilization, for ten centuries menstruating women were forbidden to go to church. How can a woman grow up in a society that fears one of her natural biological functions without having the feeling that she conceals some grave inner culpability? In ancient times that very same blood was used to fertilize the soil and was celebrated by communities who followed the cycles of the moon. It acted as an intermediary aspect of the spiritual bond within a community, to be replaced later by the circumcision of newborns.

In ancient times too, menopausal women were considered the wise grandmothers of the tribe, and the magical blood accumulated in their bodies was deemed analogous to the wisdom contained in their psyches. On the contrary, today, women seem merely to wear themselves out, and be treated as empty disposable containers.

The same degree of sacred power was attributed to the Great Goddess of ancient Europe studied by the archaeo-mythologist¹⁴ Maria Gimbutas. This Goddess is represented in carvings, symbols and images, primary sources essential to an understanding of Western religion, mythology and archeo-mythology, useful to obtain a view of the Pre-Indo-European world. Several studies regarding continuous associations between the Middle East, south-eastern Europe, areas of the Mediterranean and of central, western and northern Europe, reveal the spread of the cult of this very same Goddess. Many of them¹⁵ claim that the womb of the Grand Mother was believed to have bestowed life on all things:

«Of the beliefs shared by ancient agricultural populations, those regarding sterility and fertility, the fragility of life and the constant threat of destruction, as well as the periodic need to renew the generative processes of nature, are the most enduring. Some very archaic aspects of the prehistoric Goddess continue to live even today despite the continuous process of erosion that affected them upon entry into the era of history. Transmitted by the grandmothers and mothers of the European family, several of the ancient beliefs survived despite overexposure to Indo-European and, later, to Christian myths. Religion centred on the Goddess existed for a very long time, well before the era of Indo-European and Christian culture (which represents a relatively short period of human history) and left an indelible mark on the Western psyche (...).» (Gimbutas, 2008; p. XII)

The main symbolic theme of the Goddess is the mystery of birth, death and regeneration, not only of human life but also of all forms of life on earth and even those within the cosmos. Symbols and images coalesce around the parthenogenetic Goddess and her functions as Giver of Life, Ruler of Death and - no less important - Regenerator. She is simultaneously young and old, she rises and wanes to the rhythm of the lives of the plants (Gimbutas, 2008, p. 20). With its total absence of images of war or solitary individuals, the art representing the Goddess seems to reflect a social order where women were leaders of the community and priestesses¹⁶.

In the Bible, too, women are present, with strong and sometimes ambiguous roles, to the point of becoming shadows, just as many of the women of the New Testament have a multi-faceted destiny. Emblematic among all the stories of these women, and there are many of them in Scripture, is that of Zipporah, the Ethiopian wife of Moses, his faithful companion and saviour, who

14 The union of archeology, comparative mythology, historical sources, linguistics, folklore, historical ethnography.

15 See in particular Gimbutas M. (1989); Noble V. (1991); Duby M., Perrott G., (1990); Zucca M., (2010); Bock G., (2001) Scaraffia L., (2013 e 2016), Murgja M., (2011), Irigaray L. (2010).

16 Maria Gimbutas points out that in the fifth millennium BC a completely different Neolithic culture "with tamed horses and lethal weapons emerged within the basin of the river Volga " from southern Russia to the western bank of the Black Sea. This new population changed the course of European prehistory. "I call it the *Kurgan* culture (*kurgan* means mound in Russian), because the dead were buried under circular mounds covering the burial places of prominent males." (Gimbutas, 1989; pp. XX-XXI)

knows how to advise him during his dangerous encounter with God, to become the protagonist of the event:

«Zipporah circumcised her son and with the excised fragment of his foreskin touched her husband's genitals, uttering solemn words that sound almost like a warning against that disconcerting God, 'Surely you are a husband of blood to me!' They are the only words spoken directly by Zipporah. They have the flavour of a liturgical formula that seems to seek to establish membership, 'Take your claws off this man because he is mine!' The outcome of the gesture is appeasement of the anger of the divinity. The life of Moses is saved» (Maggi, 2009; p. 42).

Zipporah was the daughter of a priest, and shows that she too is a priestess by performing a ritual capable of saving her husband. But after this episode, she becomes a shadow, a fleeting trace until she disappears from the life of Moses, who remarries, this time choosing a younger woman. Is one possible interpretation of what we are told about the life of Zipporah a warning not to separate projects from affection, salvation from communion?

The woman presented in the book of Proverbs is not praised for her beauty. What matters is the strength, autonomy and wisdom of her words. Scripture provides us with an alternative view, in some ways revolutionary, as Walter Benjamin wrote, "the revolution is the leap of a tiger in the past".¹⁷

This is what Mary Wollstonecraft in England and Olympe de Gouges in France tried to assert during the heyday of the Enlightenment when fighting for a form of education for women not confined to the sphere of feelings, but enlarged to embrace rationality. They held that the inferior social condition of women was not a matter of nature, but a reality dictated by culture and education.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular, should enter history as a full-blown forerunner of sociology, like her contemporary J-J Rousseau, because, first of all, in the 1700s she clarified and criticised the social dynamics that influenced the lack of an egalitarian form of education for both men and women alike and the exclusion of women from the exercise of rational thought and freedom of action in space and in their own time. The two books read most frequently by young girls in Wollstonecraft's day were Fordyce's *Sermons* and Dr. Gregory's *Legacy to his Daughters*. History, philosophy, the classical languages were considered too difficult for girls, while botany and biology were forbidden because deemed coarse. Apart from dance and exercises in posture, young women made no physical effort, engaged in no contests and practised no outdoor games but were

«Confined then in cages like the feathered race they have nothing to do but to plume themselves and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch». (Wollstonecraft, 1792; p. 64)

Wollstonecraft was interested, above all, in investigating the origin and dynamics of the inferior social condition imposed upon women. Before claiming legal and political rights she believed it was necessary to acknowledge the right of women to a childhood during which the body and mind were trained to be strong and not at the mercy of fragility and compliance:

«[...] But were their understanding once emancipated from the slavery to which the pride and sensuality of man and their short-sighted desire, like that of dominion in tyrants, of present sway, has subjected

17 "The woman of Proverbs does not correspond certainly the one in the ancient Venetian saying, "Let her please, be silent, stay at home". She has a strong, enterprising character. She provides for the needs of the family not only the management of the home, but by undertaking commercial activities. The hymn taken into consideration talks about prices, earnings, buying and selling, estimating merchandise, production: " She looks at a field and buys it, plants a vineyard, trades with the fruit of her hands". This woman has contacts with merchants who travel to distant lands and open up new horizons for her. She sells them the goods she produces. Such a woman necessarily has a strong sense of autonomy, even if she belongs to a patriarchal environment. This is, naturally, an idealized image. However, contemporary readers will have to question themselves about present-day ideals, the images of women our emancipated reality suggests". Op. cit., p. 131.

them, we should probably read of their weaknesses with surprise. I must be allowed to pursue the argument a little farther.

It was true that women who gained power by devious means, practicing or favouring vice, evidently lost the place that reason should assign them and become either abject slaves or capricious tyrants.

The moment women acquired that kind of power, they lost all simplicity and mental dignity, and acted just like the men who had come to power by similar means.

The time had come for a revolution in women's behaviour. It was time to restore their lost dignity, and ensure that they, as part of the human species, worked to transform the world, starting with themselves.

To become respectable, it is necessary to exercise intelligence, an essential element of independence of character [...] and bow to the authority of reason only and cease to be the modest slaves of opinion». (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 47).

It is no coincidence that Catholic women have been the least emancipated in Western history and have struggled much harder than Protestants or Jews to achieve recognition of their civil and political rights. This difference is explained (Duby G., Perrot M.,; 1990) as the result of the dogmas of the Church, of its customs and, therefore, of how its doctrine is experienced. Protestantism and Judaism required their members to read and write as well as interpret the sacred scriptures, even autonomously and on their own behalf. Within Catholicism, the mediation of the priest is required to interpret sacred texts and for confession. These functions were traditionally central and were not entrusted to the autonomy of the individual especially not to women, who were permitted to learn to read, but not to write.

This is precisely the case of Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), who in her monastery learned to read but not to write: she dictated all her memoirs and knowledge to her secretary. Hildegard, a Benedictine nun, a mystic and prophetess, a cosmologist, herbalist and healer, linguist, naturalist, philosopher, musician and composer, asked for and obtained permission to found an all-female monastery and the possibility of playing, dancing, singing, creating miniatures and music in honour of God and life (Gammaitoni, 2013). She managed to achieve an unthinkable degree of freedom for a woman of the Middle Ages: she travelled throughout Germany as a prophetess, in a century when women could not travel easily, or were not allowed to speak publicly, on the eve of an era when many women would be condemned to be burnt at the stake for witchcraft.

Hildegard was respected and kings and queens sought her out for advice. She addressed the men and women of her time and preached publicly with all the prestige and austerity of a prophetess. She even went so far as to denounce the incapacity and/or indolence of ministers of the church. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI canonised her as Saint Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Universal Church.

The genius of women was recently recognized and publicly re-evaluated by St. John Paul II in a prestigious document entitled *Primis Mulieris dignitatem*, which inaugurated a reflection on the "theology of women", something auspicated also by the present pope, Francis.

It was by no chance that Simone de Beauvoir (1961) wrote that the observation, the judgment of men, creates the private and social identity of women. Antonietta Potente (2015, pp. 13-14), a theologian and Dominican sister wrote of St. Thomas Aquinas:

«Starting from the end, for me, means finding myself with groups of women who were initiators of feminist thinking of ideas of difference, or who represent historical feminism and discover that we are all more or less the same age and that some younger ones walk restlessly, but on other paths. In short, starting from the end is a bit starting from that sense of no future that surrounds today, humanity and above all those small and large groups - even religious life, in fact - which in some way marked history or for the less they tried. (...)

For example, in the 1960s and 1970s religious life was entered to seek a more effective social commitment; one followed the historical Jesus, the Jesus of the relationship with the excluded. This was also the case for those who entered the seminary. The model was that of the Incarnation, of God-with-us, Emmanuel. Today this model dream seems insufficient and not only for those who choose these horizons but also for those looking for a space in history».

3. Symbolic violence in contemporary literature

The latest provision of the Italian Ministry of Education (January 2020) provides that to pass the competition permitting one to teach Italian in the country's senior secondary schools, it is sufficient to know two twentieth-century female authors. Two. When there are at least twenty of the highest level (Serkowska, 2017).

Unfortunately, very little has changed since in 1973 Elena Gianini Belotti in *Dalla parte delle bambine* [On the side of girls] wrote that "authors of children's books limit themselves to providing them with the same models as those proffered by the family and the social environment".

Despite the fact that in a self-regulation code, in 1999, ten of Italy's major publishing houses active in the school sector - De Agostini, Giunti, La Scuola, Nicola Milano, Fabbri, Raffaello, Piemme, Elmedi, Capitello, Piccoli - promised to avoid sexism and stereotypes and provide balanced representations of difference in the books they published between 1998 and 2002.

The first feature that one notices is the clear prevalence of male protagonists, 59.1% of the total (as many as 74% in a text published by Raffaello Scuola) as against 37% female protagonists. Taking adventure stories only into account, in 72% of all the cases examined, the protagonist is a male (Biemmi, 2017). The professions attributed to these male protagonists are 50 as against 15 assigned to the females. Among the former we find kings (5), knights (4), masters, magicians, squires, writers, doctors and poets, while the women, in 8 cases, are all teachers. The other female characters are witches or sorceresses.

Examining the secondary characters, we find the same degree of asymmetry: 80 male professions - knights and kings, but also captains, soldiers, pirates, merchants, monks, hunters, janitors, sailors, painters, firemen, mayors, journalists, engineers, geologists, commanders, even a lion tamer and a pope.

The professions involving women are 23 in all, though teachers head the list, followed by witches. Then there are waitresses, doctors, painters, needlewomen, secretaries, managers, dancers, TV news readers, gardeners, housekeepers and beauticians.

This way, by providing them with a broad range of choices and particularly rewarding models, young boy readers are encouraged to "aim high". The exact opposite is true in the case of girls, because if most of the professions (and in particular the most prestigious and attractive ones) are attributed to the male gender, it is highly unlikely that a girl will aspire to a profession in one of those fields.

Dacia Maraini also draws our attention to the fact that however heavy housework may be, it is never remunerated. This means that, as a result, children often consider unpaid domestic work the biological duty of the woman-mother-wife while men are defined more often than women by their professions. Today, women continue to be defined on the basis of their parental role. In the books examined here only 12.3% of the male characters are referred to as fathers (though they are also defined on the basis of their professions) 24.4% of the female characters are just said to be mothers. And "this being a mother is understood in the most traditional sense: cooking, cleaning the house, preparing a snack for the children to take to school". As for the children who feature in the texts, the boys play with tanks, rockets and robots and love cars, music, physics and mathematics, while the girls prefer dolls, admire nature, collect stamps and postcards and - as a pastime, of course - cook, clean and organise parties. However, there are also some signs of change, there are also girls who "construct a barometer", carry out scientific experiments or declare being interested in mathematics.

An analysis of the content of the individual texts highlights the fact that alongside the numerous gender stereotypes there are also several anti-stereotypes: equal and unconventional models, albeit in no way extraordinary. These present an intelligent, free, witty and self-confident woman, an adventurous and imaginative female child.

Anti-stereotypes that refer to the males are rarer and include the "fearful man" and the "shy, silent, delicate, calm little boy". This disparity of roles is also reflected in a research project con-

ducted in 2012 regarding the contents of the West's best sellers, where the principal and secondary characters are, more often than not, men, young, thin, not particularly glamorous though almost always white-skinned.

What are the reasons that prompt an author to devise a best seller, building certain male and female characters? Susanna Tamaro declared that she decided by default to write a best seller *Va dove ti porta il cuore* [Go where your heart takes you] where metalepsis (the technique by means of which the construction of the "real/fake author is transformed by fiction to trigger the empathy of the readers prepared to make the fiction they are reading real) provides an open door to millions of potential readers" (Calabrese, 2015, p. 36). This technique is so efficacious that readers become the co-authors of the concrete intention to cooperate in the writing of a series of novels by interacting with the male/female author at his/her website and on social media, giving rise to the spin-off genre where the destiny of the characters becomes so playfully important that possible developments and endings are proposed. This was not only the case with *Harry Potter* and his famous author J.K. Rowling, but also with undeniably autobiographical-educational novels like *The Kite Runner*. These are novels that became best sellers because everything was delocalized, the author-character had his/her body in one place, his/her mind in another, prepared to become flesh-and-blood male and female characters in films and TV series.

The twentieth century was characterized by the "historical dissolution of the unity of the subject", so much so, that in his *Teoria dell'Estetica* [The Theory of Aesthetics] Theodor Adorno denounced the incomplete nature of the modern novel, meaning that it is constantly in progress. In the West we are witnessing the loss of the narrating first-person voice, of introspection, the definition of an ethos and its dissolution. Today, the characters of many novels are afflicted by unavoidable fatigue, bewilderment, a sense of desolation and a quest for truth or knowledge. This means that one has the feeling that compared to other literary genres, the novel is unending, incomplete. This seems to be the reason why in the 21st century, despite the death of Stieg Larsson, his stories have been inherited by another author, who continues the story so that now a television series called *Millennium* thrives propelled by characters who now seem to have a life of their own.

The Latins designated the *persona* (from the Latin *per-sonar*, to sound through), and the character derived from it as an entity that resonated because closely linked to his/her theatrical role and the mask s/he represented, from which Erving Goffman derived the socio-institutional experience of the concept of role. In the arts, the Greek word protagonist (principal or first actor) is derived from this because in ancient classical times the lead actor was the person who performed the foremost dramatic role.

Today, can the same be said of the best-sellers written for the two generations of readers including young adults, children, adolescents, adults and the elderly? In any case, what are the characteristics that emerge from the personages of these latest best sellers? It is indicative that those who undertake an analysis of the 21st-century male and female characters featured in contemporary best-sellers are rare. Stefano Calabrese describes some of the types and recurrences on the basis of the "metacharacters" they feature: the *smart novel*, the *trans-novel*, the *immersive novel*, the *magical novel*, the *emotional novel*; definitions that are not closed in upon themselves but act as intercommunicating vessels where the watchword is always metalepsis.

In 2013, the journal *Science* published the results of some psychological research conducted by the New School for Research in New York confirming the intuitions that the economist Smith had already written about in the 19th century whereby "reading novels increases the levels of empathy between us and others, improves social perception and heightens emotional intelligence that is, the ability to understand what others feel by feeling it in turn. Readers create their own mental images of the emotions and feelings of literary characters, experiencing a personal, almost physical transport." (Calabrese, 2015, p.31)

In recent years, the production of novels has increased worldwide by 44%. Their high degree of readability facilitates their diffusion at medium-low, medium-high and high levels of society. There are those who hypothesise that in the face of economic crises or slowdowns of the global

economy, there is a need for literary fiction, evasion and identification of the problems characterizing the *liquid society* such as the loss of employment, the impoverishment of the family nucleus and emotional instability.

In the case of the best sellers chosen and analyzed between 1998 and 2012, using a specially devised content-analysis sheet, it emerged that they feature mainly ordinary, no longer exceptional people because "like the characters of literature they draw on reality, so that reality elevates some characters to the rank of witnesses of truth, reducing their proper names to common nouns" (Bufalino 1982, p.31). But they are extraordinary in their everyday lives, heroes and heroines practically by chance, intelligent enough, rarely brilliant. It seems that the task of these characters is, mainly, to reassure average people despite their human misery, rather than establish themselves as heroic examples of values and choices that they should and would never betray. In honour of metalepsis, these male and female characters act in a present, time often contemporary to the era of the reader, or in the very recent past. Most of them live in the USA (31%), France (10%), the United Kingdom (10%), Italy (10%) and their stories take place more often than not inside the home and in urban contexts.

The protagonists are more frequently men (56%), young people (41%) rather than adults (36%). The majority of these young heroes and heroines are students, children (33%) and are single (49%), while only 15% cohabit or are married. They are described as being physically "normal" 38% of the time, thin 25% of the time, and fat only 5% of the time. However, they appear to possess no extraordinary abilities, on the contrary, they seem to be very ordinary (59%), undoubtedly fascinating in their own way (46%) while the majority of them are Caucasians (87%). The co-protagonist is almost always a man (46%), an adult (47%), 58% of the time his status is mentioned explicitly. In 15% of cases he is a son, single 33% and married 23 % of the time. He is nearly always a student (10%) a domestic servant (8%) an artist (5%), a homemaker (5%), a policeman (5%), a scientist (5%). In 59% of all cases, he is described physically, is said to be normal 38% fat 13% and thin 8% of the time. He differs from the protagonist more due to his lack of charm than because of other traits; he is deemed handsome 38% of the time, though he is always said to be an ordinary person (56%), of Caucasian origin in 69%, Mongolian 8% of the time. On the contrary, the antagonist plays a different role; is a man in 51% of all the cases, a woman in 7% of the time. He is older than the protagonists and the co-protagonists (49%), married 28%, single only 8% of the time, more clearly defined and better structured than the other characters. He is a merchant 39%, an entrepreneur 8%, a professional or a policeman 5% of the time, undefined 13% of the time. In 46% of all the cases examined, he is described physically (normal 36%, fat 5%) held to be charming 18%, handsome 16% and ugly 13% of the time. He too is an ordinary person 41%, extraordinary only 20% of the time. He is of Caucasian origin 51%, of African origin only 5% of the time.

The protagonists, both men and women, perform a dominant role in the story (50%), though the men appear more independent (45%) than the women.

The men identify as single (90.5%) more often than the women (86%).

The male antagonists are dominant in 63.6% and independent 18.2% in all cases. The women are dominant only 13% of the time.

The true phenomenon of the twentieth century was the success with the public and critics of female writers born in the 1960s. On the one hand, they rejected all interest in current politics and in the literary tradition, privileged a dreamlike, fantastic world, and addressed the taboos of sex (e.g. Yoshimoto) and the female body. On the other hand, the female writers who established feminist politics were completely absent from the upper ranks of best-seller ratings (Serkowska, 2020).

Only in rare cases did some female roles associated with apparently submissive, passive action emerge in a way that, not being immediately evident, was subtle or unconscious, began to establish themselves as astute co-protagonists or antagonists. Excellent exceptions are the protagonists of *The Help*, *Va dove ti porta il cuore* [Go where your heart takes you] and *L'Élegance du hérisson* [The Elegance of the Hedgehog].

Conclusions

«We are the daughters of a truly long history with its standard of countless precautionary strategies: borders, prohibitions, limitations, exclusions, interdictions, denials, mortifications, repressions, constraints, suspicions, prescriptions, expropriations, all justified by the *natural* female vulnerability, implicit in the strong/weak, active/passive dichotomy» (Priulla, 2020, p. 97). Today, we continue to be faced with difficulties when they are called upon to discern the violence experienced by women. The issue of rape has travelled down the long corridors of legal rules and interpretations, where it is easy to come across judgments that blame the victims for patterns of behaviour that allegedly facilitated the acts of violence perpetrated against them, to the point of questioning the veracity of their accusations. This permits us to conjecture, therefore, how difficult it is to recognize symbolic violence in the history of ideas and the arts.

It is the same kind of violence that diminishes, by subtraction, the problem of human trafficking, of new types of slavery that assume the form of forced prostitution, because, it is held, after all, prostitution is the oldest profession in the world, so much so, that occasionally we hear talk of reopening brothels to safeguard urban decor. Out of sight, out of mind!

Here we wish to recall the words of the British orchestral conductor Sir Thomas Beecham who held that "The trouble with women in an orchestra is that if they're attractive it will upset my players and if they're not it will upset me." (Atkins, Newman, 1978).

Another type of symbolic violence: the "cancellation" of women as they age. In 2012, the German orchestral conductor Elke Mascha Blankenburg wrote, "to date we find no woman conductor over 55 years of age with a permanent contract"¹⁸. Older female conductors are not sought after anywhere; they manage to impose themselves only if they are young and beautiful. "Maturity of interpretation, knowledge of musical practice, an expert ear count for nothing. Instead, the public listens ardently to concerts conducted by gentlemen aged 70, 80, 90. At present, Pierre Monteux conducts the *London Symphony Orchestra* on a permanent contract; at the age of 80 he was conceded an extension of 25 years. Leopold Stokowski signed a contract with the RCA at the age of 92 for 10 more years."¹⁹

The route leading to a reform of scholastic and university publishing policies is long; it will take time to debunk the myths of the most reactionary of traditions, but also to change a mentality that takes refuge in that comfort zone of disregard that fosters a climate of *disturbance and cultural delay*, far stronger in Italy than in other Western countries.

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¹⁸ The only exception is Ewa Michnik (Poland).

¹⁹ From a letter dated the 30th of October 2012 sent by Elke Mascha Blankenburg to Milena Gammaitoni.

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Childlessness and disability: an intersectional analysis on access to motherhood for women with disabilities in Italy²

1. Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), which Italy ratified in 2009, has had a significant influence on culture, society, and politics regarding the rights of people with disabilities (Marchisio e Curto, 2020; Sz mukler, 2019). The CRPD adopts a human rights perspective on disability through a “paradigm shift” from the medical model to the social medical one (Flynn, 2011; Karr, 2011). The CRPD specifically supports an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 2005) by underlining the various obstacles, prejudices, and disadvantages that women with disabilities encounter in their daily lives. Several studies (Groce, 1997; Asch and Fine, 1988; Morris, 1991; Sheldon, 2004; O’Toole and Doe, 2002) have demonstrated that there are major inequities for women with disabilities: many are jobless, live in unstable financial conditions, many have poor levels of education, not well incorporated into sufficient social networks, and ultimately, their health requirements are not adequately met. As a result of inaccessible and inadequate equipment, many women with disabilities experience greater challenges when trying to access reproductive health services (Blair et al., 2022). For instance, they frequently have limited access to services for women’s cancer screening (Smeltzer, 2007), inadequate sexual health information and menstrual hygiene education (Groce, 1997). Because their bodies “neglect” and “violate” social expectations of femininity, women with disabilities were perceived constructively as being childless, dependent, and asexual and then were excluded from fulfilling traditionally female roles (Asch e Fine, 1988, *op. cit.*; Groce, 1997; Frederick, 2017; Malacrida, 2009). This complex and ambivalent situation shows how, for this group of women, the opportunity to pursue parenthood planning is complicated, not only because of the “effects of impairment” (Thomas, 1997; 1999), such as fatigue, pain, precarious state of health etc., but because they face various multiple barriers in their everyday lives.

This contribution proposes to understand the reproductive trajectories of a specific group: “the missing mothers”: women with a visible or invisible disability who failed to become mothers because of their impairment. I identify this group through a typology of narrative that can be referred to as “imagined motherhood”, describing the experience of 18 women with physical disabilities divided into two micro-groups, “visible” (11) and “invisible” (7).

The results presented in this contribution propose to overcome a mainstream approach to disability (Meneghini et al., 2015) that considers “childlessness” as an obvious and common experience of women with disabilities (Prilleltensky, 2003). In this article, I analyse the processes of constructing meanings related to childlessness through the prism of the social norm, which assumes that women with disabilities should not have children (Ash and Fine 1988, *op. cit.*). Therefore, I will examine the empirical results of the childlessness experience by using Bell Hooks’ (1998) concepts. She identifies *centre/periphery* dichotomy as part of a critical reflection on marginality as a «site of resistance» (Hooks, 1998). *Marginality* offers us to reconceptualise the social-spatial dimension of power relations and rethinking oppression as an act of change. Applied to my research, it is useful in order to discuss the social aspects of the construction of “biographies of childlessness” as a site of resistance among women with disabilities, and finally analyse the mechanisms of social maintenance of childlessness among this group of women. This perspective is also justified by the need for a nuanced approach to the study of childlessness, which turns out to be much more complex and diverse than indicated by Disability Studies (Meneghini et al., 2015; Oliver, 1995)

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2. Theme and literature

2.1 Disability and motherhood: a brief overview

The situation of women with disabilities regarding access to parenthood has not been an area of study in the social sciences (Garland-Thompson, 2004). Internationally, it started with the development of the disability rights movement (Thomas, 1999; Oliver, 1995) and at the same time, with the development of medicine that allowed for a greater understanding of the reproductive health of women with various disabilities or health conditions. Reproductive health and family formation gradually began to become an important area of research and discourse. Indeed, numerous studies have highlighted how motherhood - understood as a historically conditioned social construct - remains inaccessible to them in many matters (Frederick, 2015 *op. cit.*, Malacrida, 2009, *op. cit.*). While most efforts for reproductive autonomy by able-bodied women have been to claim the decision *if* and *when* to have children, and to break the social expectation of being a mother, in the case of women with disabilities the main issue is usually to fight for the possibility of being a mother. In point of fact, for women with vulnerable bodies (due to illness or impairment) the choice to become a mother is characterised not only by uncertainties, fears, and tensions but also by the role of prejudice and stigma (Goffman, 1963; Thomas, 1999, *op. cit.*). Some international research has highlighted the prejudices that disabled women face in their journey to become mothers (Prilleltensky 2003; Thomas 1997, *op. cit.*). The reasons for these prejudices are varied. Women with disabilities are not expected to aspire to norms such as femininity and motherhood; instead, they tend to be perceived as asexual or genderless (O' Toole and Done, 2002, *op. cit.*). These women often face a lack of support and increased social control, and experience different expectations of motherhood than other women: they are not encouraged to have children or under pressure to have a family, they face restrictions on access to gynaecological care or sex education (Asch and Fine, 1988, *op. cit.*). For this reason, it should be emphasised that for women with disabilities, the first issue is the possibility of having children, for which most women do not have to fight and against which a certain part actively defend themselves. Most studies have focused on the experience of caregiving and the parental relationship with their children (Grue and Tafjord, 2002; Malacrida 2009 *op. cit.*; Prilleltensky 2003 *op. cit.*) or their experiences with social services and health professionals (Malacrida 2009, *op. cit.*), with social services and health professionals (Thomas, 1997). This situation therefore exacerbates the degree of complexity that characterises their "reproductive choices". In research conducted by Frederick (2015 *op. cit.*), women with disabilities who desire/choose to become mothers, in addition to facing uncertainty and tensions, must challenge stigma due to the visibility or invisibility of their condition, and justify or negotiate their choices and desires when interacting with significant others. Stigma towards them can be deeply invasive, pervasive, and destructive, resulting in prejudice, shame, exclusion, and internalised oppression (Link and Phelan, 2001; Goffman, 1963). However, the social processes (norms, attitudes, values) are still little investigated, underlying the relationship between disability and childlessness. While the issue of parenting for people with disabilities has begun to be investigated in international social research in recent years, the processes of constructing meanings related to childlessness have not, until now, been the subject of in-depth research interest. The norm of childlessness for women with visible disabilities is often invoked at the level of socialisation to gender roles (Asch e Fine, 1988 *op. cit.*). As the results of my research indicate, women with disabilities do not experience the pressure towards normative socialisation to the role of "mother". In the case of these women, the norm is ambivalent: motherhood as the norm for able women in general and childlessness as the norm for women with disabilities. Conversely, challenging the prevailing perception of childlessness as an obvious and natural state characterised by lack of agency, it involves emphasizing fluid boundaries between childless and childfree (Basten, 2009). While able-bodied women who remain childless

often face stigmatisation (social disapproval) from their friends, family and relatives, as they are judged as selfish and superficial (Park, 2005; Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008) due to their deviant behaviour, in the case of non-able-bodied women there is a “reversal of the stigma”; the “choice to become a mother” is seen as a selfish choice that jeopardises the well-being of the future child (Frederick, 2015; 2017 *op. cit.*).

2.2. Intersectionality and disability: the contribution of Feminist Disability Studies

In recent decades, the concept of intersectionality is gaining increasing popularity in academia (Marchetti, 2013; Bello, 2020). This term provides a critical tool for understanding how difference affects women’s lives (Crenshaw, 2005). Offering a framework for theorizing oppression and marginalization, intersectionality enables us to identify structural intersections within power dynamics, while acknowledging individual experiences of difference (Collins and Bilge, 2016). It provides a redefinition of ways of thinking about social hierarchies and exclusion and describes how systems of oppression that construct different identities are responsible for positioning individuals in hierarchies of power and privilege (Collins and Bilge, 2016, *op. cit.*). Although the concept derives from reflections on racism and sexism, since the 1990s it has become increasingly used to describe other social stratifications (Collins, 2022).

Intersectionality also describes a research approach aimed at understanding the world of people living at the intersection of different identity categories. For example, what does an intersectional view bring to sociological reflection about women with disabilities?

Systematic interest in gender in disability reflection appeared relatively late (around the 80s and 90s of the last century). Although gender is seen as a fundamental variable, women with disabilities have not been considered in theoretical reflections. Despite the dynamic development of feminist thought, the situation of women with disabilities was not a significant topic of study until the 1980s, which may be surprising, because the interest in difference has a significant tradition in feminism. This silence later became grounds for criticism of feminist thought, which reproduced the exclusion of women with disabilities, without being interested in their situation and not including them in the common reflection about women (Morris, 1991, *op. cit.*; Thomas, 1999, *op. cit.*).

Between the late 1980s and the 1990s, a variety of disabled feminist scholars, e.g. Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch (1988), Jenny Morris (1991), Liz Crow (1996), Susan Wendell (1996), Carol Thomas (1999, *op. cit.*) have highlighted the lack of consideration of disabled women’s experiences in mainstream feminist theories. These feminist scholars have developed a field of study, the so-called ‘Feminist Disability Studies’, claiming the positionality of disabled women from an intersectional perspective and emphasising the multidimensionality of disability. The purpose was to incorporate disabled women’s varied epistemologies in order to provide a more meaningful engagement with the politics of difference, stimulating a critical engagement with able-bodied and able-minded privilege. For example, Morris (1991, *op. cit.*) explored the intersections between disability, gender and feminism, revealing the numerous ways in which disabled women were marginalised and excluded from political debate and participation - both within the disability rights movement but also from within the women’s movement. Morris observed that a women’s movement which included the issues and interests of disabled women would require a radical rethink of feminist issue (1991); arguing that including the experiences and perspectives of disabled women would result in a more explicit feminist resistance to oppression.

Starting from this theoretical framework, intersectional analysis offers a useful analytical framework. Such an approach delineates the ways in which bodies and minds not only matter to understanding disability politics, but are constituted along gendered, racialized and classed lines, called into being by capitalist systems (Goodley, 2014). Because of the intersection of different systems of domination (Collins, 2022, *op. cit.*) - sexism and ableism - intertwine in shaping the disadvantaged position of women with disabilities who face specific barriers related to their disability and gender status, such as: desexualisation and infantilisation in the construction of femininity of women with disabilities; access to reproductive rights, the focus on forced steril-

isation and eugenic policies (Ross and Solinger, 2017) the right to care and independent living (Morris, 1991, *op cit*). In the face of this, women activists with disabilities share a parallel, often interconnected approach with the Reproductive Justice Movement guided by African-American women (Ross and Solinger, 2017, *op cit.*). Recently, several scholars, such as Kafer (2013), Ginsburg and Rapp (2013), have linked disability to reproductive justice, insisting on the common ground of reproductive issues and recognising that reproductive issues cannot be separated from issues of race, class and sexuality, not to mention poverty, health care, social services, environmental justice and so on:

«The Reproductive Justice framework analyses how the ability of any woman to determine her own reproductive destiny is linked directly to the conditions in her community-and these conditions are not just a matter of individual choice and access.» (Ross, 2007, p. 4)

Although the disability rights and reproductive justice perspectives are not identical, they share important affinities. Both perspectives look beyond individual acts and choices to the social structures in which those acts and choices take place. Both focus on justice for marginalized and devalued groups. And just as the disability rights movement was organized in response to harmful systems of paternalism toward people with disabilities, the reproductive justice movement was itself a strong response to the paternalism of those who would force reproductive choices on women of color.

3. Methodology

Theoretically oriented from the field of Feminist Disability Studies (Thomas, 1997, *op cit.*), the empirical material I present in this contribution comes from a qualitative investigation focusing on life trajectories and reproductive choice of disabled women. Feminist Disability Studies, as well as the intersectional approach and the reproductive justice framework provide a very rich and varied toolbox for an in-depth understanding of disabling processes and the social structures of ableist oppression and at the same time aims at empowering disabled women participants in the study (Davis, 1995; Goodley, 2014; Campbell, 2009). The questions that guided the research aimed to understand: i) how does the presence of a visible or invisible disability affect the gap between the desire for motherhood and (non-)reproductive behaviours? ii) how do gender norms that associate femininity with motherhood exert pressure on women whose bodies, due to their condition, might fail in intensive motherhood performances? In this regard, in conceptualising the itinerary of this research, I questioned how a research design can be constructed through a feminist methodology that puts the circularity of knowledge between researcher and actors at the centre (Bell Hooks, 1998). Likewise, the methodological framework was informed by a critical understanding of power relations in terms of accessibility in the research process and an engagement to a broadly social and political understanding of disability (Kafer, 2013). During the phase of defining the objectives, the target population and the research questions, I decided to focus on different disability groups through an intersectional approach that crossed gender, age and social class in order to reveal the features of some disability groups and in particular the invisibility of women with invisible disabilities and the compulsory visibility of women with visible disabilities. The research is based on 33 biographical interviews (Bichi, 2000): the interviews were conducted on 18 women with disabilities without children and 15 women with disabilities with children. In particular, the use of in-depth interviews was designed to capture the experiential and embodied knowledge of disabled women as a valid method for investigating the world and seeking to shed light on stories that might be ignored by a positivist research tradition (Kafer, 2013). The interviews were collected between July 2020 and September 2021 and,

due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, were realised through digital platforms such as Meet, Teams, Skype and Zoom. With regard to the procedures for recruiting participants, the role of gatekeepers - some associations and public gynaecological-obstetrics clinics open to women with disabilities - was fundamental. The choice of the women to be interviewed followed two phases: a first more exploratory one that can be defined as "rational choice" and a subsequent "snowballing" one on the basis of profiles constructed on homogeneous characteristics, taking into account certain theoretical-methodological criteria considered relevant in line with both the *critical case design* (Cardano, 2020; Doucet, 2000) and the theoretical reference literature (Thomas, 1997, *op cit.*; 1999, *op cit.*; Frederick, 2017, *op cit.*; Malacrida, 2009, *op cit.*). Indeed, it was chosen to hold together invisible chronic diseases (Multiple Sclerosis), visible chronic-degenerative diseases (muscular dystrophy and spinal muscular atrophy) and visible impairments (spina bifida and spastic tetraparesis) in order to understand the mechanisms of visibility and invisibility as well as social exclusion. Issues such as the type, degree of disability, practical functionality, the moment of acquiring disability, the visibility or invisibility of disability, are factors that have a key impact on the experience of everyday life, including the experience of reproductive rights. This decision makes it possible to analyse the double tension between visibility/invisibility and healthy/illness and to explore how, when, and whether people with visible or invisible disabilities make their condition in/visible, when and whether they identify themselves as disabled (Wendell, 1996). This was done by cross-referencing gender (female), age (20-55), social class (medium or medium-high) and the presence of social and cultural capital (medium/medium-high) available to them, the presence of a partner taking into account the time of onset of the disease or impairment (e.g. having received the diagnosis in childhood, in late adolescence or youth, before however embarking on a possible maternity pathway) and finally that they lived in an urban context in Northern Italy (Turin) which is characterised by the implementation of some regional interventions in support of inclusive policies for disability: accessibility measures in gynaecological-obstetric services; funds for projects supporting *Independent Living* (Morris, 2004); implementation of territorial initiatives through an integrated model of local welfare. This final issue is very relevant because it allows us to articulate a critique of the north - paying attention to how disability mainstreaming policies are implemented in northern urban contexts (Italy, the world) neglected in other parts of the world.

4. Results

4.1. *Central and marginal as narrative categories about childlessness*

In the public opinion, childlessness of women with disabilities seems to be divided between biological impossibility and social prohibition. However, an analysis of the interviews with the women who took part in this study reveals the need for a much more nuanced approach to the problem. The experiences of these women are very disparate, multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a common denominator. *Childlessness* was presented as a central category of the life course, which was associated with its profound experience, often as a failure and more specifically as "an unwanted absence". These narratives were full of pain, uncertainty and striving to come to terms with their situation, to come to terms with the unwanted trajectory of life. On the other hand, however, in addition to the narratives directly related to the physical impossibility and social devaluation of the possibility of having children, there are several reflexive experiences that attribute the experience of childlessness as a secondary issue. In order to highlight the complexity of childlessness, I bring an analysis of ways of constructing the narrative of childlessness as a central or marginal experience. Influenced by decolonial feminist epistemology, I adopt the concepts of centre and margin from Bell Hooks (1989). This terminology helps to avoid reification in

conceptualisations and theorisations of childlessness and demonstrates the tensions between of the *centre-periphery* dichotomy: de-centre the centre by centring the margins.

4.1.1 *Motherhood as a central desire to be a woman*

In order to understand the experiences of women with disabilities in the field of childlessness, it should be noted that one of the basic categories that organises the narratives collected is the way of constructing the meaning of this dimension of life. In many of the narratives collected, childlessness was indeed a “central” dimension of their life course, which was associated with its profound experience, often as a failure, a lack of fulfilment. These narratives were full of pain, uncertainty and commitment in trying to change their situation. The women with disabilities interviewed presented descriptions of failure or attempts to come to terms with an undesirable trajectory in life. An illustrative example is that of Matilde, who is 33 years old and was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at the age of 22. In her words:

«So before the sclerosis, yes...it was definitely a wish of mine...with the guy I was with before we talked about it. Actually at 25 I would have liked to have a child, but he didn't want to. Again, it was my wish not to take motherhood too far and he obviously didn't want to and this wish was not realised. Then, however, we broke up and I had lost the desire. I had not ruled it out...but as the years have passed, I feel it more and more distant...as a desire. I would like to, but I don't know ... my current boyfriend would like to, but perhaps I should wait a couple of years»

Prompted by the undersigned to reconstruct and explore her “desire” for motherhood in relation to the time of her diagnosis, Matilde illustrates the tension between the before and after diagnosis and the gap between her desire for motherhood. For most of the women, talking about the experience of childlessness was a difficult and emotional experience. The stories presented were associated with suffering, lack of acceptance of their situation, and disagreement with it. Childlessness was a significant, if not the most important, dimension of existence.

Motherhood was a desirable state, an object of aspiration, the main category that determined the course of life. These narratives referred to the traditional understanding of a woman's life trajectory as a mother, and the failure to fulfil this role had its consequences in the intense identity work of trying to accept an undesirable state. Matilde experiences her childlessness as an undesirable state that redefines her imagined life trajectory. Motherhood is central to her life expectations, and childlessness, coupled with the breakdown of self-esteem, requires her to undertake biographical work and change her self-perception. In these narratives it emerges how the sick body is perceived as inadequate in relation to the ideology of motherhood and its values (Miller, 2007; Hays, 1996): good physical health, infinite energy, autonomy. This subgroup of women, who is trying to justify the gap between childlessness and the desire for motherhood, perceives disability not as an obvious and easily generalisable feature in determining childlessness, but as a complex and multi-layered element, between corporeality, the perception of one's body and the social meanings attributed to it. The reasons for childlessness are complex and multidimensional - but they assess it much more on the side of society than physical disability (it is mainly the attitude of the family, which recognises that they should not have children, on the basis of an unconfirmed medical condition on the heredity of the disability, the unwillingness of the partner to have children and long-term experience, domestic violence).

Another illustrative story is that of Miriam, 42 years old, who has had spina bifida since birth and thus expresses “her desire for motherhood” that develops amidst ambivalent gender norms. On the one hand, the visibility of their disabled condition leads to a constant infantilisation of her body and on the other hand she experiences the tension of aspiring to a normative model of femininity:

«Yes. I've always thought about it to be honest...however for us it's a bit complicated...during adolescence I had low self-esteem about my body [...] then as I grew up I recognised myself as a girl and I could be pretty and recognised as a girl like them and I could be liked...only the first loves led me to deny this desire»

-[interviewer] How come?

"I was told that I am half a woman...that I have smaller legs...that I don't grow...that I am in a wheelchair and these characteristics of my body questioned my ability to be able to generate something somehow»

Her account is important not only because it highlights the enabling construction of the disabled female body, a body that "visibly" disregards social gender expectations, but it allows us to understand her interpretation of the low self-esteem towards her body as being linked to the boys' failure to recognise her femininity. *Visibility* plays a central role in producing a negative social reaction from others.

Similar processes can be found in the story of Laura, 44 years old and with spastic tetraparesis. She would also like to have children and experienced childlessness as *emotional work*: fear associated with the inability to be a mother, reflecting on the biological processes related to the body's possibilities and the time constraints of fertility in women, establishing new meaning, reconceptualising her social role.

«Motherhood was a dream for as long as I can remember...I carried it within me from a young age so it was something I wanted. In the last few years, anxiety grew...you start to reach a certain age, then my problem»

Motherhood is a central concept in her perception of herself and femininity, a determinant of a happy life. Many interviewees devote an enormous amount of attention and time to childlessness. For them, it is a primary experience, strongly connected with female identity and the socially expected trajectory of a woman's life. In their narratives, childlessness is associated with frustration; it represents another proof of not being a "real" woman. It is the deviation from the norm that brings childlessness to the fore. However, if we look more generally at the norms concerning motherhood for women with disabilities, it can be supposed that while the interlocutors themselves are able to admit that the social norm for women with disabilities articulates that they should not have children, on an individual level they refer to a normative gender order that assigns a special value to motherhood as an inseparable attribute of femininity.

4.1.2 *Childlessness as a marginal experience*

Not all stories about being a childless woman were articulated in this way. A significant proportion of the participants created narratives about childlessness as one aspect of life, important, but not special, not unique, not central to identity. These stories did not focus on the experience of suffering, they did not have such a great emotional burden. The story of childlessness was not told from the point of view of absence, but rather through the prism of the importance of other dimensions of life, whether professional, educational, interpersonal, or related to health and fitness. Looking at the collected narratives through the prism of the central or the marginal allows us to understand how childlessness is socially maintained. For example, the following sentence: «Parenthood doesn't concern me» by one of the women with disabilities interviewed highlights how the absence of children is considered something obvious and natural. Of course, this has been presented as the result of a strong taboo of parenting for people with disabilities, resulting in the perception of childlessness as the only possible path in life. However, childlessness doesn't have to necessarily be associated with the narrative of absence.

Previous research on childlessness, concerning the distinction between childless and childfree, did not prove useful in the context of my analysis. This distinction introduces the concept of

choice, which is not adequate to describe a significant part of the experiences of women with disabilities.

For example, let's consider the narrative of Silvia, who is 38 years old and was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2018:

«But right now I have no desire to have children...Because I have to spend my energy on my own basic functions. That is, I wouldn't be able with the ability in my hands to put on and take off nappies and imagine holding a baby. I've tried to hold my friends' babies, but only from a sitting position. No? And then how much effort can a body like mine make to get pregnant...I don't see it as compatible. Then it's also true that during pregnancy the disease stops, at least that's what the studies say... but I don't know, maybe we could think of something else... surrogacy? But the problem is that multiple sclerosis has taken away so many freedoms and created limitations» (Silvia)»

For these women, the announcement of the illness seems to reorient future plans on motherhood, challenging the ambivalent experience of childfree and involuntary childlessness. Childlessness was not considered a failure or a disappointment, but treated *neutrally*, sometimes even as an expression of responsibility. But there are also other stories in which childlessness was presented in the context of other priorities, such as education, work, the strain of living with disabilities, rehabilitation, caring for one's health, etc. An eloquent example is the case of Valeria, who is 33 years old and has spastic tetraparesis:

«I am still young...I am 33 years old and frankly at this time in my life I do not wish to have children. I've spoken to my partner about it, yes, maybe he would like to, but I'm still in a «waiting» phase because I'm trying to have more stability in my job after years of study; anyway, I have to think about my health and my body first before thinking about a possible pregnancy...if it were even possible in case»

Her job allows her to focus on ensuring and supporting an independent life. Childlessness is perceived as a most likely passable state. Currently, she has no intention of having children, nor is she trying to get pregnant. She speaks of childlessness not from the perspective of absence, but from the perspective of the multiplicity of other essential dimensions of life. The dominant frame is not suffering and incompatibility with the desired trajectory of destiny, but an appreciation of the various aspects of being in the world. For these mothers, childlessness is not a devaluation, but one of the equivalent ways of functioning in society. It is a neutral element of life as long as it is not socially marked. Their attitude towards childlessness is determined by their attitude towards traditional models of femininity, not combining the trajectory of a woman's life with the necessity of motherhood and the possibility of playing other socially important roles.

At the same time, the interlocutors mentioned above are included in the group of *procrastinators*. They are women who consider different life scenarios; this group does not refuse motherhood or having children in the future, but is not currently making efforts in this direction. In the literature on childless/childfree (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2008), this orientation is referred to as a passive process of reproductive decision-making, as opposed to its active dimension (Rich, 1986).

5. Final discussion and considerations

5.1 Barriers to motherhood. Childlessness as a social norm

This contribution offers an analysis of the relationship between desires for motherhood and non-reproductive decisions and in particular, it focuses on choices, events and experiences of disability that have left an impact on the construction of their gender identity. An intersectional perspective reveals that for women with disabilities, the very possibility of motherhood and

support in the implementation of parenting practices is at the centre of reproductive justice struggles, yet childlessness, the possibility of preventing having offspring and access to health information are equivalent aspects of this group's experience. The findings presented in this article highlight how their decision to remain childless challenges the perception of childlessness as an obvious and natural state. The norm of childlessness for women with in/visible disabilities is, in some cases, invoked at the level of socialisation to gender roles. Some of these respondents did not experience the pressure towards normative socialisation to the role of "mother". In a similar way to other women, they experience the control of sexuality, but in varied forms: their motherhood is linked to violations of social norms that confine disabled women beyond motherhood. As I have argued to illustrate, these analyses of the parenthood of disabled people bring up a new question about the reproduction of societies, regarding who can be a parent and who decides. Furthermore, the findings emphasise the factors and mechanisms that come into play in the formation of non-reproductive choices. Reproductive experiences are always linked to biographical situations and decisions, but these choices are rooted in the values and practices of the communities in which the individuals live. I argue the interrelationship between the status of childlessness and the ways in which this norm is socially maintained.

Additionally, the purpose of this contribution is not just understanding *if* women with disabilities consider childlessness as their own choice, but rather how their situation in terms of creating a family is conditioned by the realities of the community in which they live. While the literature defines the struggle for opportunity and support in parenthood as fundamental themes for women with disabilities, it is important to remember that not all of them want or are able to have a child. For them, access to information on reproductive rights, gynaecological care, contraception, legal abortion and, above all, sex education may be important (Kallianes, Rubenfeld 1997). Women with disabilities in Italy do not always have access to gynaecological care on an equal basis with others (e.g. due to lack of architectural accessibility). Patients point to stereotypes among medical staff and the attendants (often from the family) and scarce availability of health information. The intersectional perspective shows that for women with disabilities, the very possibility of motherhood and the support to implement parenting practices are at the centre of reproductive justice struggles, but nevertheless childlessness, the possibility to prevent having offspring and access to health information are equivalent aspects of this group's experience. An intersectional perspective, through the use of theories on socio-cultural identities of gender or sexuality and disability studies, has the potential to offer a more nuanced understanding of the reproductive choices of women with motor disabilities. In other words, the key question is how (childless) life biographies are socially produced and sustained (Malacrida, 2009, *op cit*; Frederick, 2017, *op cit.*). To understand the childless experience of women with disabilities, it is necessary to observe how socially constructed norms and practices relate to this issue. The interviewees presented a very complex picture of their childlessness, abounding with events that occur in various spheres and situations that influence the situation of becoming childless. The norm regarding childlessness on the part of women with disabilities in some cases is already invoked at the level of socialisation to gender roles. Some of the interviewees did not go through the traditional socialisation of girls to the role of mother (O'Toole and Doe, 2002, *op. cit*).

The empirical material collected illustrates the multiplicity of their biographies; but what emerges is the role of others in recognising their possibility of becoming a mother. On the other hand, the experience of taboo, discouragement, negative attitude or simply the absence of support in this area of life was pointed out. As a consequence, their motherhood is judged according to a moral framework, assuming a negative value (Thomas, 1999).

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Intersecting injustices: understanding oppression and privilege through the perspectives of parents facing poverty²

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the daily experience of mothers and fathers living in poverty, adopting an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991). This approach offers useful analytical tools to highlight not only overlapping forms of oppression affecting parents, but also the complex relationship between individual agency and the wider cultural and structural processes, generating conditions of advantage or disadvantage at the material and symbolic levels.

The study is part of a larger national research involving parents, challenged by particular conditions (economic poverty, forced migration, highly conflictual divorce, sexual minorities) that expose them to different forms of social vulnerability (Fargion, 2023). The general goal is to analyse how these parents are "doing families" (Morgan, 2007), and how they relate to a dominant ideology in contemporary Western societies, identified as "intensive parenting" (Hays, 1996). This prevailing discourse holds that child-rearing should be centred on children's needs, and oriented by "methods that are informed by experts, labour-intensive and costly" (op. cit, 1996: 21). Within a decontextualized and deterministic view, parents are identified as solely responsible for managing risks and building opportunities for themselves and their children, thus as the only ones to blame in case of "failures" (Fargion, 2021). The pursuit of intensive parenting practices demands "middle-class circumstances and resources" (Fox, 2006: 243); therefore, relating to these dominant representations is particularly challenging for low-income parents that encounter daily barriers to accessing opportunities.

This study's findings contribute to enrich our knowledge about this phenomenon, valuing the perspective of mothers and fathers facing poverty. Their voices allow us to shed light on the impact in their daily lives of social divisions, especially those constructed in relation to the classic trilogy of gender, race and class.

The first section of this article is going to account for the theoretical assumptions that guided the study and, more specifically, the concepts of "oppression", "privilege" and "intersectionality". The second part discusses the study's results, looking at interlocking forms of oppressions and privileges, both at the level of the wider socio-cultural context and micro-level processes, showing how parents experience their social locations within hierarchies of domination and oppression (Pease, 2010).

2. Background

2.1. Poverty as a form of social oppression

In the theoretical and the empirical literature, poverty is defined in several ways (Gori, 2020; Morlicchio, 2012), with scholars referring to different paradigms used, more or less explicitly, to account for the roots and the consequences of this phenomenon (Krumer-Nevo, 2020).

This study is guided by the definition proposed by Lister (2013), who assumes that poverty is not only a condition of material deprivation and economic disadvantage, but also "a shameful social relation, corrosive of human dignity and flourishing, which is experienced in interactions with the wider society and in the way people in poverty are talked about and treated by politicians,

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officials, professionals, the media, and sometimes academics" (Lister, 2013, p. 112). This perspective highlights the importance of taking into account, both in the practice field and in empirical studies, the economic and socio-cultural processes involved in the construction of the phenomenon, as well as the different experiences of people struggling with it.

In line with this perspective, Fleurbaey (2007) identifies poverty as a form of social oppression, highlighting how societies in which people in poverty are forced to accept undignified living conditions are in fact willing to tolerate different forms of injustice that threaten human integrity and dignity. The author shows how the privileged conditions of some groups are grounded in the disadvantaged condition of others; privilege is the other side of the coin of social oppression, linked to cultural and structural factors, even more than the explicit intentions of individuals.

The definition of "social oppression" (Johnson, 2000) proposed in the Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology helps to understand this perspective, identifying oppression as "a relationship of dominance and subordination between categories of people in which one benefits from the systematic abuse, exploitation, and injustice toward the other" (Johnson, 2000, p. 293). This definition distinguishes social oppression from forms of oppressive behaviors of single individuals. From this point of view, all members belonging to a dominant group participate in the processes of social oppression, regardless of their individual behavior. A white-skinned man may not himself act in oppressive ways, yet he still benefits from the advantages attributed to men and white people by cultural and structural processes oppressing women and black-skinned individuals. The same can be said in relation to other social groups who benefit from positions of privilege, such as people in the wealthier countries of the Global North, and generally those who belong to the more affluent social classes.

Social oppression is reproduced through discourses that associate to a group or a social category qualities or characteristics that distinguish it as "better" (as regard to ability, merit, values) than another, justifying a sense of superiority and, likely, forms of discrimination or domination. Classism is an example of discrimination that results in oppression of social classes defined as "lower" and "inferior". Based on stereotypes and prejudices, people in poverty have often been attributed traits such as laziness, poor skills, a weak commitment to get out of a disadvantaged condition, a tendency to depend on others for the satisfaction of their needs, and sometimes dubious morality; these discourses have justified punitive or paternalistic welfare interventions, more recently disguised behind the pedagogical and moralizing rhetoric of activation (Busso et al., 2018).

When such representations and ideologies are, often unknowingly, assumed and reinforced through institutions and wider societal structures, social oppression become institutionalized, so embedded in taken-for-granted discourses and practices that does not even involve intentional forms of prejudice or discrimination (Johnson, 2000; Deutsch, 2006). Disproportionate rates of black-skinned people living in poverty in the North American penal welfare system and in juvenile services constitute examples of institutionalized racism and classism (Johnson, 2000; Kelly and Varghese, 2018). Forms of classism have been highlighted also in some studies on middle-class professionals' practices in welfare services (Krumer Nevo, 2020; Morris et al., 2018); these were found to be linked not only to practitioners' ethnocentric perspectives, but also to organizational cultures and structures orienting an emergency approach, focusing on micro level interventions, while obscuring the impact of contextual factors (Sanfelici and Gui, 2020). Unjust policies and practices toward population groups living in poverty stain the history of the welfare systems from their origins (Ioakimidis and Wyllie, 2022). Even today, anti-poverty policies seem insufficient to tackle the phenomenon as a global social issue, weakly addressing its structural causes, which would require questioning the broader socio-economic system and its assumptions, as the source of the reproduction of social inequalities (Towsend and Gordon, 2002).

The power of dominant groups is maintained also by introducing and imposing categories to interpret the reality, exploiting their greater influence in ways that are functional to preserve their own position of advantage. Forms of "epistemic oppression" refer to the dominance in the pro-

duction and transmission of knowledge by privileged groups, which is also reproduced in forms of "discursive injustice"; these affect "individuals in their ability to act on the world with words" (Bianchi, 2021, p. 19), within institutionalized social processes that inhibit the ability to interact and communicate with others, and to express one's feelings and views about social life (Young, 1995, p. 50). Forms of epistemic injustice suffered by the poorest people may have the effect to silence them, also to avoid more suffering and humiliation.

Forms of oppressions are enacted in interpersonal relationships too, when mainstream discourses justify oppressive behaviors as micro-aggressions enacted by individual members of the dominant groups. Examples include racist, classist or sexist jokes or stereotypes, harassment, threats, or physical violence acted against people in disadvantaged positions (e.g., violence against women or people of color). Harvey (1999) uses the concept of "civilized oppression" referring to forms of oppression that are normalized and perpetuated in ordinary daily life interactions. They are based on social norms, symbols and practices taken for granted, and used unknowingly by ordinary people, who are not aware of how their assumptions of superiority impact on the lives of others and do not understand themselves as having unearned privileges (Pease, 2010).

The dominant belief systems and attitudes can be internalized by members of disadvantaged groups, resulting in forms of "internalized oppression" (Baines, 2007) that impact on self-esteem, self-confidence, and not rarely lead to shame or social withdrawal.

2.2. Understanding oppression through the prism of intersectionality

The intersectionality perspective is useful to guide the analysis of the complex interplay of socially constructed categories (social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, ability, age) and the ways in which, in relation to them, forms of social oppression and domination are reproduced or contested. These categories operate "not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p.2). Crenshaw (1991) focuses on three interlocked dimensions on which to orient the analysis. The concept of "structural intersectionality" is useful to highlight the socio-structural elements underlying conditions of disadvantage, helping to shift the focus from the analysis of individual deficits to that of systemic issues that generate inequality. The "political" dimension of intersectionality unveils how groups experiencing multiple forms of oppression compete in politicized contexts, oriented by more powerful discourses, that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas, in which their perspective is neglected. Crenshaw points out how human rights movements that focused their action on one social category (e.g., gender) have often excluded those voices with less power (for example, the diverse experience of non-white, non-middle-class women). The historical lack of "political intersectionality" has led to the formulation and implementation of policies incapable of identifying the reciprocal linkages of forms of oppression that affect more marginalized groups; the risk is that laws, social policies, and practices, even unintentionally, contribute in perpetuating forms of social exclusion. The concept of "representational intersectionality" guides the analysis of how disadvantaged groups are positioned in public discourses. Stereotypes and prejudices perpetuate and justify forms of marginalization. An example is offered by the expression "welfare queen" referring to black-skinned women in poverty, stigmatized as dependent on forms of public assistance. Moreover, the debates over representations have elided the intersection of social categories in producing dominant narratives; for example, the contemporary critiques of racist or sexist representations have long excluded the experience of women of colour (Crenshaw, 1991).

The intersectionality prism allows one to focus at the micro and macro level simultaneously. At the macro level, dominant discourses, contextual social processes, institutional practices, and power relations that influence the distribution of material resources and symbolic capital are analyzed, focusing the attention also to policy levels dynamics. At the micro level, an intersectional

analysis focuses on the multiple and interconnected aspects of identity and the resulting social positions of advantage or disadvantage constructed and reproduced in interpersonal relationships.

On the one hand, this perspective sheds light on how the groups impacted by forms of disadvantage and oppression are not homogeneous; for example, not all parents facing poverty experience it in the same way, nor is it possible to identify a direct relationship between economic deprivation and parenting styles. The social categories in which one is positioned or positions her/himself are experienced differently; in some cases, this positioning is the result of coercion, which can involve either submissive reactions or resistance (Marchetti, 2013, p. 138). On the other hand, the intersectionality lens is useful to recognize the intersections of processes that generate and maintain complex forms of structural vulnerability that systematically affect people in poverty, despite their differences.

3. Method

In this research, intersectionality was used as a powerful analytical lens to explore the experience of parents facing poverty, analyzing intersecting forms of oppression that impact in their daily life. More specifically, this study assumed a constructivist approach to intersectionality (Colombo and Rebughini, 2016), with the aim to highlight the dynamic interplay of individual agency and structural constraints. Social categories are not understood as the mechanical effect of reified social differences, but as "constantly constructed, imposed, adapted, and contested in interactions, depending on contexts, audiences, personal goals and the resources available" (Colombo and Rebughini, 2016, p. 446).

The research involved forty parents, living in different Italian regions, and known to professionals or volunteers in social services of the public administration or the third sector, supporting them in facing various challenges, including poverty. The recursive stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Sanfelici, 2023), guided by the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) method (Charmaz, 2014), took place during the period between October 2020 and May 2021. The overall goal was to explore how parents cope with the challenges experienced due to their conditions of economic precariousness, in order to develop a model of explanation (Sanfelici, 2023) as the result of their knowledge as expert by experience.

The process of data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, with the aim of exploring the processes involved in "doing parenting" when struggling with poverty. The initial open coding was conducted on 12 interviews, from which the first labels emerged. The writing of "memos" facilitated the identification of connections between conceptual categories. Subsequent analysis, focused coding and theoretical sampling resulted in data collection from a further 28 participants, deepening the exploration of the categories emerging from the first wave (Sanfelici, 2023). An intersectionality approach guided also the sampling process; gender, class, race, disability and juridical status in particular were taken into account in the second wave of data collection, to better understand how different levels of vulnerability influence representations and experiences, and may lead to different coping strategies.

More specifically, this article focuses on one of the main categories emerging from the CGT analysis, labelled as "forms of injustice". This category refers to the parents' accounts of factors imposing continuous barriers that limit their choices and possibilities as persons and as parents, both at the material and the symbolic levels, generating forms of oppression. A secondary analysis was carried out to analyse the meanings associated to the sub-categories related to this main one. The intersectionality lens allowed us to grasp the forms of oppression at a structural, political, and representational level (Crenshaw, 1991), highlighting their impact on parenting, as well as the participants' strategies to cope with them.

4. Findings: interlocking “forms of injustice”

The presentation of our findings is organized into two sections, which discuss the meanings that emerged in relation to two categories, related to the wider one (“experiences of injustice”), as follows: 1) the category “constrained parenting” includes sub-categories (“trapping forms of structural oppression”), referring to the participants’ explanations of the multiple effects of structural factors that hinder parenting and child rearing; the expert knowledge of parents enables to understand the impact of conditions that constantly impose barriers to accessing resources needed to plan and pursue projects in life.

2) the category “(de)valued values” includes the subcategories “success vs. failure”; “autonomy vs. interdependence”; “competition vs. solidarity”, emerged from the participants’ reflections on the criteria used to attribute value to people and their qualities; these explanations shed light on the social and cultural processes that limit access to symbolic resources - crucial to build and maintain self-confidence and self-esteem - producing forms of epistemic oppression.

4.1. “Parenting constrained” by forms of institutional and structural oppression

The category “constrained parenting” emerged in our participants’ discourses, referring to their experience of necessary choices that must be made in relation to the constant lack of resources available to “doing family” (Morgan, 2007), highlighting the impact of interlocking forms of oppression at the macro level. Many of the challenges related to economic poverty are common to our interviewees. The scarcity or absence of material and symbolic goods is described as a condition that “limits” or “blocks” their possibilities as people and as parents, “trapped” in what is described as “a cage”, or a “vicious circle” that leads to “forced choices”, rather than well-considered ones.

According to most of our participants, the difficulty in accessing livelihood-securing jobs is one of the main causes of the “vicious circle” that limits their opportunities. Living in the poorest areas of the country, characterized by high unemployment rates, and sometimes marked by the scourge of organized crime, makes a difference in determining the quantity and the quality of employment opportunities. Unemployment or access to poor and precarious jobs is a constant in the sample of our respondents, but the challenges are greater for people coming from poorer countries, those with a precarious juridical status and for women, particularly in contexts where public employment services and family services are absent or with precarious resources as well. Being a mother in a context that has poorly invested in family services entails the “forced” choice between being employed in the labor market and taking care of the family members, undermining economic independence, or in some cases accepting the risk of precarious forms of supervision for their children. Nadia is an Italian mother who grew up in a neighborhood in a northern city marked by poverty and deviance, raising her five-year-old daughter alone; in the absence of support from family networks, she had to close her business as a hairdresser. Nadia describes a “constant struggle” to overcome the barriers daily experienced in her attempts to access the resources needed to make plans for herself and her family:

«I was an hairdresser... and then I got pregnant, and not having help with the baby, and the possibility to pay a babysitter ... I was on my own, I had to close when the child was one year old. And after then I could not find anything anymore, except for precarious jobs; I do not know... it's just difficult honestly. (...) I'm stuck! I really feel as a lion in a cage, because I've tried everything, but I can't get out of this situation». (N.)

In some experiences, gender-based violence intersects with the condition of poverty, or it is a consequence of it. Giovanna, lives in the South, is the mother of two children, and went back to live with her birth family, after a path supported by an organization that helped her as a battered

woman. The experience of severe psychological and physical suffering overlapped with her exclusion from the labor market, the subsequent economic dependency, and the inability to ensure housing and opportunities for her children. Giovanna describes her experience as a double source of injustice, due not only to the oppression suffered by her ex-partner's behaviours, but also to the unavailability of services to ensure a decent life for her family:

«The State does not allow you to have a decent job, one that gives back dignity to women; we declare to carry on so many battles for battered women, and... I came out of a ... I was saved from violence against women and then what did the State do? It abandoned me, with my children (...). This is what I ask the State, to help us, not giving us money, but giving us dignity, a job, that's all». (G.)

Exclusion processes related to poverty are intertwined with those produced by race, skin color, and legal status. For non-Italian people, structural and cultural barriers hinder the access to housing and adequately paid and legal jobs. Mohamed and Cleo are two fathers, married, who migrated with their families from poor areas of two central African countries. Both are trying to secure the minimum conditions for survival, combining precarious income sources from seasonal jobs, and aids from charitable organizations; they experience a constantly precarious balance, frequently interrupted by unforeseen critical events, most recently the pandemic and its impact on the labor market. In the poorest or most isolated areas of the country, one of the ways to access job opportunities is mediated by organized crime, for example in lands where an illegal gang-master system named as "caporalato" has not been effectively addressed by institutions. Most often, this phenomenon involves migrants in hyper-precarious conditions, who are more easily subjected to labor blackmail and exploitation. Diana, a mother from an Eastern European country, describes her past experience as an exploited worker in agriculture; she highlights the risk of internalized oppression, when degrading working and living conditions for herself and her family become the "normality", preventing from "being able to see beyond" and imagining other possibilities for living in dignity:

«Because here it's not that you are recognized for the work that you do, I'm talking about insurance, rights... it's not that you get this information (...). Even if I worked without a contract, it was fine for me, as long as there was a job and as long as we could eat (...) He [the gang-master] gave me a room where I could stay with my daughter and I thought it was also too much... even the other like us were not able to see beyond that». (D.)

Institutional responses in many cases appear to be poorly effective in countering forms of structural oppression, and sometimes involved in the reproduction of social discrimination that takes the form of institutional oppression. The response of public offices to requests of economic aid is often described as uncertain and unpredictable, and above all limited by the allocation of scarce resources for families in economic distress. Job search is described as weakly mediated by public agencies; social services workers often explain to parents that helping for a job search is not their responsibility, and at the same time employment services put on hold responses that rarely arrive. Integrated interventions between social and labor services are advocated by the participants, but in fact rare; they sometimes take the form of offers of internships, scarcely relevant in countering a condition of hyper-precariousness. Jessica, an Italian mother of two children, married to Mario, who is unemployed due to a severe heart disease, describes her enthusiasm when she was offered and accepted a paid internship, and the disappointment and concern when knowing that the 600 Euro payment would have been given "after months", at unpredictable times.

For parents in recent immigration paths, access to national and local income support measures or to housing is often not guaranteed, due to the absence of eligibility requirements, such as the number of years of residence in the territory. For parents with precarious legal status, the complexity and slowness of the bureaucratic paths necessary to update their permits to stay expose

them to periods marked by extreme uncertainty and the impossibility not only of making plans for the future, but also of guaranteeing in the present the satisfaction of basic needs.

Many parents refer to the traumatic experience for their family in cases of eviction. Ana, a mother of three children, with a residence permit yearly renewed, lives with the constant fear of losing her home, an event that has happened three times in her young life. Grace, a Nigerian mother, recounts the experience of "losing everything"; when her husband's long period of unemployment led to losing their home, in the absence of support networks, she was forced to adapt to an emergency solution in a temporary shelter, offered by a charitable organization, experienced as a further source of suffering and injustice.

«I lost everything, I had no home, I had nothing, I didn't work, as soon as my husband got a job we lost the house. (...) I lived it [the shelter] as a place ... very ... with different families, in the daytime at 8 o'clock they kick you out, and you have to go out with your children in the street... This is not good for mothers and children». (G.)

4.2. *"Devalued values": forms of epistemic oppression, between adaptation and resistance*

In contemporary Western societies, the availability of material resources is considered as evidence of merit and success. In a specular way, the condition of economic poverty is more often interpreted as a proof of failure, lower commitment, or capacities. The distorting lens of stereotypes and prejudices associated with these assumptions emerges in our participants' reflections and accounts, highlighting how, in relation to them, people are singled out and, at the same time, made invisible (Young, 1995).

The interviews trace numerous episodes in which parents in their daily life deal with prejudices, in the forms of judgmental looks, verbal expressions, devaluing attitudes, leading to experiences of shame and humiliation, sometimes anger, resulting in different forms of adaptation and resistance. Maria Grazia, a single mother of a child with special needs, explains how, at a time when she was facing a condition of extreme poverty, she had to neglect her needs to ensure her son did not experience any kinds of deprivation; in that period, she often perceived the judgmental stares of "other moms" she met at school, looking at the inadequate conditions of her hair, clothes and shoes; she also narrates her attempts to defend herself to safeguard her image and self-esteem, highlighting the value of her "sacrifices", her "strength despite all", her walking with her "head held high".

«Before [receiving the minimum income] I went to school with broken shoes and they looked at me from head to toe (...). However, people should also look internally, taking into account what I went through, because (...) being a father and being a mother at the same time is hard, and I can say that I am proud of that». (M.G.)

The need to protect their own identity and that of their family from prejudices lead to different reactions, depending on the contexts in which they occurred, the different social positioning, their values and their representations of the roots of poverty, identified at the individual or at the system level.

Some parents emphasize what "really matters" to them, namely recognizing themselves as part of a family "rich in values": caring relationships, love for their children, enjoying their staying together and united, as well as mutual help and solidarity, which for someone seems to be limited to their family members, while for others extends to friendship and community relationships. For Ester, an Italian mother living in the North what matters is to "have gold in the family":

«It's hard to make a living on such a salary nowadays (...), but what should we do? The important thing is not to swim in gold, but to have gold in your home. If you could see us all together, we are beautiful... so beautiful!». (E.)

In some interviews, it emerges how reference to values such as altruism and solidarity often ap-

pears at odds with the kind of performances required in everyday interactions. Assuming "sharing" as a value, in a context where competition prevails on reciprocity, and marked by unequal opportunities, can reinforce the condition of disadvantage. Laura, an Italian mother with parents from Albania, living in a northern city, explains how she often argues with her husband with regard to the values to pass down to their children.

«My son has always seen sharing in the house, right? But, do you know what he told me last year? When he was 7 years old. 'Mom, you always talk about sharing, but that kid bought x [a brand of candy], every time I buy 10 candies, I share them with the others, but I don't even get one from them!' And my husband: 'Look! You want to teach him your "sharing", but then in life... I told you, this was coming!'. And so he's making me paranoid now, you know?» (L.)

Even asking or giving help to others - relying on one's family or community networks, or on public services - can be socially approved, or become a source of shame and negative stigma associated with "not autonomous people". The experience seems to differ, depending on the quality of exchanges in social networks and the assumed values ("individual autonomy" vs. "interdependence"), which in turn are constructed in relation to different meanings, associated to social categories that are intertwined in different ways.

Sonia, an Italian mother, living in the South in a small town, explains how, when she does not have enough money "to arrive at the end of the month", relatives, neighbors, and shopkeepers help her and her family, recognizing them as trustworthy. Sharing and exchange seem more valued in a context where economic poverty is a condition of many, and community ties are stronger. Daria, a single mother from Bosnia, escaped from the violence perpetrated by her husband, and now she is living in the Northeast of Italy; Daria states that "it is not shameful to be poor", but she actually feels ashamed to ask for help. Even if, in her words, "being poor" is portrayed as an unchosen condition, asking to others means publicly showing not to be able to make it. The experience is even more humiliating as parents. Franca is an Italian single mother who moved from the South to a northern city, where she can count on help from her brother and the presence of a stronger network of public services. Franca explains that being poor "is not a humiliation, but you live it as such", especially when you have responsibilities to your children. Her discourse seems to justify somehow her condition of economic deprivation in relation to contextual variables, but also to assume that the responsibility of care for children lies first and foremost with the parents, so it is up to them to cope, regardless of their conditions.

«However, when you need to ask for help to others for your children's needs, you feel a little bit like ... it's not a humiliation, because unfortunately we are all in it, unfortunately this period is difficult, but... you live it as such [a humiliation] ... for parents not being able to meet the basic needs of their children is something that ... it's really hard». (F.)

Also being identified as a "service user" becomes a source of stigma, when it is assumed that service recipients are people who are not able to cope by themselves, people with weaker capacities and strengths. Ciro, a father who lives in the South, recounts, for example, the refusal of his niece, for whom he has guardianship, to attend a day care center for "disadvantaged youth", a condition that makes her feel different and exposes her to the risk of being labeled by her classmates. At the same time, Ciro suggests the importance of "services for all", avoiding pathways for "second class children".

Being a parent "known to social services" becomes in many cases not only a source of shame, but of "fear" for not being considered as an "adequate parent". This happens in interaction with professionals perceived as representatives of institutions aimed at controlling parents' performances in relation to standards that are equal for all, therefore unable to deeply understand and consider their perspective and the impact of contextual conditions.

An emerging topic, though often not explicitly addressed, concerns the value placed or denied

on family members that are in charge of caregiving. In many families, the traditional gender division of labor in line with a patriarchal model, seems to be taken for granted; other parents described instead attempts to equally share house keeping and childrearing. In most interviews, it is evident how the recognition of the importance of care as a form of social reproduction is, at best, limited to the household, but misrecognized in the public sphere, where "income-producing" work is required.

The consequences of the misrecognition of care emerge predominantly in mothers' narratives, sometimes even in the form of internalized stereotypes. Elena, an Italian mother living in the North, a housewife, explains how despite choosing to become a mother "as a gift", not being able to contribute economically for her family struggling with poverty makes her feel "useless" and less worthy of esteem:

«I wanted to become a mother, that was my choice (...), so, I stopped working, even if it was my passion selling books, really; and I became a mother... And sometimes you feel... because only your husband is working, so you feel useless [E. cries]. Maybe not useless... but as you are not really helping your family, right? So, this makes you... it lowers your esteem [E. cries] a little bit, your self-esteem». (E.)

Two fathers expressed awareness of their privileges as men in a dominant discourse that devalues care, more often attributed to women. For a period, Fabrizio was the principal caregiver of his four children, since his wife had easier access to work; he explained how, while doing it, he realized how care work is not recognized, both for the value it brings and the "sacrifices" it entails.

«I found myself in this situation, and I had to do it; and now... to say that a woman who takes care of the house and the children show less commitment than a woman who goes to work sounds like heresy to me, the wrongest thing I have heard; a woman who is forced to give up work and to neglect herself, because that's basically how it works in practice, she also ends up being judged». (F.)

5. Discussion and conclusions: the "cage of oppression" and the possible ways out

Our findings are useful to highlight how the intersection of multiple forms of oppression makes parents living in poverty as systematically vulnerable (Frye, 1983). Their experience is confined and shaped by forces «which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable», but inter-related «in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction» (Frye, 1983, pp. 4-5).

Frye states that the experience of oppressed people is that of "being caged", surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers. Similarly, the image of a "lion in a cage" was used by one of the interviewed (paragraph 4.1), to describe how all her daily efforts and struggles are constantly frustrated, leading to the feeling of being trapped, despite her strength and constant battles. The experience of forces that restrain, restrict or hamper the possibility of moving forward is common to our participants facing economic disadvantage. On the one hand, people in poverty are prevented from accessing the resources necessary to live independently; on the other hand, dominant cultural assumptions place in a position of inferiority those who do not access adequate resources to participate in social life as the others. Within these processes, parents who cannot ensure the satisfaction of material and educational needs risk to be considered as inadequate; for some, this judgment may become internalized and experienced in the form of guilt and shame. This paradoxical condition - being simultaneously excluded and judged for the consequences of exclusion - varies in relation to different social positioning that allow or hamper the access to material and symbolic resources.

While the impact of structural forms of oppression in limiting possibilities is evident, our findings also highlight how the meanings and practices associated to social categories that interact in producing oppression are constructed and therefore transforming, without excluding indi-

viduals' agency. Parents draw on and confront the dominant narratives, internalizing them, reacting to them, defending themselves, or trying to assert new perspectives and interpretations of reality. Forms of internalized oppression are recognized in some discourses, when parents seem to normalize their conditions of disadvantage, and refer to the same dominant ideologies that exclude their perspective. By contrast, other parents describe several forms of resistance to oppressive structures, and attempts to assert different standpoints. For example, many respondents seem to refer to a dominant cultural model that represents autonomy as a condition in which one achieves self-sufficiency, free from dependence on others and external help. Others proposed a different perspective, one that values interdependence, as the possibility of building one's autonomy within relationships of solidarity, based on sharing. The first position is consistent with a representation of autonomy, widespread in modern Western societies, in line with an individualistic culture. By denying the vulnerability of human beings as a common ontological condition, this representation obscures not only the structural and relational variables that influence autonomy, but also the social practices functional to its maintenance. It is a cultural model, dominant in liberal societies, consistent with a patriarchal culture, that has in fact promoted positions of "privileged autonomy" for some (males, adults and affluent), at the expense of others (women, for a long time legally and socially deprived of autonomy, and people from impoverished groups, "serving" the privileged ones) (Verza, 2018, p. 240). For a long time care work, despite its essential contribution to social reproduction, has been relegated into the private sphere, devalued, most often attributed to women or delegated to the "working poor", namely those employed in poorly recognized jobs. From the second half of the last century, unpaid care work and income-generating jobs have been competing within systems that enabled women's emancipation, allowing their greater participation in the public sphere (Camozzi, 2020). In affluent (Western) households, some of the activities related to home care and care work for family members have been delegated to domestic workers (mostly, migrant women) from poorer backgrounds. In the "global chain of care" (Hochschild, 2007) the dimensions of class, gender, and ethnicity are now intertwined, with a national and international division of labor that reproduces forms of inequality and social oppression.

Oppression is also reproduced through the institutions in residual models of welfare systems, in fact excluding the ideas of interdependence and reciprocity, and assuming their beneficiaries as those who are "weaker", with the perverse effect of further stigmatizing them (Verza, 2018), as highlighted from some of our participants.

Also the discourse on intensive parenting is consistent with an individualistic view of parental autonomy and responsibility, obscuring the influence of contextual variables, with the risk of blaming parents as the only responsible for possible negative outcomes in their children's developmental path. This assumption spreads a narrative that easily results in epistemic and discursive forms of injustice, which can induce internalized oppression.

The reflections shared by parents also point to possible ways out of the "cage of oppression". Many indicate how structural barriers can be broken down by institutions taking responsibility for promoting access to the resources needed to ensure a decent life and dignity for all. Participants have also described their attempts to affirm different perspectives that value mutual aid, solidarity, reciprocity and collective efforts to address common social issues.

These positions seem to be reflected in the concept of "relational autonomy" (Anderson and Honneth, 2005; Verza, 2018, op. cit.), which considers vulnerability and diversity as conditions of human beings, rather than making them the object of social stigma. Interdependence is recognized as a necessary condition for autonomy, at the same time resisting the dominant idea according to which collective well-being depends on economic development only (Prilleltensky, 2003). The inclusion of such a perspective, however, implies for "privileged" groups the recognition and the willingness to question their position of unearned advantage (Pease, 2010). It entails unveiling how their autonomy is not just a self-earned condition, as well as their power and strengths are not simply due to their own achievement, but conferred as members of groups

that are attributed privileges related to gender (male), to living in wealthier contexts with greater opportunities, and to having access to well-paid jobs.

This study highlights how the integration of concepts from the intersectional approach and the anti-oppressive perspective (Baines, 2007) allows not only to overcome individual-blame explanations of poverty, but also to critically analyse assumptions that orient policies and interventions. If the latter are ultimately based on the idea of "activation" to foster individual autonomy through temporary aids for the "vulnerable", without addressing structural roots of disadvantage, they actually risk obscuring the systems of domination that maintain conditions of privilege for some, through the exploitation of the most oppressed groups.

An intersectional lens can help policy makers as well as professionals to recognize and critically question the invisibility of disadvantaged populations. Redistribution of resources and welfare interventions able to vehicle recognition (Honneth, 2005; Lister, 2001; Krumer-Nevo, 2020) are keys in the formulation and implementation of policies to tackle poverty as a form of multi-facet form of social oppression. Anti-poverty politics and interventions need to address both questions of material resources and of power relations within and among groups, overcoming programmes which consider separate systems of oppression, focusing on one, while obscuring the others. This perspective also implies the willingness and the capacity to activate people's participation, recognizing them as "experts", not only of their unique situation, but also of how unjust systems that impact on their lives can be transformed.

Future research can help move in the direction of anti-oppressive policy and services, in several ways. Through a constructivist approach to intersectionality, it is possible to highlight the risk of essentialization of both social categories and identities (Colombo e Rebughini, 2016), leading to othering processes both in the public debate and in welfare services. Studies can further contribute to explore power dynamics in socially constructed identities and structures, as a way to foster awareness and change. Researchers can also think themselves as allies with citizens, professionals and policy makers, giving back power to different voices; the fight against poverty can be interpreted as a collective action, to advocate for the development of welfare systems authentically oriented toward the promotion of social justice, overcoming discourses that only formally defend the access of people to human rights.

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Intersectional approach within Italian anti-violence centres. Challenges for research and policies²

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the call for the adoption of an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991) in the social sciences seems to state the obvious, claiming as it does to consider every dimension of an individual's life as intertwined and shaped by the interactions of different social attributes of identity concurrently: gender, class, sexuality, age, migratory condition, culture, dis-ability, among others. Each of these categories of belonging can be considered as a code that in everyday life is mixed with others and is sensitive to the specific context of power relations. Furthermore, these codes are associated with symbolic constructions, shared representations, connected social structures related to the distribution of opportunities and vulnerabilities. The intersectional approach points to considering simultaneously all the axes of subordination that subjects experience and incorporate. That means that intersectionality is an epistemological and analytical transdisciplinary device used to understand power, inequalities, privileges, and their role in defining subjective and collective experiences.

This way of framing social problems and the challenges of contemporary inequalities is crucial in empirical research as well as at the epistemological level: often, variations and causalities are measured and explained by one or two variables (gender and nationality or religion, or age or culture), as if these simplified categorisations are enough to inform any practice enacted and signified by the subjects and groups analysed (Eve, 2013). Quite the contrary, simplified constructions and standardisations of categories in social analysis often end up reifying subjective and collective paths from partial dimensions assumed to be unambiguous determinants of social experience (McCall, 2005). People, indeed, normally carry and embody more diversity at the same time. The challenge proposed by intersectionality is, also, that of recognising and analysing both the differences among the people who are categorised into each group, and the similarities among those defined into different groups. This is a crucial debate for critical sociology, which aims to reflect on the relationship between belonging and social environment in the construction of subjective paths, thus focusing on both contexts, structures and institutions, and identity characteristics.

Born as a political tool to give voice and recognition to the so-called minorities, criticising the single-issue agendas of the anti-racist and feminist movements (Rebughini, 2021), intersectionality has been at the centre of the gender studies agenda (Yuval-Davies, 2011) since before Kimberlè Crenshaw (1989) invented the word. During the last decades, this concept has become crucial in feminist theories as well as capable of contaminating other areas of knowledge production (Vuola, 2017). Over the years, in its "amazing journey" (Lutz, 2016), this concept has become very popular, and its success has resulted in its diffusion to such an extent that it has become a buzz word (Davis, 2008), particularly when it comes to translating it from the theoretical to the empirical plane.

This article offers a reading, in the Italian context, of the international debate on the use of an intersectional approach in research on male violence against women (VAW). First, it addresses one of the most debated arguments in the scholarly discussion on gender relations, namely the dualist interpretative approach based on the differences between women and men. The first paragraph offers a literature review on male violence, arguing for the need for postures oriented

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towards the adoption of a gender-sensitive approach. After the methodological description of the fieldwork, the following paragraphs will present and discuss some of the representations of “women in situations of violence” and “women who access services” shared by Italian anti-violence centres’ (AVC) and shelters’ workers and activists, and then representation of the particular methodologies enacted by AVCs of feminist and women’s groups in supporting survivors. Among others, the goal of AVCs’ interventions is confronting violence and supporting women in their pathway out of violence and towards self-determination. The aim of this article is to analyse constructions of meaning that implicitly define boundaries and stratifications of social eligibility granted (or denied) to the subjects in relation to their embodied differences, and to identify potentials and limits of the particular AVCs’ intervention methodologies, which could be useful in rethinking care models.

2. Theoretical frame: dualist approach and intersectionality in the violence against women debate.

During the 1970s and 1980s, researchers in feminist, women’s and gender studies, as well as those in racial theory and postcolonial studies, started to problematise the issue of differences in relation to a presumed homogeneity within the social group of “women” or of “black people”, produced by a dualist thinking not empirically detected (Gregori, 1993). When talking about gender relations analysis, the critique was of relying on the myth of womanhood as an internally homogeneous category (Swindler, 1986), based on the sociological notion of the sameness built on a shared oppression. This kind of conceptualisation, to define the “woman” (but, in the same way, “the poor”, “the black”, “the young” people) as the ideal-type of the whole of the differences measurable within the human experiences of subjects that define themselves (or are defined) as “women”, ends up ignoring the differences among “women as a group built up by narrations” and “women as their own *herstories* subjects” (Scott, 1988). The proposal consisted in taking into account the extent to which subjects constitute themselves (subjectively and as a group) through the practices proper to their statuses and roles, which in turn derive from the interaction between class, cultural, religious, age and sexual orientation affiliations, and not simply as a function of a particular economic system or other differentiations considered individually (Mohanty, 2003). More generally, the critique refers to the idea of “gender” as a self-sufficient modality of difference, without considering how each identity attribute affects in daily life practices and patterns of behaviour that each person represents. Furthermore, the category of gender does not coincide with that of “women”, even less when built on a singular, universal, unique model of identity, namely that of the heterosexual, western, white and middle-class woman (Moore, 1994). These reflections have run throughout the scholarly debates on male VAW, in particular those born from adopting and discussing feminist patriarchal theory (Firestone, 1970; Millet, 1970; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This theory has been crucial in the conceptualisation of VAW as gendered, but it has been criticised because, while highlighting the direction of violence itself (Walby et al., 2017), it has obscured the weight of both social context and subjective representations, both of which are necessary to understand gender-based VAW (Carby, 1982).

Three main arguments were made to claim the importance of distinguishing among differences (Toffanin, 2021): the first calls for considering power relations within the field of gender relations, recognising that subjects’ concrete experiences (and their meanings) result from the interaction of different systems of domination, not only that of patriarchy: gender, “race” and culture are not to be considered as separate categories, but as “regimes of difference” linked to each other (Mason, 2002). This approach will allow us to understand the processes through which different categories of identity are built up and interact with each other (Wyatt, 1985; Hart, 1986; Crenshaw, 1991).

The second argument concerns the opposition between women-victims and men-aggressors in a kind of biological foundationalism in which attributed sex, biological body and socially fixed gender roles are overlapped (Nicholson & Seidman, 1999; Butler, 1993; Danna, 2007). Among other things, it would exclude from analysis the experiences of anyone who does not coincide with this dichotomic model: women who act out violence, men who try not to benefit from privilege, and individuals who experience violence because they do not conform to predefined gender roles and stereotypical gender identities that are functional to the dominant social order. Finally, the third critique of the patriarchal approach refers to the production of representations: the risk would be of portraying male dominance as insurmountable, underestimating women's capacity to enact practices that renegotiate subordination (Heise, 1995; Michalski, 2005). In this sense, international (Hearn, 1996) and national (Ventimiglia, 1987) debates on masculinities have already critically discussed the nexus between social construction of masculinities and violence. Here the proposal is to consider as crucial the differences between various experiences, constructed in different ways depending on the social, political and economic contexts (Bimbi, 2019). The intersectional approach states exactly the need to develop cognitive and empirical tools to recognise the interaction of class, gender and race/ethnicity, in order to understand the articulation of power relations, without producing inconsistent analysis that considers as separated and internally homogeneous the social divisions and categorisations produced by racialisation, genderisation, classism (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Within this debate, studies on gender-based violence suffered by women belonging to marginalised groups, particularly those women actively experiencing migration (Bograd, 1999; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010; Raj & Silverman, 2002), are particularly useful in demonstrating how to embody intersectionality as an analytical tool that helps to make distinctions, being able to investigate both the experiences of violence in the dynamic intersection of sex, gender, class and racialisation processes (Jonhson & Ferraro, 2000), and the differences between different symbolic-cultural horizons that also persist within (hetero)defined social groups (Crichton-Hill, 2001).

These studies have highlighted the specific vulnerability that every woman may suffer as a woman and a migrant: critical elements do not only refer to the intersection of direct sexism and racism, but also to the effects of processes related to administrative constraints on the regularisation of the residence permit, and housing or labour policies. These issues reveal the weight of structural or social limitations also on the possibility of asking for help, or not, outside personal social networks (Toffanin, 2015). For example, it can be difficult for a migrant woman to leave her violent employer or her husband, if her legal status depends on her job or her marriage, as the Grevio³ report on Italy warns (2020). Other conditions that can make it harder to find exit routes from violence for migrant women are linked to possibly reduced social networks, or to professional devaluation that complicates (or prevents) access to the labour market (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Pederson, 2009; Bimbi, 2014).

There are, then, analyses focused on the relation between migrant women and public and private services supporting survivors of VAW. They highlight that some women may feel uncomfortable approaching public or private social services because of different language and cultural norms, or because of the fear of possible racist stereotypes, or because of the perception that they cannot (or will not) adhere to the "ideal" victim model shared in their society of immigration (Brännvall, 2012; Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005; Villalón, 2010). Finally, some analyses have pointed out the so-called secondary victimisation, that is, the condition of additional suffering experienced by those who turn to public or private actors looking for help but instead receive neglect, blame, or devaluation (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Fanci, 2011). The combination of these elements

3 The "Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" (Grevio) is an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ("the Istanbul Convention") by the parties.

can negatively affect confidence in accessing public and private social services: the fear is, on the one hand, of being discriminated against and/or exacerbating stereotypes of one's social group, and on the other hand, of not being properly helped. Finally, many women refer to their concern that their situation may get worse, more serious or more dangerous, if they try to seek help (Leone et al., 2014).

From the results of these studies, we analyse whether and how, in Italian anti-violence centres, an intersectional approach has developed: the question is if, in their practices and methodologies, anti-violence workers and activists have incorporated a standpoint that is attentive to subjective experiences, also considering the specific social, political and economic contexts in which they occur. That means a kind of care for differences capable of recognising the survivors' subjectivities without reifying them.

3. Methodology

The focus of this study is the Italian anti-violence system and in particular the universe of AVCs born from the experiences of women's and feminist groups. Within these places, specific methodologies to support women in situations of violence are practiced, oriented towards women's agency and personalised interventions (Busi et al., 2021). It is a privileged observation point for reasoning about the relationships between workers and users, which can also provide useful information for rethinking the interventions activated by public and private social services in the sphere of social care, health and school policies (Toffanin, 2022).

This article is built on data and analysis collected during the ViVa Project⁴ research activities. It refers to quantitative data collected in 2018 among the 335 AVCs and 264 shelters mapped in 2018 by IRPPS-CNR in collaboration with ISTAT (Misiti, 2019), and, simultaneously, to qualitative data collected in 2019 and 2020 analysing both thirty-eight case studies involving thirty-five AVCs and six shelters selected from all over Italy, considering their experience (in terms of years of activity) and the type of management, either public or private non-profit (Toffanin et al., 2021). Each case-study involved a desk analysis of the relevant contexts, study visits and interviews with workers and activists, with the aim of analysing representations of violence, survivors, perpetrators; professional practices, methodologies and organisational routines; network activities; sustainability.

The adoption of an intersectional approach has been considered indispensable in guiding the conceptualisation of research tools and analytical activities as well as interpretative ones. Nevertheless, it was not initially included as an argument within the interviews, even if a thematic panel questioned the AVCs' and shelters' practices in dealing with women with multiple vulnerabilities, such as those related to age, migratory condition, sexual orientation, disabilities.

From the perspective of research practice, in the last thirty years there have been many attempts to move beyond the merely additive approach (McCall, 2005). At the same time, the focus has shifted to the categories themselves employed in research (MacKinnon, 2013), highlighting that they result from the dynamic intersections between multiple hierarchies, within processes built up by workers, activists and, generally, the people (Corradi, 2013). During the research activities, such as in the daily routines, these categories often end up statically fixing the identities of individuals and groups, essentialising them, and hiding the dynamic and relational aspect of memberships and identities.

From the analytical point of view, the focus here is on the relationship between woman and worker/activist, and in particular to the latter's own positionality in models and practices of in-

4 The ViVa Project focused on the Italian anti-violence system, mapping and analysing the measures (in terms of policies, politics and services) to prevent and fight violence against women. Additionally, the project monitored and evaluated the interventions implemented. The project started in December 2017 and ended in June 2021. A second wave of the project began in April 2022. For more information please visit: <https://viva.cnr.it/en/>

interventions framed by a care approach. The analysis is based on those AVCs and shelters that represent themselves by referring to feminist and women's movements and acting "methodologies of relationship among women" in their daily routines and practices, as well as their internal organisation (Busi et al., 2021). AVCs' activities are also linked to the production of the knowledge and expertise developed by women's and feminist groups in the field of anti-violence in Italy. In this sense, the research practice adopted considered the workers interviewed as competent subjects with agency and history (Madison, 2005). We hypothesised that the narratives collected within the research activity would allow us to reason about the relational dimension that is at the heart of the debate on intersectionality (Cherubini et al., 2020).

If we consider the research activities, some of the main questions, which also crossed the AIS Gender 2021 Conference, remain partially open: how do we transcend the ethnic/racial/gender/class/victimisation/othering frame of reference and dismantle the insuperable boundaries of otherness that end up reifying differences, as well as avoid simplified approaches to social inclusion? And conversely, is it possible, and if so how, to produce knowledge on the experience of others? Following the assumption that the relational dimension is embedded in the construction of inequalities, feminist studies propose routes to possible solutions, for instance by applying an "epistemology of partiality" (Haraway, 1988), and by focusing on the relational dimension and the researcher's continuous self-reflexive process, in order to take in charge, also, one's own position of privilege (Fremlova, 2018). To improve our capacity to adopt a "reflexive sociology" posture (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), each interview was conducted in pairs: active listening and the simultaneous participation of two researchers enriched the internal confrontation within the research group as well as the processes of self-reflexivity and analysis of each one.

4. Universalism and intersectionality? Activists' and workers' representations of women in situations of violence and methodologies of intervention.

During the interviews, AVCs' and shelters' activists and workers came up with very similar representations to describe their survivors-oriented methodologies, using the same words and expressions.⁵ The emphasis is on the horizontal relational dimension of their practices, based on the meetings among women that are expert on violence: those who work in an AVC, whose expertise is related to specific training and grassroots professional experience, and those who enter an AVC for help because they are living a situation of violence. According to these methodologies, workers (who welcome) and women (who express needs and desires) build together personalised paths out of violence, starting from the survivors' subjective time, desires and needs, and not from professional or organisational routines (Goodman et al., 2016). The interventions enacted following these methodologies are described by AVCs' workers and activists as "accompaniment", and this practice differentiates AVCs from social, health, security and welfare services (Guarnieri, 2018, p. 21).

In their interviews, talking about VAW and their methodologies, often AVCs' workers and activists refer to "sisterhood" in defining practices, methodologies and routines. In these narrations, the asymmetry of the helping relationships seems concealed, at least from a discursive point of view, and a universalist representation prevails, in which women's common category membership is described as prevailing over the acknowledgement of each woman's differences. These

5 The description of organisational routines and daily practices reveals often a more diverse landscape (Toffanin et al., 2021). To give an example, from a formal point of view, some AVCs do not pre-define any limits to the interventions with regard to duration, number of individual meetings or type of service to be activated, while others follow a standardised process, proposing a sort of "menu-based" approach, offering a set of options for assistance framed in a fixed number of meetings. In many cases, this attempt to typify the variability of the paths moves from organisational and managerial needs, or from an assessment of the (scarce) resources available, to have also an impact of standardisation and regularisation on the Italian anti-violence system.

narratives follow the description of violence as a cross-cutting phenomenon which, since it is a structural problem, can affect any type of woman, particularly women who are or have been in an intimate relationship, as the surveys conducted by ISTAT (2007, 2014) have already revealed. It is interesting to note that, at the same time, workers and activists name the differences included in the category of woman, specifying that they do not impact on the risk of suffering violence but rather on the ways out:

«It is clear that different resources, such as social or cognitive competences as well as economic possibilities, can help in the path to exit from violence, but in experiencing violence there are no differences» (AVC 12, September 2019).

So, each path out from VAW may be very different, both on the basis of the lived experiences and needs of the women and the moment when they arrive at the AVC, and also in terms of self-reflection on their relation: *«Every woman has her own time, has her own questions. There is a world of needs behind it»* (AVC18, July 2019.)

As already mentioned, interviews did not include a specific focus on "intersectional" practices and training, although they did refer to the issues of interventions aimed at migrant women, disabled, very young or elderly women, women with addictions. However, the analysis highlights that activists and workers are aware of the criticalities of working with women with multiple vulnerabilities. According to AVCs' workers and activists, their survivor-defined practices based on "relations among women" is the tool to customise interventions according to one's own unique circumstances and hopes for the future (Davies & Lyon, 2013). Often, a universalistic approach based on a representation of women's sameness is applied. In this context, nevertheless, intersectionality is described as virtually embedded in each practice: the heterogeneity of women's needs requires personalised interventions, as each one's situations, desires, goals and needs "vary enormously by virtue of culture, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, degree of social connectedness, family situation, and many other factors", as previous researches revealed (Goodman et al., 2016, 165).

In the daily practice, to guarantee this approach is often extremely complex, also because of contextual factors: women's paths usually concern many different areas and domains (safety, housing, employment, social connection, the well-being of children, ...) involving collaboration with social services, hospitals, police departments, the justice system, child protective services, among others.

Regarding the professional routines and practices enacted, qualitative interviews reveal a strong polarisation among AVCs. On the one hand, many AVCs seem to maintain a universalist approach to VAW, which is not always able to make distinctions in order to avoid transforming diversity into inequalities. The risk remains that of the designation of "other", of the attribution of characteristics that distinguish particular categories of people from some presumed (and usually unstated) norms (Scott, 1988). On the other hand, we find (a few) AVCs with great experience, expertise and professionalism in working with diversities, able to operationalise and make concrete that intersectional approach to supporting women and confronting VAW.

In the next paragraphs, the analysis focuses on AVCs workers' representation of women-users' diversities and multiple vulnerabilities, the criticalities in maintaining their specific methodologies, and some tools useful in order to manage these complexities.

4.1 Same methodologies for different women and different needs?

Analysis reveals representations of huge heterogeneity among AVCs' users. A first element of difference is related to the social context in which the AVCs are active. AVCs in big or medium-sized urban centres, characterised by a historical and established presence in the territory, well known

by the citizens, and associated with an idea of greater confidentiality, have a high number of users, both working- and middle-class women, including professional, highly skilled, successful ones. In contrast, in the AVCs that are based in small towns and have a limited number of contacts, one encounters predominantly women with low educational qualifications and income levels, employed in precarious work positions and/or limited to the domestic sphere. According to the workers in these places, these categories of women have less difficulty in approaching AVCs than others who also have other resources to deal with the problem, such as: «Those who have extra tools get by on their own, find the psychologist, find help first» (AVC4, July 2019).

The role of economic, social and symbolic resources that can be activated to get out of a violent situation is particularly noted when referring to the shelters:

«Women in shelters often have social and/or economic issues (...) We were already seeing this fifteen years ago in other European countries, and now it's here: in the shelters there are women who also have other social issues besides violence. 80 percent are migrants, while in the AVCs more Italians come, even of a high social and cultural level» (AVC 6, September 2019).

The quote mentions the migratory condition, which seems to be the most attentively addressed by workers in Italian AVCs and shelters, as the vulnerabilities lived by migrant women are recognised and well documented. In relation to migrants, often activists and workers do not mention cultural differences: instead, they refer to poverty or lack of social networks and, more generally, material obstacles. If, on the one hand, there is an awareness of avoiding culturalised interventions, on the other, it should be considered that the migratory condition does not in itself coincide with that of poverty (even if many migrant women accessing AVCs, and shelters in particular, are in precarious situations from an economic point of view). The risk, here, is to focus only on material obstacles in migrant women's lives, leaving in the background the need to protect women's rights as universal human rights. The point is that, even if material conditions have to be considered, they cannot overshadow other elements that interact in producing subordinations.

According to the surveys conducted by IRPPS-CNR and ISTAT since 2018, more than 75 percent of women who access AVCs are Italian. The workers' perception though is that there is a huge presence of migrant women among their "users". Despite this, in 2019-20 only 48.1 percent of Italian AVCs included among their services linguistic and cultural mediation. Furthermore, only 25.4 percent offered support to migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women. So, this kind of service is not capillary or widespread throughout the country. The Covid pandemic has made the situation even worse: in fact, in 2020 90 percent of the AVCs reported a decline in requests for help from migrant and asylum-seeking women. That means that during lockdown they were left to deal with violent situations on their own.

Going beyond migratory conditions, if we consider other types of differences, such as younger or older age, sexual orientation, disabilities, only 2.2 percent of AVCs offered specific support (ISTAT, 2021). In some territories, namely those where AVCs have activated informational and awareness-raising campaigns together with NGOs, schools and universities, these groups of women have become more visible in also contacting AVCs. In other contexts, workers and activists of many AVCs refer to the criticalities of dealing with very young or very old women, while others name their difficulties in dealing with women in lesbian relationships in a situation of violence. Lastly, many workers refer to the fact that it is still very difficult to plan and organise support for women with addiction problems, as well as those with disabilities.

4.2 Economic vulnerabilities and challenges for relational methodologies.

Supporting women in their pathway out of violence and towards self-determination appears to be particularly challenging when helping women with multiple vulnerabilities, as the stratifi-

cation of women's experiences can affect the methodology of keeping survivors at the core of interventions.

Focusing on the experiences of women living in shelters, it appears that socio-economic vulnerabilities are often combined with few social networks and no job experience, which means that these women are often facing many difficulties aside from the gender violence in their marriages. As VAW is a multifaceted phenomenon, impacting many dimensions of women's daily lives, the support activities in the case of VAW could not be undertaken without an alliance with public and private social services, in particular, but not limited to, the issues related to the labour market, economic precarity and housing (Gadda & Mauri, 2021). In this sense, networking activity has become crucial for many AVCs and shelters, opening up new challenges related to the conservation of their particular methodology.

In some activists' representations, besides their subjective precarities, these women face the structural and sociocultural aspects of the Italian welfare system and labour market that often end up prolonging their length of stay in those institutions. Then, these survivors risk being unable, in a short time, to be autonomous in acting out rights and citizenship practices in the Italian public space, namely in the labour market.

«The poorest women are also the ones who use shelters... And their pathways are longer and longer. This is because they are often poor women, that often coincides with being migrants in this historical context (...) you clash with the outside (...): there is sometimes a lot of racism in giving jobs to migrant women... they only find precarious, fragile, few-hour jobs (...) And then there is the problem of housing, because the private market is unaffordable, it is inaccessible for many women, especially if they are single women with children» (AVC-Shelter A, September 2019).

So, the operators of AVCs and shelters warn about two main orders of problem concerning keeping their own methodologies. The first refers to the socio-economic context and the second to the possibility of maintaining a horizontal relation with survivors. Regarding to the first, on the one hand, material problems related to the lack of economic resources may impact on the possibility of changing homes, with all the expenses involved such as paying for the move, initial rent, security advances, fees of intermediaries, if any, and then bills. Then, on the other hand, workers and activists highlight the stereotypes to which these women are subjected: in their opinion, neither employers nor housing market actors offer opportunities to "women in a situation of violence", particularly if they are migrants and with children, as they are considered the most vulnerable category, identified with low or no spending capacity, unreliable with respect to the continuity of rent payments, as well as with complying with labour market requests in terms of presence. In these cases, often AVCs manage to find creative solutions:

«A foreign woman had found a house and it was very important for her because it also meant residence, but she didn't have the deposit and so we... well, we have a "stash fund". The boss doesn't know this, but we lent the lady money with a receipt.... It's not a donation, it's a loan. She has a house, she has residence, and she can become independent... and she will give us the money back» (AVC 10, June 2019).

The issue of money, furthermore, is a good topic in relation to which to discuss the criticalities for AVCs workers in building a horizontal relation "among women", keeping the protagonism of the "other" at the core, with women perceived as poorer and more isolated than oneself. The problem is also connected with the public funding system and the organisational routines of protection, that end up limiting and disempowering survivors instead of helping them to build up their autonomy.

«We give the money to the women, but we have to account for each expenditure. So they have to give us receipts. This is heavy work. It is an additional control you have over the women. It is an

additional dependence they have on us that is not easy to handle. The relationship with money is difficult. These are delicate things that also affect the relationship» (AVC 24, October 2019).

Even if these aspects have not been openly debated during the interviews, at the same time they have been leaked. If in some anti-violence centres women workers work to empower women, through paths that are often very long and with uncertain (and difficult-to-measure) results, in others empowerment is implemented through controlling practices, such as a request to show the receipt for grocery shopping, and the imposition of which items to buy as a priority. Another challenging sphere is that of women's sociality, including the dimension of sexual behaviour.

«We become punitive! In shelters women live in situations of cohabitation. Living in a shelter is a strong limitation of women's freedom and sometimes they emphasise it. (...) If one is in a shelter for two years, migrant or not, she has to keep up her duties, respect the timetable and our rules, to be a good mother, keep track of money and everything we ask of her (...) But, for instance, where does she have sex? (...) Bye-bye privacy (...) Workers sometimes have to be the controller, which is not our right, but it would not be up to the social workers either, who log on to Facebook to see where a woman went ... because she cannot go to a disco» (AVC-Shelter B, October 2019).

These practices of control emerged also in other analyses focused on vulnerabilised experiences (Pasian, Toffanin, 2018) and are well discussed in the debate on care as protection and control (Held, 2010; Tronto, 2013).

Finally, methodologies' suspension may occur when children are involved or in a high-risk situation:

«If it is a situation that is assessed as "high risk" or there are children, the situation changes a little, because we have a responsibility that we cannot ignore. (...) You try, I don't say to force the hand, but to make women understand that the situation is serious» (AVC 31, June 2019).

Despite all these critical issues, there are AVCs able to maintain their specific methodologies even in the face of all the administrative constraints, tensions in the territorial networks, and limitations of the socio-economic context. In the next paragraph some tools enacted by these AVCs are described.

4.3 Keeping to survivor-oriented interventions

Activists and workers are aware of the criticalities of working with women with multiple vulnerabilities, and they refer to their practices in order to manage them. Among the AVCs there are those able to maintain their methodologies, even in the challenging situation when survivors share projects, needs and desires both difficult to achieve and far removed from those considered appropriate by AVCs workers:

«Women find the door open even when they follow paths different from those considered appropriate by us: I have to do a job to remind myself that it is their story, their life, and not mine (...) The relationship is at the basis of everything, even there: I know that if I have a difficulty in that relationship, with that woman with whom I may not be able to.... if things don't work out, I know that I'm not alone, I have colleagues, the team and I can possibly pass the project on to someone else, even in an honest way» (AVC 21, August 2019).

Here, the training is central: it is composed of face-to-face training on the topic of VAW and of the methodology of relations among women, shadowing more experienced colleagues, and opportunities to activate self-reflective processes.

«When I started the training course, I already had ideas, but there were also surprises. In the training course we start from oneself and the stereotypes and attitudes that are inherent in each of us» (AVC1, June 2019).

Talking about specific intersectional training, it is not provided in all the AVC. Quantitative findings highlight that in 2020 only one out of two AVCs and two out of three shelters were engaged in specific training on the multiple vulnerabilities lived by migrant women. In the same direction, the results of qualitative analysis reveal an increasing demand by AVC workers and activists for training, demonstrating an awareness of how much the incorporation of multiple vulnerabilities may affect pathways out of violence, and, then, of the need of specific capacities and knowledges in order to deal with this kind of situation (even if in many cases, at the time of the interview, this training was only planned and had not yet been delivered).

«We are trying to prepare ourselves also culturally (for work with foreign women) but it is a time-consuming undertaking and we would need people dedicated to this, because one cannot do everything, and it is not easy to dedicate oneself to this» (AVC 4, October 2019).

Also, in relation to the interventions with women with disabilities, many workers refer to a lack of training: only one out of four AVCs and one out of five shelters report that they have promoted specific training, and very few AVCs say they are able to provide support and advocacy for women with mental disabilities.

In many AVCs, the “learning by doing” approach is emphasised, as well as the continuous confrontation between workers. Fundamental in this sense are multidisciplinary teams; in particular they often provide the possibility of active self-reflection and networking practices:

«When you work with a lawyer or a psychologist you inevitably learn something» (AVC5, September 2019).

«In the AVC you deal with people’s lives (...) When there is a team that works, there is trust, there is networking, and you feel supported. In this razor’s edge situation we are very sensitive to the support of those who are on top of us, those who work with us. I feel it when there is an organisational context that gives you confidence» (AVC10, June 2019).

Finally, many AVCs involve cultural mediators in order to facilitate the relations with migrant women, revealing some criticalities due to the need for specific gender violence training for these professionals, as well as their cost, in terms of sustainability.

Other research will analyse and discuss these kinds of relations between workers and users with multiple vulnerabilities, giving the opportunity for the scientific debate to go further in the reflection on the construction of alterity and the process of defining other-ness, starting from the process of categorisation and its effects on the construction of meanings, categories of belonging, social stratifications and boundaries. Here, I argued that intersectionality might be a resource to maintain the personalisation of standardised interventions (Toffanin et al., 2020), particularly to situate experiences in a symbolic, social and economic structure of relations, related to embodied belongings, claimed as well as assigned.

Conclusion

Thirty years of debate on intersectionality demonstrate that its journey is not yet over, and nor are the interpretative, ontological and epistemological conflicts that it generates (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). Nevertheless, its utility has been taken for granted as a tool to study the complex interactions between different social categories producing social inequalities (Hill Collins,

2015). This is possible keeping in mind the relational and contextual dimensions of human lives, at both the subjective and the social levels. By analysing the narrations about practices enacted within the AVCs to take care of diversity through survivor-oriented interventions, this study contributes to the current debate on anti-violence policies and interventions and their ability to propose personalised models of care to all women in situations of violence. The focus is on the challenges and the opportunity posed by an intersectional approach, starting from an analysis of the debate on gendered VAW. Following this interpretative reading of international researchers, intersectionality appears as a useful tool to conceptualise and understand the phenomenon, surmounting dualistic approaches based on contraposition of “man” and “woman” as internally uniform categories.

Many studies have focused on the capacity of society to respond to gender-based violence, and in particular to accompany women on exit paths: as here presented, they are crucial to discuss the results of an analysis of the Italian anti-violence system, and namely to reflect on the practices of AVCs’ and shelters’ workers and activists, represented as survivor-oriented, horizontal, non-judgmental interventions. Workers’ and activists’ narrations provide an awareness of how the presence of multiple vulnerabilities can define subjective experiences in specific ways, at the very least highlighting how there may be specific critical issues to be addressed, and how supporting activities are strictly connected to economic, social and cultural context. Sometimes, this awareness is informed by an intersectional approach, while for other professionals an additive approach seems to prevail.

Talking about methodologies of intervention, the analysis reveals huge heterogeneity in terms of practices as well as the symbolic and political meaning. Often the capacity to apply the intervention’s personalisation is still lacking when women with multiple victimisation are involved. As in the research practices, also in the support ones, the universal categorisation of womanhood risks veiling the differences produced by activists’, as well as researchers’, positionality and privilege (Wekker, 2004). Indeed, both in the practices of AVC workers and in those of researchers, an intersectional approach may help to keep in mind the meaning negotiation process enacted within the daily interaction with women in situations of violence: here, two subjects meet, they are engaged in a process of recognition of differences (of status, role, sometimes age, languages, cultures, racialisation) and similarities. In this sense, it appears that a survivor-oriented intervention can be more fruitful if it is based on active listening, non-judgmental sympathetic observation, self-reflective process, specific training, and team confrontation among workers. Moreover, an intersectional approach, focused on power structures in which embodied differences interact, can offer many tools to question one’s own positionality and avoid unconsciously reproducing inequalities, also considering that a universalistic approach, tailored on “mainstream” responses, can result in being unsuitable or harmful.

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Gender and Age. The Myth of Eternal Youth in Advertising²

1. Introduction

As Simone de Beauvoir pointed out in the 1970, it seems that the desire to appear younger than one actually is has become in contemporary society a real "social duty" to be carried out with commitment, unlike in the past when at the most it was occasionally referenced in myths and novels (for example *Faust* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), but it did not have the same wide-spread cogency.

Concepts of youth and old age are «social constructions» (Berger e Luckmann, 1966) and as such, vary in time and space. If we look at Nineteenth century literature, for example, we can see that in previous epochs the period of life known as 'youth' covered a very limited arc of years: it was a brief passage from childhood to adulthood, and one was deemed almost elderly at the age of forty.

As for geographical variations, in non-Western cultures, such as China, special prerogatives are granted to old age. In this country, the proverbial respect and consideration for the elderly, along with the prestige attributed to them as disseminators of knowledge, probably originates in the Confucian religion, centred on devotion to the family, particularly to parents, and worship of ancestors (Sciolla, 2002, p. 183) and, by extension, of the elderly. In the West, on the other hand, people who have dropped out of the productive system are no longer considered to be able to take an active part in society, except as agents of family welfare, and are devalued.

In his essay on the generations, Mannheim (2008 [1928/1929]) explains how the concept of youth was different in the past. In his opinion, youth began to be considered as a distinct period of life only between the two world wars, becoming idealized and praised during the Fascist dictatorships.

After the second world war, the condition of youth began to be discussed, and studies on the theme flourished; however, this only took into consideration the young themselves who, for various reasons, were more visible³. Several studies⁴ have been published on the subject of youth since the 1980s, giving rise to the origins of *Youth Studies*.

The psychologist Erikson (1974 [1968]) coined the term 'psychosocial moratorium' to describe the tendency typical of Western societies to stretch the period in life in which one is considered young.

A cultural climate that exalts the values of youth induces people to prolong the characteristics of youth over time and to judge those who have passed this stage of life in a negative way. An example of this is the fact that there are some Italian politicians who call for the *rottamazione* (a term with a negative connotative value that means replacement) of representatives in politics who are no longer young.

Although ageism gives rise to «differential and demeaning treatment that harms the rights or image of people belonging to [a certain] age group or cohort» (Corradi, 2012, p. 166), and thus can affect young people as well, «research in this area of social inequalities indicates the prevalence of discrimination against older people everywhere» (*ibidem*). Therefore, the widespread tendency to prolong the qualities of the early stages of life should come as no surprise.

The myth of eternal youth particularly concerns women, albeit to varying degrees in different

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3 The hippies at the end of the '50s; the "young rebels" of the '60s; the Beat Generation; the young protesters of 1968; then the yuppies, expressive of the retreat from politics; the new "Metropolitan Indians", etc.

4 In Italy, *Indagine Iard sulla condizione giovanile* (1984); Bobba e Nicoli (1988); Cavalli e De Lillo (1988); Cavalli (1990); Colucci (1984); De Masi and Signorelli (1978); Garelli (1984); Milanese (1989); Nicoli e Martino (1986); Rauty (1989). More recently, among others, Spanò (2018).

cultures. For example, Mernissi (2000) highlights the fact that the difference between the genders regarding this aspiration is particularly accentuated in Western societies. The Moroccan sociologist argues that in the East, in order to dominate women, men use "space" - particularly by forcing them to wear the veil if they want to go into public places - while in the West they use "time": a woman who does not appear young has no value; she is almost invisible⁵. This message has been embraced by several Western women who consequently live with an obsession to always look young.

The signs of this trend are the gradual spread of exercise and fitness activities, dietary control, body care, cosmetic surgery, and, on the communication level, the growth of advertising messages on topics related to youth and ageing, which are largely directed at women.

Therefore, the intersection of gender and age can produce discrimination's multiple forms: «numerous studies have added age to the list of factors that can create additional risks for women with regard to sexism» (Corradi, *op. cit.*, p. 175).

In order to effectively promote products, advertising images and commercials propose lifestyles (Fabris, 1997) by invoking easily recognizable values (e.g. beauty, elegance, youthfulness). In doing so, they rely on other values that remain implicit. Although the viewers do not perceive these hidden values, they are nevertheless influenced by them because they reproduce assumptions assimilated since primary socialization. This is the case, for example, with stereotypes regarding gender roles.

In order to achieve their goal, advertising creatives resort to emotional cues (linked to internalized values) rather than cognitive ones: in commercials, the informational element is often in a secondary position. Emotional cues, as Berger and Luckmann (*op. cit.*)⁶ point out, have a powerful persuasive force. And the more we identify with deeply assimilated values, the better the advertising messages are conveyed.

For the reasons described above, advertising images seem to me to be a reliable source of data gathering for social values (traditional and emergent). However, as suggested by cognitivist psychology and sociological trends, such as symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, the deepest values are those we are least conscious of, which are therefore difficult to recognize and interpret. I resorted to the conceptual framework of interactionism, which helps us to see things that usually remain hidden.

I was particularly inspired by the notion of «sensitizing concept» put forward by Blumer (1969, p. 148-49) and I used the concept 'definition of the situation' in the analysis. On this subject, Thomas (1931, p. 331) writes «Before any action that is self-determined there is always a phase of examination and decision which we may call 'definition of the situation'». This concept sheds light on the fact that it is the vision of the objects that guides reactions to them (Perrotta, 2009, p. 445). Subsequently, Berger and Luckmann highlight how the definitions of reality, assimilated during primary and secondary socialization processes, take on the meaning of objective truth, and become confused with "reality *tout court*".

2. Methodology

The methodological approach used is qualitative. The main aspects relevant to this study, which characterize it and differentiate it from the quantitative approach, can be summarized as follows:

a) Using this method, hypotheses about relationships between variables are not established; instead, an exploratory attitude is adopted. At most, conjectures are formulated (which do not involve, as in the case of hypotheses, causal models with possible cause-and-effects links)

5 On the images of women in the West and the Middle East, see Fobert Veutro (2010).

6 During primary socialization, the authors maintain, affective and emotional identification with agents of socialization is necessary in order to learn and interiorize values and models of behaviour, and even knowledge and skills.

- about the phenomenon under investigation. From the exploration of these conjectures (for example, that multiple discriminations related to gender and age exist in our society), useful hypotheses for subsequent studies with a different methodological approach can also emerge. This falls within what Reichenbach calls the 'context of discovery', as opposed to the 'context of justification' (1938) in which the researcher's task is to "explain" the identified relationships between variables.
- b) The purpose of the analysis is descriptive, not explanatory: the focus is on the "how" the phenomenon manifests itself, rather than the "why" (Perrotta, 2009, p. 82). The different objectives are consistent with the different ways of considering the object of study in the two approaches. In the qualitative approach, the object of study (whether it is a person, document, or event) is studied in its entirety, and its manifestations are described, creating classifications and typologies (such as those presented in the results and conclusions of this essay) that shed light on the motivations behind certain phenomena. In the quantitative approach, on the other hand, the object of study is broken down into operationalized properties as variables, and the purpose of the analysis is precisely to "explain" any identified relationships using statistical procedures (absent in qualitative analysis).
 - c) Regarding the sample, qualitative research does not have the constraint of size and representativeness typical of quantitative research. The selection of cases studied depends, each time, on the relevance attributed to them by the researcher(s) for the investigated phenomenon. It is not uncommon for research to be conducted on a few cases or even just one case (for example, Shaw, 1939; Castaneda, 1968). However, for this investigation, around 450 documents have been considered (see later on).
 - d) In quantitative research, it is assumed that the researcher's observation in conducting the investigation is «scientific, detached, neutral» (Corbetta, 1999, p.55), even though methodologies following this approach have long argued that standardized instruments do not eliminate the influence of the interaction between the researcher and the observed phenomenon and that «data must be constructed and, above all, interpreted» (Campelli, 1996, p. 29). In qualitative research, the researcher's personal knowledge (including tacit knowledge⁷), experience, empathy, are not only unavoidable but also constitute a fundamental hermeneutic resource for the researcher, to the benefit of the research (see, among others, Cipriani, 1996; Diana, Montesperelli, 2005; Marradi, 2007). The need to reduce the subjectivity of the researcher can be addressed by revealing to the reader, as much as possible, the interpretative process of the researcher (see Montesperelli, 1988; Cardano, 2003), as I have attempted to do in describing the criteria I used for analysis.

I followed an intersectional approach and employed qualitative techniques of document analysis, particularly guided by the principles of ethnographic content analysis (ECA) proposed by Altheide (2000 [1996]).

Institutional documents (as distinct from personal ones) include items from mass media (such as news articles, television, radio and new media broadcasts, and the new media including commercials, advertising images,⁸ etc.), fiction, teaching materials, fairy tales and stories from popular culture, legal material⁹, political documents, company and administrative documents.

In quantitative content analysis, the primary aim is «to verify or confirm hypothesized relationships rather than discover new or emerging patterns» (*ibidem*, p. 26). Conversely, in ethnographic content analysis (ECA) great importance is given to «the reflective and highly inter-

7 On the study of implicit knowledge, see also Marradi, Fobert Veutro (2001); Fobert Veutro (2006).

8 Altheide notes that «most of the document analysis is oriented towards the written text, although public information and popular culture are mainly composed of images»(2000 [1996]: 84). Moreover, there is a branch of sociology, known as "visual sociology", that deals specifically with the analysis of fixed and moving images (Mattioli, 1991; Facioli and Losacco, 2010; Frisina, 2013).

9 See, for example, Perrotta (1994).

active nature of the investigator [...] Unlike quantitative content analysis, where the protocol is the instrument, in ECA the investigator is continually at the center [...] Categories and variables initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge to be taken into account in the course of the study, including an orientation towards constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances» (*ibidem*, p. 27). Regarding the images, Altheide points out that there are various approaches «that go in search of underlying messages or cultural signs, within images, which can then be related to sign systems» (*ibidem*, p. 84).

For this study, I examined several advertising images, taken from magazines published in Italy, in which the theme of contrasting ageing appears. The investigation took place over three different periods.

During the first phase, in 2012, I reviewed issues of three weekly magazines by different publishers in Italy (*Venerdì di Repubblica*, *Oggi*, and *Panorama*) in the first three months of the year (39 issues in total). During the second, in 2019, I analysed eight issues of the same magazines published in January of that year¹⁰.

The third survey period began on October 30, 2021 and ended on October 15, 2022. In this phase, I focused the research on *D di Repubblica* (henceforth *D*), of which I analysed 29 issues: I initially considered all the issues; from April 2022, following the criterion of saturation in the composition of a sample (Bertaux, 1981), I then examined only one issue per month since the analysis of additional cases added little or nothing to the knowledge previously acquired. I also looked at nine issues of other Italian weeklies with a wide circulation (*Chi*, *Donna moderna*, *Elle*, *Oggi*, *Tv Sorrisi e canzoni*, and *Vanity Fair*) and analysed five television commercials broadcast in Italy.

To sketch a comparison with another country in the West, I also examined 13 television commercials broadcast in the United States and a billboard on this theme displayed on a street in New York City. The results arising from material addressed to an American public will be presented after those for the *corpus* of documents intended for Italians. Obviously, the scarcity and extemporaneity of the considered material do not allow for a direct comparison with the results derived from the analysis of the much more substantial and systematic material aimed at the Italian audience. However, the American documents can provide insights into a reality that is different from the Italian one, even though it is also Western.

Browsing through Italian journals, as I flipped through them page by page, I dwelt on advertisements that referred to the theme of ageing in various ways: I observed their overall composition and details, and I read the caption texts. In the first two investigation periods, I explored about 200 advertising pages; in the third period I examined 211. I cut out and analysed those that struck me because they contained the following features:

- a) excessive and inappropriate use of numbers;
- b) situations and scenarios (rural landscapes; presence of animals) in which the advertised product did not have a prominent position;
- c) expressions or terms that were emotionally strong or that recalled an idea that I felt was familiar, for example: face them, challenge, forbidden, triumph, victory, global, exclusively, absolute, the original, limited edition, ritual;
- d) pharmacological and cosmetological terms that are specialized and mostly unfamiliar to the uninitiated, for example: hydrolyzed collagen, resveratrol, niacinamide, multi-fermented longoza, peptide complex, viniferin, makgeolli, cicawax, oxygeskin;
- e) images showing biological processes *in vitro*, that are unfamiliar to non-experts.

¹⁰ The investigations carried out in the first two periods covered a broad set of values, and the topic was the subject of a teaching workshop aimed at classes of student as part of the courses in Metodologia qualitativa and Teorie e tecniche della comunicazione. The results of the research and the modalities as well as the outcomes of the workshop were published in Fobert Veutro (2019).

Subsequently, I put together advertisements that reported similar situations and elements and classified them. As the research went on, I identified criteria that I found interesting and significant. Sometimes I would find references to scholarly contributions in them. Finally, with a mental disposition sensitive to the concept of 'social value', I wondered what definitions of the situation might refer to those aspects that had seemed strange or incongruous to me to some extent. Needless to say, this part of the work was informed and enhanced by the aforementioned references, by my experience of research and my general socio-psychological and community background, deriving in good part from a tacit introjected knowledge ever since my primary socialization, which I made an effort to bring to consciousness. When I felt that I had identified a concept of value, a certain definition of the situation, I imagined an expression or term that I thought was appropriate and which I report in the results.

3. Results

As noted in other studies (Corradi, *op. cit.*), the first thing you notice in advertisements promoting products that combat ageing is the lack of presence of older people. As will be seen, they almost always appear in some commercial sectors, particularly drugs for specific diseases. On the contrary, people (almost all women) who are young or youthful - as well as beautiful - are mainly depicted to advertise cosmetics and the like, with few exceptions. Thus, the supposed outcome of anti-ageing products is shown, not the starting state, probably because the state of old age arouses unease and the sight of it would make the advertised merchandise unattractive. Delving deeper into the analysis, a general finding is that the promotion of items that embody the manifest value of aspiring to look young all the time is mostly "encapsulated" in certain taken-for-granted, and thus uncritically accepted, definitions of the situation that easily convey the main message, i.e. the effectiveness of certain products to stay young. Here are the identified definitions.

a) "This anti-ageing product is good because the numbers give credence to an indisputable truth". We could call this definition of the situation 'the cult of numbers'. In our society, the attribution of scientificity and truthfulness tends to be linked to the use of numbers; therefore, they attract our attention and influence definitions about the merits of a product. In many advertisements for anti-ageing cosmetics, efficacy is evidenced by statistics that show percentage numbers sometimes even with decimal points, with improbable and even ridiculous results.

There are many examples found in each of the issues considered. Here are a few: *Dior* advertises *Capture Totale* products by reporting that «women noticed an improvement in their skin of +51% in plumpness, +56% in firmness, and +77% in elasticity». In microscopic type it reports the procedure leading to these results: «Self-evaluation of skin condition upon awakening of 32 women after 28 days of application». With *Bioscalin*, hair is 75% stronger in 15 days (*Elle* 15/10/22). *BioNike* (*Chi* 17/11/21) attests that its cream is «recommended by 96% of women at age 60» (self-evaluation test by 50 women, aged 55-70). The cosmetic company *Matis* omits the number of test subjects but details six different percentages of improvement (from 77% to 96%) of various aspects of the skin: radiance, wrinkles, firmness, smoothness, etc. (*Donna moderna* 4/11/21).

The emphasis on quantification, with an obvious deference to research practices in use in the natural sciences¹¹, clashes with the technique that gives rise to the above statistics.

11 European sociology, with Saint-Simon, Comte and Durkheim, was born under the influence of a positivist and epistemological outlook and that in our societies, in the wake of this thought that grants superiority to the research method used in natural sciences (and which must also be adopted in the other sciences), has spread a conception of scientific activity linked to the use of numbers.

As reported above, this technique is mentioned in the captions below in tiny and almost illegible characters: «self-evaluation», an eminently qualitative and subjective mode of detection.

In this regard, it should be noted that the quantitative approach in the human sciences has for quite some time used techniques (so-called scaling) that allow a certain degree of quantification of constructs that are not directly or hardly observable. These techniques are evidently not used in cosmetology research, except in one case where the test proposes a fixed response from the users, but with only two options: very satisfied or fairly satisfied; uncertain, little and not at all are not even envisaged (a serum by *La Roche Posay* in *D 30/04/22*).

Another incongruous element, given the display of so many figures¹² and percentages, is the small size of the sample, which is also published in microscopic font. For example, only 20 women (between the ages of 20 and 76) tested a *Korff* facial serum, an *Euphidra* anti-ageing eye contour and an *Arval* anti-blemish treatment (*D 11/27/21* and *7/05/22*; *Vanity Fair 12/10/22*) and only 22 tested a facial treatment from *Filorga* (*Elle 10/15/22*): tiny groups such as these appear most frequently¹³. Once again from the minuscule captions, we are sometimes also informed of the ethnicities of those tested regarding products that, let us remember, are advertised and sold in Italy: African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian (*L'Oréal Midnight Serum* and *Dior Capture Totale*) and Chinese (*Guerlain Advanced serum*) women.

This, therefore, is the framework that attests to an efficacy that supposedly derives from numbers constructed in such a way that completely diverges from serious research practice. These figures are in any case taken seriously because they invoke an entirely familiar value in our society: numbers are a guarantee of scientificity and therefore of truth.

- b) “This anti-ageing product is good because Science says so”. In modern and contemporary Western societies, the authority of science has replaced that of religion¹⁴, and in several advertising images, emphasis is placed on the fact that the quality of the anti-ageing product is guaranteed by, for example, the «science of regeneration» (which inspired a *Lancôme* product) and technology. Among many cases, *Shiseido* claims to be «a world leader in innovation [...] after decades of study, it brings to light a revolutionary technology: *Molecushift* Technology, inspired by cosmetic medicine» (*Elle 15/10/22*). The same cosmetic company asserts that «The new *Cool & Warm Eye Care* technology delivers visible results» (*D 11/27/21*). *Caudalíe* informs us that «TET8 Technology, co-patented with Harvard after 10 years of research corrects eight indicators of age»: from 1, persistent wrinkles, to 8, hydration (*D 5* and *19/02/22*). Among other things, the mention of substances and active ingredients with strange names unknown to many (see above) lends an aura of esoteric scientificity to products containing them, as does the *in vitro* depiction of «plumping» and «restorative» biological processes. Moreover, stereotypical exoticism can help instil confidence in a cosmetic: the *LaboFillerina* is the result of a «Swiss Patent». Also reassuring is the cream «*Sensai* - the sense and science of Japan» (*D 7/05/22*). Switzerland and Japan are scientifically and technologically advanced countries; an item produced in a Central African country would not have the same effect.
- c) “This anti-ageing product is good because it is natural. We need to go back to Nature”. This definition is applied in certain corporate communication strategies called ‘Greenwashing’. The anti-ageing effect is supposedly promoted by “natural” herbal products, by non-chemical active ingredients, such as «Hyper-Fermented Aloe» or «edelweiss native cells + ginger root» (*D 30/10/21* and *13/11/22*). *Erboristica* proclaims «The natural revolution [...] using

12 For example: +3.39 mm.: cheekbone volume; - 2.87 mm.: Oval facial sag; 315.55 mm²: Collagen reticulum area, etc. (*LaboFillerine* and *Cosprophar Facial and Eyelid Lift* in several *D* numbers).

13 As if wishing to pillory a practice of deceptive advertising, the cosmetic company *Élève* thus invites purchase: “Try our products. If they work, you say so!” (*Vanity Fair 12/10/22, D 30/09/22*).

14 As shown by Auguste Comte in *Opuscles de philosophie sociale* and *Cours de philosophie positive*.

authentic formulas with natural, selected and exclusive active ingredients» (*Donna moderna* 4/11/21). The relevant captions state that *Garnier* hair colour restructuring treatment and *L'Erbolario* products are «98 percent natural in origin» (*Oggi* 25/11/21 and *D* 13/11/21). *Nuxe* uses a «vegan formula» (*Vanity Fair* 12/10/22). Other cosmetic companies boast that even the wrappers are made of natural and recyclable materials, and the prefix *Bio* appears on many products, such as *Biocollagenix*. Some companies are actually proposing a «Green Impact Index» to measure the social and environmental impact (e.g. on the marine ecosystem) of cosmetics and healthcare products (*D* 20 and 11/27/21).

The exhortation to return to nature can also be seen in the spread of animalier-style fashion. Not only are there fabrics with prints recalling animal coats, that were also made in the past, but also the depiction of a real interpenetration between women's faces and bodies and those of animals: a woman's face recalls the pride and majesty of a lion (not a lioness, as she flaunts thick blonde hair that resembles a mane) and the caption is «Naturally Sustainable» (*D* 9/04/22); another female face is juxtaposed with that of an innocent lamb (*D* 13/11/21)¹⁵.

This value, which seems to contradict the previous one, is an example of how in modern and especially contemporary society, values of different, sometimes even opposing, signs coexist (Gallino, 2006; Sciolla, *op. cit.*): for example, one anti-pollution face serum is created thanks to «Bioscience and biotechnology» (*D* 27/11/21) and another by *Collistar* «from the encounter between science and nature» (*D* 19/02/22). *Guerlain* attests to «the restorative power of science and bees» (*D* 3/09/22).

- d) "This anti-ageing product is necessary because it is important to be special". The exclusivity, the fact that they are "selected", is emphasized by many products. The implicit message is as follows: "by using this cosmetic you will be part of an inner circle that enjoys benefits reserved for the few". In order to advertise an *lbsa* cream, for example, a woman's face is displayed framed as if it were an art painting, with the words «*Ritratto di rimodellamento. Ognuno di voi è un capolavoro* (Remodeling Portrait. Each One of You is a Masterpiece)» (in several issues of *D*). A *La Mer* cream repairs and regenerates thanks to its «unique and precious ingredient [...] A luxurious daily pampering» (*D* 30/10/21). *Collistar* offers «tailor-made solutions [...] targeted treatments» (*D* 19/03/22). Some of the expressions and terms that appear with some frequency are: «limited edition», «the best», «excellence».

Like the title of Bourdieu's (1983 [1979]) famous work, one can name this set of aspirations 'Distinction'. The desire to distinguish oneself is certainly an old one, but it became rather widespread with the advent of industrial production and its related mass consumption.

Baudrillard (1972 [1968]) illustrated the seductiveness of the language of advertising and stressed the symbolic value of the commodity: consumption of the product, as a source of identity, can make you feel special and unique. It invokes similar feelings through the presence of extreme adjectives, such as «global», «absolute», which recur frequently.

- e) "You need to use this anti-ageing product on a daily basis because if you follow a daily ritual, you will gain well-being." This definition follows from the fact that repeated activities elicit a sense of security. Several scholars have highlighted the importance of rituals for human beings: they have the effect of preserving individual identity and a sense of cohesion in the groups to which they belong and in the larger society. Durkheim (1912) identified the concept of a state of «collective effervescence» that is created during communal rituals and that would forestall the dangerous condition of anomie. Goffman (1969 [1959]) argued for the relevance of micro rituals in the interactions of everyday life. Berger and Luckmann (*op. cit.*) identified «reality-preserving mechanisms» in «routine» and «casual conversation».

15 However, other images (in several issues of *D*), which exhibit the mischievous juxtaposition of figures of women with those of big cats, echo the cliché of the panther woman, the tiger woman, with a «feline gaze», a dangerous enchantress in short.

The captions of several anti-ageing advertisements feature just the word 'ritual', a term particularly emblematic of repeated actions. Here are some captions associated with images of cosmetics: «The *Lotion soin Anti-Âge* is the prelude to the *Supremya* night ritual» (D 19/02/22). *Chanel* urges people to practice «the new *Le lift pro* ritual [...] to act on the triangle of youth» (D 1/10/22). «Your youthfulness ritual» is proposed by the face of a well-known actress regarding three anti-ageing products (D 7/05/22). The cosmetic company *Isdin* points out the secret to ever-youthful skin: «taking care of it every day» (D 13/11/21).

Therefore, this definition can draw attention to advertisements because it invokes a widespread individual and societal need.

By quantifying the number of advertisements according to the target audience, it is evident that advertising on these issues targets women to the maximum degree, pushing them more than men to pursue certain models. It is interesting to note the ways in which the portrayals differ depending on the gender to which they are targeted. Here are some observations below.

- a) "Ageing is a woman's problem". There are very few advertisements about ageing in which (only) men are depicted. In my *corpus* I have encountered just one (preventing hair loss) in which only a male figure appears. As is well known, the gender most afflicted by baldness is male, but products that claim to have the effect of invigorating hair are largely aimed at the female gender. For example, ads for *Bioscalin Tricoage 50+* and *Nova Genina* display a woman's long, full-bodied hair (TV *Sorrisi e canzoni* 4/10/22; *Elle* 15/10/22; *Vanity Fair* 12/10/22). In the *Miglior Cres* advertisement, which features a woman with long flowing hair, the reference to a man appears only in a small caption: «Also available for men» (TV *Sorrisi e canzoni* 4/10/2022). Here is a further exception: next to an anti-wrinkle fluid (*Lierac homme*) appear the words, in very large letters, «New. For men» (D 29/01/22). But it is, indeed, a "novelty."

In noting that the largest number of advertisements of these hair products are aimed at women, it may be considered that long female hair can also be seen as sexually appealing: it is no coincidence that obscurantist and sexist cultures require it to be covered. Moreover, according to a widespread popular belief, male baldness is supposedly caused by an excess of testosterone, which allegedly also has the effect of enhancing sexuality. It follows that in order to sell certain hair products, it is more useful to target women than men, even though the latter may need them more. It is not the object itself that directs consumption, but the meaning attached to it by the definition given to it.

There are some advertisements that depict a woman and a man together at a rather advanced age; however, they do not promote cosmetic products to preserve beauty and youthfulness but supplements or drugs, i.e. health remedies: *Rubaxx Articulations* (TV *Sorrisi e canzoni* 2/11/21); *Kilocal* against cholesterol (D 18/12/21); Pharma's *Abiogen*, a drug that combats osteoporosis (D 6 and 13/11/21).

- b) "Women are ancillary and caring figures". In the few advertisements that are aimed only or mostly at men (in which they are also depicted there) there is almost always also a woman, in whom an affectionate caregiver figure may be discernible (*Sanders Helvetic Institute for Hair Treatment: Chi* 17/11/21 and TV *Sorrisi e canzoni* 2/11/21) or, in other images, a sexual partner. I have not come across any advertisements with similar situations in reverse, i.e. men contributing to the protection of women's mental and physical well-being. Thus, reference to traditional definitions of gender roles seems implicit.

- c) "Women must fight to maintain youth and beauty". Bellicose terminology is used in certain advertising images aimed at the female sex: *Capture Sculpt* by *Dior* «triumphs over time» and has «the mission» to improve your profile, «wrinkles and loss of tone are terrible enemies»,

«the greatest victory of all: preserving your youth!». Another proclaims «Growing old is not allowed». (*Planter's* face cream).

These expressions do not appear in the few advertisements on the subject aimed at men. This confirms the definition that "ageing is a dangerous threat for women, much more than for men". A TV commercial aired in Italy, in which three women of different ages take pleasure in looking younger than their age, testifies to the fact that appearing younger is considered to be a kind of personal and social obligation. In the weekly magazines I examined, the depiction of three women of different ages (who obtain differential benefits from the proposed cosmetics) on the same advertising page is recurrent, as if throughout her life, a woman must always be on her toes and arm herself against the dreaded and disastrous ageing. None of this is depicted with male protagonists.

In the weekly magazine *Donna moderna* (4/11/21), the advertisement of two facial creams recommended specifically for use during menopause reports much lower percentages of skin improvement than in other examples (39% tone, 22% elasticity, 17% density), thus pointing out that at this time of life a woman has less chance of prolonging a youthful appearance, and therefore perhaps has to work harder.

In the advertisements viewed, the potential loss of attractiveness of older men is not shown at all. Moreover, the term 'andropause' (the male counterpart of menopause) as a sign of aesthetic decline never appears: this phase of life does not appear relevant to a man. Instead, for example, the advertisement for the dietary supplement *KilocalAge* shows, once again, three figures of women with the respective captions: Pre-menopause 45 years; Menopause 50 years; and Post-menopause 60 years (in several issues of *D*). Unlike for men, the idea that women's lives are punctuated by events that threaten their appearance is reinforced, to the point that *Laboratoires Lierac* accredit themselves (with a caption in very large print) as «Menopause Experts» (*D* 7/05/22). We do not find any cosmetologists who are experts in andropause. d) "Old age can exert charm". In the images examined, it seems that this applies only to men: people who have greying or white hair but are decidedly attractive are almost only of the male gender, as in an advertisement for Radio Monte Carlo (*Elle* 15/10/22) and in another for glasses, the *Cucinelli* brand (*D* 2/07/22). «In advertising discourse, the intersectional approach between age and gender is fundamental: we could not otherwise understand why the signs of mature age [...] in men can be considered fascinating while in women they are to be hidden in every way» (Corradi, *op. cit.*, p. 179). If anything, the white-haired woman derives her prestige not from her attractiveness but from the professional position she has attained, like the director of *D* (13/11/21). Or from a charitable disposition, such as the depiction of a sober old lady who put in her will a bequest to the *Opera San Francesco per i Poveri* (a charity) (*D* 3/09/22) and another who, by buying *L'Oréal* products, «donates her wrinkles» (*D* 6/11/21) to support the Umberto Veronesi Foundation (which deals with cancer research).

- e) Some advertisements suggest the following definitions: combatting the ageing of men involves their sexual performance, while the possible sexual activity of women in old age is not relevant. This can be exemplified by two TV commercials concerning incontinence: one aimed at men (*Prostamol*) in which the scene is dominated by a double bed; another at women (*Tena*) in which the advertised product (mini sanitary pads) facilitates conviviality and entertainment with girlfriends. The two contexts are very different.

An exception, among the material viewed, is a commercial (again about *Tena* sanitary pads), devised by director Yorgos Lanthinos, which instead depicts the sensuality of women in old age: this, too, is an example of the emergence of coexisting alternative values (see above), and of the fact that women tend to claim spaces in the imaginary traditionally considered to be only masculine.

- f) In some advertisements aimed at women, a competitive attitude toward other women, focused on the aspiration for youthfulness, comes through. For example, the caption of an image advertising a face cream (*Cera di Cupra*), with a man and a woman dancing is, «They saw your husband with a younger woman: it was you» (obviously due to the effect of the cream). Nothing like this appears in images with male protagonists. We are thus going back to the stereotype that women (and not men) compete with each other about looking young.

Analysing the material directed at the American public, we can find some similarities and some differences with certain findings that arose from examining the *corpus* of documents published and broadcast in Italy.

As regards the similarities, the commercials broadcast in the United States confirm the traditional gender roles mentioned above.

A commercial, which focuses on the special needs of the elderly, urges them to purchase a «Safety Bath Tub»¹⁶ in which one opens a door to a seat in the tub without having to climb into it. The elderly male protagonist is a well-known and attractive actor who moves with agility; a mature-aged lady, also with white hair, appears only for a couple of seconds and is barely discernible: probably because it is believed that an elderly woman cannot have the same qualities as her male peer who appears in this video, and therefore would not be attractive to the product. As has already been pointed out, old age can give charm to men, but not women.

The *Dove* chocolate advertisement¹⁷ shows several stereotypes regarding gender roles. With a catchy musical background (the song *La vie en rose* performed by Edith Piaf) a woman's life, from childhood to old age, unfolds in a few frames. In addition to the chocolates of the advertised brand, it is punctuated by emotional encounters, and the encounter with the mirror, the fearsome judge of women's adherence to the imposed canons of beauty. In old age, the mirror's verdict is lenient in that it sends back the image of a face marked by wrinkles, but satisfied and proud (thanks to the mood-boosting chocolate). In her youth, the girl quickly climbs a ladder, playfully pursued by a boy of the same age; in old age, she climbs a ladder slowly and wearily, and alone: no one follows her; a beautiful and comfortable bedroom with a double bed awaits her, in which she falls asleep serenely, alone (after enjoying a chocolate). The definitions underlying the advertisement are clear: in a woman's life, the most important thing is romantic encounters with men in youth, for which she must carefully prepare herself by consulting the mirror (as the protagonist does). Moreover, love and sexuality, which are vibrant in youth, are completely expunged in a woman's old age, as is also evident from one of the commercials aired in Italy. Finally, it comes to mind that if the protagonist of the chocolate advertisement had been a man, perhaps his moments of success in work would have been presented rather than those in the realm of love.

On the subject of love and sexuality in old age, in the billboard advertisement posted on a street in New York City in 2019, there appears (only) an elderly man who, unlike the protagonist in the video just described, claims the desire to have a partner. In fact, it is an advertisement for a dating app for single people over 50: the *Lumen Dating App*. According to the well-known cliché, this character is advanced in years but handsome: shirtless, seductive-looking and sporting a large youthful tattoo. The caption (which plays on a pun) mentions the Christmas party («Pull a cracker this Christmas!»): the man resembles a reassuring Santa Claus with a white beard and braces, but he is slender and handsome. It is as if recalling the most traditional of holidays in the West compensates for the transgressiveness of an older man's search for a partner.

There are some noteworthy differences between American and Italian advertisements in this regard: as mentioned above, in the Italian magazine advertisements examined, the elderly mostly appear in certain commercial sectors, particularly drugs for specific pathologies; or in some cases, usually in television commercials, they promote goods whose choice requires experience

¹⁶ <https://youtu.be/udhyKvF68mg>

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWJ2ThGFg-o>

and wisdom (the grandmother bestowing advice regarding household cleaning products; the grandfather together with the grandchildren around the Christmas cake).

In the American commercials I reviewed, the elderly depicted advertise drugs for various illnesses to a considerable extent, but also other goods and services that are not usually promoted in Italy: nursing homes; insurance or financial investments (befitting the elderly more than the young); home or supplementary health care; and even lots in cemeteries and funeral planning (to relieve their children of these tasks in advance).

The focus on certain goods and services in a nation that does not have health and pension welfare (unlike Italy) is understandable. On the other hand, the explicit mention in several American commercials of death and the end of life is not easily interpretable. In Italy, with few exceptions, one does not encounter promotional activities on these issues, which are mostly kept private. Below I describe a commercial that promotes a *Funeral and Memorial Information Center*¹⁸; it also carries a definition of the situation that falls within the usual canons of family representation. In the video, children are urged to be told by their parents about memories and what was important in their lives («Have the Talk of a Lifetime») so that they can best honour them at the time of their passing. No lonely elderly people appear, but three married couples of a certain age, well brought up; one of these people shows an album with photographs showing her with her children. Only traditional families are presented.

Another difference, compared to Italian commercials, is that more commercials feature older women and men promoting goods that are not necessarily intended for people of advanced age, but are used mostly by young people. Here are two examples: *Nike* sports shoes and a Mexican fast-food chain that is mainly frequented by teenagers and young people (*Taco Bell*).

What is also striking in these two commercials is that these people are presented in a caricatured way. In the first commercial (Unlimited Youth)¹⁹, the elderly woman («The Iron Woman») wearing *Nike* shoes engages in feats and sports that are far too strenuous and implausible for her age. In the second²⁰, a clique of elderly people in bad shape, who have been admitted to an old people's home, escape the staff's surveillance at night and run off to indulge in the dishes of the advertised fast-food restaurant, and then continue their night out at the disco, which is crowned by a sexual encounter with a young man.

Another commercial, that uses this kind of humour, advertises an insurance company²¹ that guarantees support in old age; it presents elderly men and women in a grotesque way, showing them being forced to work late in life because they have no pension or medical insurance. In the United States, instances of political correctness are widespread, but this is not the case for the elderly people in these videos. In Italy, on the other hand, there are no such portrayals of old people as they would be seen to put people who are advanced in their years in an undignified light.

4. Final discussion and considerations

Advertisements sell products by invoking a value that is appreciated in our societies and easily recognizable (the preservation of youthfulness), and their message is enhanced by the fact that they rely on another value that remains implicit, usually not directly perceived by the recipients. However, these are influenced by a definition of the situation that is taken for granted because it reproduces assumptions assimilated since primary socialization.

Through the analysis of advertisements considered in this investigation, the ways in which the phenomenon under study is presented, often in a subtle manner, have been articulated and

18 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGm_nHIXh-K

19 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anbpHZbk8aM>

20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_afZ0H7V0vQ

21 <https://youtu.be/PJbyV-InCCo>

detailed. This phenomenon employs the objective portrayal of numbers and science, bestows validity upon “natural” product, and assigns importance to exclusivity and rituals.

Furthermore, some representations mirror discrimination’s multiple forms the multiple forms of discrimination, such as those generated by the intersection of age and gender: they send back images of identity and gender relations in which a woman who is no longer young is affected by a stigma that is difficult to dismantle. It rests on definitions of the situation incessantly reiterated by advertising, which guide consumption and confirm certain beliefs and thus certain patterns of behaviour, that are unfavourable for older women in particular. It has been highlighted that aging is portrayed as a problem exclusively affecting women, who engage in a daily battle, often in competition with other women. Women are depicted as affectionately caring for men, who are rarely shown with the early signs of aging, which, however, can make them more attractive, unlike in the portrayal of women. The greatest concern for men seems to be the decline in their sexual performance, whereas this aspect is not regarded concerning considered regarding aging women.

These outcomes of the analysis unite the documents considered, both Italian and American. Other findings, however, such as the readiness, or reluctance, to mention death, and the disinhibition, or vice-versa the reticence, to ridicule the elderly, seem to differentiate the advertisements in the two countries.

As can be seen from some of the results presented, advertisements embody widespread values yet at the same time propose, in certain cases, emerging values, sometimes in contradiction to other strongly entrenched ones: for example, the credit assigned to both science and technology and to procedures according to nature, or the legitimate aspiration for sexuality on the part of women in old age.

These “new values” may appeal to individuals who are sensitive to change or novelty that is in the realm of elites or that may be transgressive to some extent. Here are the other instances I have identified in Italian documents.

- Sensitivity to ethical issues. For example, the manufacturer of *Acqua Rocchetta* (fountain of youth), together with *Differenza Donna* (nationwide network of anti-violence centres), supports the «Autonomy Project, helping to provide safe housing and concrete help to women and their children escaping violence» (D 13/08/22). *L’Erborario* is a «Benefit Society, because [...] cosmetics rhymes with ethics» (D 04/23/22).
- Depiction of same-sex relationships. In an advertisement for a handbag (D 4/12/21) two women, who are not exactly young, are depicted kissing; and in a TV commercial there are two young gay men.
- The display of non cisgender identities: both transgender (in *Chi* 17/11/21 there is a seemingly non-stigmatizing article on the «trans world») and gender fluid, as in a *D* article (*Towards a Unisex Future*: 1/15/22) which explicitly states that «no-gender perfumes are in high demand among the public today».
- Aesthetic canons that do not correspond to traditional gender roles. In a special issue on men’s fashion (D 15/01/22) the models have an ethereal appearance, not at all macho, and even the clothing is not traditionally masculine, albeit not on a par with the transgressiveness of the well-known musical group *Måneskin*, for example. Models with similar characteristics also appear in *Vanity Fair* (12/10/22).
- Forms of countering body shaming: in *D* dated 11/20/21 an obese model is depicted.
- Presence of models of non-white ethnicity in several issues of *D*.
- Some ambiguity in the portrayal of the ages of some model couples (a man and a woman) simulating an emotional relationship: they could give the impression of being a mother and child but also of a woman and a much younger partner.

- One gets the impression that the portrayal of “transgressive” values in the United States is less frequent than has been found by analysing advertising produced in Italy. Obviously, we are referring to American broadcasters targeting a mass audience, although the example I give below comes from an influential newspaper oriented on liberal positions: the New York Times. An article in this newspaper (Sept. 23, 2019 of the New York Edition) stigmatizes the mentioned billboard advertisement because it presents a “sexy” version of Santa Claus.

Concerning the co-presence of contradictory instances, Weber had spoken of the *polytheism of values*. As several scholars have pointed out (for example, Gallino, 2006; Sciolla, *op. cit.*), in modern and above all contemporary societies, there are values that coexist with opposing traits, values that are contradictory; there is the co-presence of various symbolic systems that are not always correlated.

In a sense, even if they jar or conflict with traditional values, the “new values” redefine the situation and promote the liking of perhaps initially niche products.

According to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, the «culture industry» (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1966 [1947]), of which advertising is a full-fledged part, performs a political action of legitimizing the dominant ideology in the capitalist world; and the market engulfs everything, even new claims to rights and transgressive values. This ideology is also recognizable in the «consumer society» mentioned by Baudrillard (2010 [1970]): it creates a “pastiche”, which amalgamates all cultural forms into a single language, absorbing even contradictory instances. However, in the Cultural Studies tradition, which has been developing in Birmingham, UK, since the 1960s and which subscribes to the Marxist approach along with the Frankfurt school, the dominant culture is not considered homogeneous and incontrovertible, inevitably imposed on the subordinate classes. Alternative values can spread through arduous processes of negotiation and conflict, which is why we speak of “public” in the plural (Paccagnella, 2004).

Highlighting and dismantling the dynamics underlying the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices encourages the setting up of critical communications that tend to expose and combat them.

If gender and age roles are not to be traps or prisons, we must foster socialization processes that accustom us to a critical consideration of proposed and imposed traditional models, and push towards renewal, respectful of the dignity of each individual.

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3T SECTION

3T SECTION



3T READINGS

Hill Collins, P. (2022). *Intersezionalità come teoria critica della società*.
Milano: UTET Università¹

«*Intersezionalità come teoria critica della società* è un'opera d'amore che aggiunge un'ulteriore visuale al mio ininterrotto attivismo intellettuale».

Sono queste le parole con cui la sociologa Patricia Hill Collins autodefinisce il proprio lavoro. Alla traduzione di Pietro Maturi e alla curatela di Fabio Corbisiero e Mariella Nocenzi va il merito di aver reso fruibile anche al pubblico di lingua italiana uno dei più recenti e completi scritti dell'autrice. La prima caratteristica di questo libro, che in qualche maniera viene sottolineata anche nelle due prefazioni (di Kathy Davis e di Vera Gheno), è la tenace e inarrestabile ricerca di introdurre un nuovo sguardo sociologico a partire dallo stretto scambio tra le pratiche di conoscenza, anche ma non solo accademiche, e quelle di vita. Questo non è solo un libro sull'intersezionalità, ma è un libro intersezionale perché incarna l'intersezionalità. I confini tra i capitoli come quelli tra le categorie sociali scompaiono, lasciando il posto a un turbinio di loro continue e cangianti correlazioni. Dagli studi pionieristici dell'attivista Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in poi, l'intersezionalità ha compiuto un lungo itinerario ed è ormai uno strumento intellettuale ed etico utile per ripensare le soluzioni di vari problemi sociali, sia fuori che dentro le Università. Tuttavia, sia nell'uno che nell'altro ambito, secondo Hill Collins, è giunto il momento che l'intersezionalità si affermi come teoria critica della società per evitare che diventi una moda accademica o che resti una teoria sociale acerba. Da qui il titolo del libro stesso, ma anche tutta l'architettura strutturale che lo sostiene. Come l'intersezionalità ritiene che, ad esempio, spiegare l'oppressione delle donne solo tramite una categoria sociale (la razza o il genere o la classe) porti a una conoscenza e soluzione parziale del problema, così questo libro, pur concependo ogni capitolo autonomo sostiene che per essere meglio compreso vada messo in dialogo con gli altri capitoli. Le questioni epistemologiche dell'intersezionalità, trattate all'inizio del lavoro, si capiscono meglio se correlate al potere, alla resistenza intellettuale, all'agire sociale, alla libertà, alla relazionalità, alla giustizia sociale, e a tutte le altre questioni prese in considerazione nei successivi capitoli del libro.

La questione dell'intersezionalità come indagine critica è sintetizzabile nell'individuazione di *concetti chiave* (relazionalità, potere, disuguaglianza sociale, contesto sociale, complessità, giustizia sociale), di *principi guida* (razza, classe e genere come sistemi di potere sono interdipendenti, l'intersezione tra le relazioni di potere produce disuguaglianze sociali complesse, l'intersezione tra relazioni di potere dà forma alle esperienze individuali e di gruppo, la soluzione dei problemi sociali richiede analisi intersezionali) e di tre *modi di pensare* (metaforico, euristico, paradigmatico) fondamentali per chi crea saperi e sensibilità intersezionali. Ma l'analisi di Hill Collins è molto più profonda: la sociologa fa emergere cosa ci sia di critico nella teoria critica della società e come le teorie critiche, già esistenti, interpretino il termine "critico" rispetto all'intersezionalità.

Per quanto concerne il potere, il focus non è centrato sui rapporti di dominio bensì su quello tra intersezionalità e resistenza intellettuale. In altri termini, i gruppi che subiscono un'oppressione, qualunque essa sia (per razza, età, genere, classe, nazionalità, orientamento sessuale ecc.), reagiscono con forme di resistenza e di opposizione. Quest'ultime sono all'opera e osservabili nei Critical race studies, nel femminismo, nei progetti postcoloniali del sapere - che sono prassi di teorie critiche funzionanti solo e soltanto se riescono a mantenere un certo livello di autoriflessività (questione che viene ripresa in più parti del lavoro, come negli ultimi due capitoli, e che mina la sopravvivenza o meno dell'intersezionalità stessa). Vengono quindi esplorati questi tre campi in quanto saperi resistenti interconnessi tra loro, che non hanno confini netti e che hanno bisogno di dialogare. A proposito della "resistenza epistemica", la sociologa riporta l'esempio di Anita Hill che, nelle udienze della Commissione giudiziaria del Senato americano del 1992, riferisce con precisione le molestie sessuali ricevute da Clarence Thomas, che a sua volta le nega, di fronte a una commissione composta da tutti uomini bianchi. La commissione finisce per credere a Thomas e non a Hill. Le categorie della razza e del genere esercitano quindi un potere epistem-

¹ F. Corbisiero e M. Nocenzi (a cura), pref. di K. Davis e V. Gheno, tr. it. P. Maturi.

ico, che determina la verità della testimonianza di una persona a svantaggio di quella di un'altra. Inoltre, in questo caso, i senatori maschi bianchi giudicano le narrazioni di due afroamericani ma diversi per genere, ovvero Thomas (un uomo) e Hill (una donna), e le cui testimonianze non vengono ascoltate allo stesso modo dai membri della commissione. Le narrazioni delle persone o dei gruppi subordinati, nelle situazioni pubbliche, danno origine a violenze epistemiche che vengono generalmente silenziate (questa è la posizione di Hill). Ed è proprio in questo margine che si collocano le strategie di resistenza epistemica per tentare di decostruire e smascherare certi meccanismi di potere. L'agire sociale come forma di sapere che può accrescere la prospettiva intersezionale è un argomento attraverso il quale l'autrice lascia fuori molte contraddizioni insite nel rapporto tra intersezionalità, esperienza e comunità. Per esempio: femminismo Nero e pragmatismo americano sono due discorsi differenti che, tuttavia, se messi in dialogo o colti insieme, consentono di riscontrare aspetti parimenti indispensabili dell'esperienza e della comunità, da cui poi si dipana un agire sociale come conoscenza. Su questa stessa lunghezza d'onda, Hill Collins mette in relazione e in dialogo anche la posizione di Simone de Beauvoir e quella di Pauli Murray sul tema della libertà. Per quanto entrambe impegnate nel femminismo e sul problema dell'oppressione delle donne, le loro argomentazioni, utilizzando strumenti diversi, giungono a diverse prospettive sulla razza, sul genere, sulla classe, sull'età, sull'orientamento sessuale, sulla nazionalità ecc. le quali tuttavia possono essere comparate e quindi possono anche dialogare, andando così a co-formare diversi modi di agire.

Il libro affronta le questioni della relazionalità e della giustizia sociale. Gli interrogativi, attraverso tante stimolanti domande, aperti da Hill Collins alla fine del lavoro, intendono "affinare il taglio critico dell'intersezionalità", nel senso di proseguire ad analizzare le conseguenze dell'estensione della sua applicabilità, oltre che dell'adeguatezza dei suoi fondamenti, per fare in modo che continui a essere uno strumento di emancipazione in divenire e mai dato una volta per tutte. Infatti, per Hill Collins l'intersezionalità come teoria critica deve essere in grado di spiegare perché la relazionalità dei fenomeni sociali permetta di comprendere i meccanismi sociali meglio di altre analisi. Questo tema risulta centrale, a suo parere, ma soprattutto va costruito insieme e condiviso. Si possono quindi individuare tre modelli di relazionalità: per addizione, per articolazione e per co-formazione. A queste forme di relazionalità corrispondono poi varie spiegazioni di funzionamento del potere intersezionale.

In linea di massima le teorie intersezionali si battono tutte per la giustizia sociale, ma le domande a cui bisogna saper rispondere vanno più a fondo: «l'intersezionalità è *intrinsecamente* impegnata per la giustizia sociale? La giustizia sociale è davvero un tratto distintivo dell'intersezionalità? O la sua intuitiva associazione con le cause di progresso significa solo che chi sostiene l'intersezionalità lo dà per scontato?». Qui l'autrice sceglie di argomentare il tema a partire dall'analisi di un discorso non centrato sulla giustizia sociale come può essere quello dell'eugenetica. Quest'ultima si afferma come discorso scientifico normale e prevalente proprio grazie alla presenza di una logica relazionale (come è quella dell'intersezionalità), ovvero sul fatto che esiste un collegamento tra razza, classe, genere, età, etnia ecc., ma senza favorire la giustizia sociale e, anzi, con una deriva ultranazionalista. Bisogna quindi fare molta attenzione: nel caso dell'eugenetica manca una dimensione comunitaria ed etica della ricerca che non dovrebbe mai mancare, né essere posta in secondo ordine, in quello dell'intersezionalità.

L'intersezionalità non può prescindere dal considerare l'etica. Se l'etica viene lasciata alle responsabilità individuali, nelle pratiche di ricerca e di vita, può facilmente e apparentemente portare a risolvere i problemi sociali, come fa in un certo senso l'eugenetica, ma continuando a riprodurre quelle stesse ingiustizie contro cui in linea di principio lotta, non modificando cioè quelle abitudini mentali che generano razzismo, disuguaglianza, esclusione, violenza e oppressione di alcuni nei confronti di altri. Fare intersezionalità come teoria critica della società, invece, è un'azione collettiva che intende modificare queste dinamiche di potere sociale.

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Ingrascì, O., Massari, M. (2023). *Come si studiano le mafie?* Roma: Donzelli

La criminalità organizzata, sia come fenomeno sociale in sé, sia come oggetto di interesse pubblico, ha registrato, a partire dagli anni Novanta, l'interesse e l'attenzione di una pluralità di osservatori e attori. Se fino a pochi anni prima rimaneva confinata nel recinto degli addetti ai lavori, quali esponenti politici, sindacalisti, giornalisti di inchiesta, intellettuali, da qualche anno assistiamo al rovesciamento di tendenza.

Le mafie occupano ampi spazi mediatici importanti, finendo per alimentare generi letterari, trasmissioni televisive, filmografie ad hoc. Un tale improvviso interesse, si spiega in due maniere: innanzitutto, gli omicidi e le stragi che vedono coinvolte le organizzazioni criminali hanno lasciato la loro impronta presso l'immaginario collettivo, finendo per produrre panico morale diffuso. In secondo luogo, sin da quando Tommaso Buscetta, nel 1984, decise di rompere il muro dell'omertà, si è dissolta l'ambiguità in merito all'esistenza delle organizzazioni criminali, che a volte si derubricava come fenomeno di costume, altre come residuo premoderno.

La condanna definitiva dei boss imputati nel maxiprocesso, il proliferare dei collaboratori di giustizia, l'ascesa di altre organizzazioni criminali, oltre a Cosa Nostra, come la camorra e la 'ndrangheta, oltre a dissolvere la coltre dei dubbi, hanno dato il via al proliferare di studi e inchieste sulla criminalità organizzata. Questo improvviso interesse, a cui fa seguito il proliferare di "prodotti" sulle mafie, se da un lato può impressionare favorevolmente come segnale dell'attenzione verso il fenomeno in oggetto, dall'altro lato finisce per suscitare qualche dubbio. In particolare, c'è il rischio che chi parli di mafia, lo faccia a partire da discorsi stagnanti, trasformatisi in giaculatorie, che rischiano a lungo andare di confondere sia chi nutre interesse per passione civile, sia gli studiosi stessi.

Il libro curato da Ombretta Ingrascì e Monica Massari, *Come si studiano le mafie?* (Donzelli, Roma, 2023, pp.230), cerca di intervenire su questi rischi, tentando di dare loro una soluzione. Le autrici, da anni attive e accurati ricercatrici dei fenomeni mafiosi, consapevoli dei rischi che si corrono, propongono uno strumento agile, denso, tanto più originale, che può rilevarsi una vera e propria bussola per orientare gli studiosi del settore. Di questo lavoro, innanzitutto, va messa in rilievo la filosofia che lo ispira. Per anni, il dibattito sulle mafie è stagnato sulla natura stessa delle organizzazioni criminali, una questione rilevante alla luce del problema: chi e come devono essere studiate le mafie? Il problema, apparentemente innocuo, ha invece influenzato il dibattito in merito alla validità interpretativa. Per esempio, da Blok a Gambetta, da Hess a Catanzaro, si insistito sulla limitatezza degli approcci interpretativi, in relazione al fatto che privilegiavano di volta in volta l'economia, la criminologia, la politologia o la sociologia. Le curatrici risolvono questo problema, mostrando sia di avere recepito appieno la problematica, sia anche di riuscire a porsi in sintonia con le acquisizioni contemporanee delle scienze sociali. Leggendo in profondità il libro, vagliando uno per uno i contributi ospitati all'interno del volume, ci si sente sollevati rispetto al fatto che, quelle che potremmo definire come le monoculture mafio-logiche sono state superate, in nome di un approccio integrato e di uno sguardo plurale verso le mafie. Ogni autore, indipendentemente dal suo percorso di formazione e dei suoi interessi scientifici, non riesce a fare a meno di fare riferimento a lavori di altri ambiti disciplinari, producendo così un dialogo tra le scienze sociali in funzione di una comprensione approfondita delle mafie.

Ovviamente, trattandosi di un fenomeno criminale, per studiare le mafie si parte sempre dalle fonti giudiziarie. I fascicoli giudiziari, sotto la forma di istruttorie, verbali di interrogatori, resoconti dei processi, dichiarazioni degli imputati e dei collaboratori, forniscono materiale *ad abundantiam* sotto vari aspetti. La struttura organizzativa delle mafie, per esempio, può essere dedotta facilmente a partire dalla lettura dei fascicoli, ovviamente utilizzando l'occhio dello studioso. Vale a dire, se gli operatori del diritto acquisiscono informazioni e costruiscono il ma-

teriale giudiziario allo scopo di accertare ed evidenziare la commissione di reati, il lavoro dello studioso consiste nella ricostruzione della complessità dei fenomeni mafiosi.

La struttura organizzativa, la sfera valoriale, i rapporti con l'esterno, le dinamiche interne, i conflitti che possono sussistere tra esponenti dello stesso gruppo criminale o con altre organizzazioni, il ruolo delle mobilitazioni antimafia e delle azioni repressive statuali nel mutamento interno, sono ottenibili dall'analisi del materiale giudiziario. Se però dobbiamo muoverci all'interno di una prospettiva integrata, multifattoriale, ovvero il cosiddetto "paradigma della complessità" di cui ci parla Umberto Santino, c'è bisogno di utilizzare una pluralità di fonti, e di adattare strumenti di rilevazione diversi.

Le storie di vita, come strumento di analisi sociologica utilizzato sin dai tempi della scuola di Chicago, rappresentano in questo senso un'importante fonte di studio. Innanzitutto, perché scavano in profondità il percorso esistenziale dei mafiosi, rivelando come i percorsi all'interno delle organizzazioni criminali siano tutt'altro che scontati, ancorché irti di contraddizioni. In secondo luogo, perché consentono di contestualizzare le vicende individuali all'interno di contesti storico-sociali più ampi, oltre a permetterci di tirare in ballo la psicologia e comprendere le ragioni di certe scelte. Infine, perché le storie di vita non riguardano soltanto i mafiosi, ma anche le loro vittime: il significato di vivere in zone di mafia, subire la prepotenza delle organizzazioni criminali, le conseguenze per chi si ribella o subisce ritorsioni, affiorano in tutta la loro pregnanza.

A questo punto, come emerge da questo libro, una lettura situata delle organizzazioni mafiose, consente di fornire la risposta che non ci si aspetta: l'analisi dei fenomeni mafiosi può comprendere l'*etnografia*. Chiaramente, non ci troviamo di fronte a comportamenti rischiosi, come il tentativo di infiltrarsi all'interno delle organizzazioni criminali. Se il metodo etnografico consiste nell'osservazione partecipante, allora ecco che le analisi micro, che partano da realtà specifiche, possono fornire un contributo notevole allo studio delle mafie. Per esempio, lo scempio territoriale subito da Palermo a causa del famigerato *Sacco*, la partecipazione a dinamiche interattive che avvengono in quartieri a forte insediamento mafioso, la conoscenza e la decodificazione di linguaggi e rappresentazioni collettive (si pensi alla Madonna dei Polsi di San Luca, alle feste di quartiere, ai cantanti neo-melodici), mettono il ricercatore in contatto con una realtà a cui, weberianamente, riesce a conferire senso nella misura in cui si relaziona alla sfera relazionale e valoriale della stessa.

Le mafie, quindi, non si connotano, per studiosi e studiose, per essere fenomeni alieni dalla realtà, anomalie o prodotti di sofisticati e improbabili complotti. Sono fenomeni sociali, prodotto di relazioni, valori, rappresentazioni e scopi stratificati a livello collettivo nel corso del tempo. Si tratta di partire dal presupposto che esistono e cercare di capire perché si siano prodotte. A combatterle, a condannarle, a reprimerle, ci devono pensare la politica, le mobilitazioni collettive, la magistratura. A raccontarle ci dovrebbero pensare i media. Senza spettacolarizzazioni, possibilmente.

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Nuvolati, G. (a cura di) (2019) *Enciclopedia sociologica dei luoghi*, Milano: Ledizioni¹

L'*Enciclopedia Sociologica dei Luoghi* (ESL) è una opera editoriale originale e innovativa di ricerca e riflessione sul ruolo che i luoghi hanno avuto e possono avere nel segnare le società e i destini di singoli abitanti, che li frequentano e li vivono.

Pubblicata in sei distinti volumi nell'arco di quasi tre anni (Ledizioni, 2019-2022), ha il merito di aver raccolto oltre cento voci che permettono una riflessione su altrettante categorie generali di luoghi attraverso un inquadramento storico, geografico, architettonico e sociologico. Inoltre, ciascuna singola voce, prevede la descrizione di almeno uno studio di caso. In tal modo, l'attività enciclopedica svolta, intesa come sforzo collettivo per sistematizzare argomenti specifici, restituisce coordinate teoriche e presentazioni di casi, utili a sviluppare ricerche situate.

La disposizione sistematica delle voci, ben organizzate e archiviate in base all'ordine alfabetico e la disponibilità in singoli volumi per categorie ordinate, rende il materiale uno strumento di consultazione facilmente fruibile e accessibile, anche grazie alla pubblicazione digitale sul sito web di riferimento.

L'opera, ideata e curata da Giampaolo Nuvolati (con la collaborazione fin dall'inizio di Monica Bernardi e Luca Bottini e successivamente di Teresa Di Bella), ha previsto contributi realizzati da studiosi e ricercatori di varie discipline. Hanno partecipato, infatti, oltre sessanta autrici ed autori, giovani ed esperti, contribuendo all'iniziativa e componendo una o più voci, in alcuni casi arricchendo e aggiornando alcune già presenti. In tal modo, l'*Enciclopedia* è diventato un vero e proprio laboratorio di scrittura collettiva, un progetto unificante capace di tenere insieme temi e approcci di sociologi e sociologhe dell'ambiente e del territorio, che offre ai lettori una descrizione delle caratteristiche dei luoghi per come si sono modificate nel corso del tempo e per il significato che hanno assunto nella società contemporanea.

Le varie forme attraverso le quali la relazione fra spazio, territorio e abitanti (uomini e donne), segnati dalla storia e dalla cultura di chi li vive, si configurano nei luoghi della quotidianità che riempiono le nostre città e la nostra essenza. Scorrendo i diversi volumi e le varie pagine dell'opera ritroviamo categorie di luoghi che vanno dai centri commerciali ai negozi di quartiere, dai bar e pub ai teatri e i cinema, dalle stazioni ferroviarie ai mezzi di trasporto, dagli ospedali e strutture psichiatriche alle carceri, dalle abitazioni, alle fabbriche agli uffici e altri luoghi di lavoro, dalle palestre agli stadi, dalle strade e piazze ai giardini e parchi.

La varietà dei luoghi trattati sottolinea l'utilità di considerare il ruolo dello spazio fisico per la comprensione dei fenomeni collettivi, già indicato da Simmel (1908) come capacità di influenzare la realizzazione di pratiche sociali. Ripercorrendo, infatti, i fenomeni sociali urbani esaminati, si sottolinea chiaramente come la morfologia urbana possa essere la chiave di lettura più definita per comprendere il comportamento umano nei contesti urbani. L'approccio sociologico "spazialista" adottato, infatti, fa emergere la connessione fra comportamenti individuali e spazio, soffermandosi ed evidenziando le relazioni tra singoli individui e luoghi della vita sia pubblici che privati, fra i tanti descritti.

La lettura delle varie esperienze situate, presenti nell'*Enciclopedia*, fa emergere tre modalità che hanno un carattere "forte", come definite da Mela (2015), di connessione dell'analisi sociologica allo spazio e al territorio, in alcuni casi reciprocamente combinate. In primo luogo, le caratteristiche spaziali di un contesto possono interagire in modo attivo con le variabili sociali, come pure con quelle economiche e culturali; pertanto, emerge come possono avere un ruolo attivo e capace di contribuire a generare l'azione individuale o collettiva. In secondo luogo, appare l'idea dello spazio come prodotto di una costruzione sociale e, quindi, come esito di un processo di interazione tra variabili sociali e spaziali. Infine, la terza modalità vede lo spazio come *medium* dell'interazione sociale, ossia una visione intermedia tra l'idea del territorio come presupposto

¹ <https://esl.unimib.it> (last visited 30/07/2023)

e come esito di processi. Queste tre modalità possono prevedere una relazione *cooperativa* oppure *competitiva* o *conflittuale* di un processo di interazione tra variabili sociali e spaziali.

Fra i meriti dell'*Enciclopedia* ritroviamo non solo la raccolta di testi sulla storia dei luoghi e delle loro architetture, ma di aver riflettuto sulle funzioni proprie che possono assolvere nella società odierne, sulle varie e differenti tipologie di frequentatori e operatori, sulle possibili relazioni sociali all'interno e all'esterno di questi luoghi che si vanno a determinare. In tal modo, il lavoro svolto contribuisce a fornire al pubblico gli elementi per catturare il *genius loci* dei luoghi descritti.

L'opera, pertanto, permette di avere gli strumenti, utili a studiosi e ricercatori, per esaminare aspetti legati allo sviluppo dei luoghi e alle loro conseguenze sociali, l'organizzazione sociale delle città, l'interazione fra struttura spaziale e residenti. L'attenzione posta sulle trasformazioni storiche, economiche, sociali e ambientali che hanno attraversato le città negli ultimi decenni consente, quindi, di avere gli strumenti per osservare, interpretare la realtà urbana, ma anche avere gli elementi per poter rispondere alle possibili domande di progettazione, anche tramite percorsi partecipati e condivisi, che sono sempre più auspicabili e richiesti, spesso per il differente uso che le diverse popolazioni fanno dei luoghi e delle città.

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INTERVIEW

Interview with Patricia Hill Collins

Patricia Hill Collins is Distinguished University Professor of Sociology Emerita at the University of Maryland College Park. She is specializing in race, class, gender, and social inequality within the African American community. Her studies opened new questions about the reconceptualization of the ideas of race, class, gender, sexuality and nationalism as interlocking systems of oppression. Thanks to her publications with Sirma Bilge, she discusses the intertwined nature of these social categorizations, their complex web of discrimination and disadvantage in the global society, adopting intersectionality as a critical theory of society.

Can you describe your research path? Where does it start, how does it develop and how is it accepted by the academic community and the social movements for human rights and global social protest?

Learning how to read started me on my research path and learning how to read critically has kept me on it. Two public institutions in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania were vital in shaping my intellectual journey. When I was about five years old, my mother took me to a small, local branch of the public library in Philadelphia and helped me sign up for a library card. To get a card of my own, I needed to know how to write my name. I remember signing my name, or more accurately, printing it, and hoping that I wouldn't make a mistake. She said, "with this card, you can go anywhere." My mother's advice that day has stayed with me since. What power I found in literacy -- reading opened up the world for me. Through books, I could have imaginary conversations with people long dead or who I could never expect to meet. My public school education, especially at the Philadelphia High School for Girls, also helped me develop the craft of literacy. My teachers were uninterested in cultivating neither my critical thinking skills (although they provided plenty of ideas that merited criticism), nor my imagination about a bigger world than the one that awaited me. But they did a great job of granting me access to the specialized language and vocabulary hegemonic, Western knowledge. Together, these two public institutions of one of the oldest public library systems in the US and one of the oldest public high schools for girls started me on my research path. But I had to do the work.

What kept me on the path was the knowledge that there were so many people in the world, many of them in my own neighbourhood, who were stuck. They had no actual or symbolic library card that could serve as a key to the wider world. Many had left school because they had to work. Others left because it was not clear what good their education could serve. I was the one who got to go to school. And I vowed that I would never forget the ones who were denied the chances that were afforded to me. As an individual, my social mobility was inflected through economic class and geography. I had to leave home in order to get an education. But my individual experiences also signal a collective process, one where many people need to leave home for a variety of reasons. Such mobility is simultaneously literal and existential - the combination of specific sociological phenomena of leaving home and the philosophical meaning of having to create a new way of being from the memories of old and the challenges of new. Mobility is tangible - the legions of people who are running for their lives from poverty and violence, or the women who flee domestic violence, taking their children with them, or the LGBTQ teenagers who leave home because they see no future for their authentic selves if they stay. But arriving in a new place promises neither recognition nor acceptance. Early in my career, I wrote about these in-between spaces as being in "outsider within" locations, places where individuals ostensibly belong within two settings, but where they never fully belong to either. They see the world differently from a place is neither

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the blindness of a bona fide insider nor the ignorance of what goes on in other groups because they stand outside. In one of my early articles, "Learning from Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," analyzed how this issue shaped my sociological work. Working within these outsider-within spaces provides a backstory of my intellectual journey to embrace the power of critical literacy developed within these outsider within spaces. There was no place for me - I had to create one. This core existential question of staying on a research path that navigates multiple outsider-within locations is fundamental to my work on intersectionality. And critical literacy is the navigational tool that I have used to stay on that path.

I cannot speak to how and why my work has been accepted within academic communities as well as how far it continues to travel in a broader social context. That's an empirical question where I can only guess at the answers. But my sense is that people find ways to connect their own experiences to the issues in my work. Many recognize themselves in the work. I published *Black Feminist Thought* over three decades ago, yet people from different racial, gender, class, sexual, ethnic, and religious backgrounds find ways to read their experiences into and through that text. My story is a story of social mobility, of leaving home in search of opportunities, of finding some doors open but others staunchly shut when I arrived. This is an increasingly common experience in our desegregating, decolonizing world. I remain compelled to do the kind of intellectual work that matters to people. I write both to people who are struggling for a pathway to a world that is bigger than the one they have inherited. I also write to broader audiences on behalf of all those who have been denied books, libraries, schools, and the gift of critical literacy. I'm happy that my work has been so well-received, at least for now. I do not control whether or not it will be appreciated in my lifetime, but I do control the ability to keep going. Reading critically is thinking critically, regardless of the actual text that you are reading. Who knew that one library card could take me so far?

Reading your works, we have always appreciated your analysis, in a global perspective, of topics such as critical education, human rights, violence, global social protest, identity politics, and women of colour feminism in the United States, but also in some relevant case studies such as the Brazilian one. In the same way, we have carefully read your scientific rigour in proposing a definition of intersectionality as a critical theory of society. How much has your attention - which someone would call "militant" - for inequalities and protest movements contributed to this original proposal? If you agree with this adjective, what contribution can this make to science?

I don't adhere to strict divisions between knowledge and politics. For me all knowledge is political in some sense because it is grounded in a social world that is characterized by social inequality. And all politics requires creating ideas and systems of thought that either sustain social hierarchy or challenge it. Within this binary framework, the notion that we can build an impermeable wall between politics and science is a story that sustains the illusion of separation. On the side of politics, stand "militant" radicals whose emotions and passions overtake their reason; and on the other, dispassionate scientists who follow the "truth" no matter what the consequences may be. We all have a stake in relinquishing the binary of politics and science that no longer serves us. I work in the space of the sociology of knowledge precisely because it sees the recursive relationship between knowledge and power that takes special form for science and politics. Examining the relationship between them offers valuable clues as to how both can be better than they currently are. This is where the framework of intersectionality comes into play. It is very much about the interplay of knowledge and power relations and aims to intervene in both spheres because it sees the relationality of science and politics, as well as its own relationship to science and to politics. How can intersectionality study the social world, which is one of politics, while being embedded in it?

Throughout my career, I have approached the study of social problems and politics through the lens of social scientist. With its rigour of proposing hypotheses, testing them empirically, and

being willing to let go of cherished beliefs if the evidence points in a different direction, Western science brings a powerful set of tools that can be put to many different purposes. Nuclear energy can be used to build weapons that destroy the earth, or to harness energy that is far less damaging to people than burning coal and other fossil fuels. Confirmation bias is my enemy. To me, the practice of continuing to gather evidence for a point of view that you already hold to be true is bad science. Scientific racism was bad science, and as my work on eugenics suggests, we certainly have more than enough of that. Because I am a *social* scientist, I bring the tools of scientific reasoning to the social world, all the while trying to recognize the limitations of the tools of social science. Good science requires innovation, self-reflexivity, and working collaboratively with others, a rejection of the one great mind of an individual who has all the answers. I believe in data - in gathering evidence for one's point of view, not just believing something or someone because it's advanced by more powerful groups. None of this means that there is no space for passion, or that expressing emotions signals the inability to be rational. Critical race theory, Black feminist thought, and intersectionality, my areas of investigation and expertise, all challenge legitimated knowledge, and rely on social science to do so.

We all have partial perspectives, being in places that make some things patently clear and obscure others from our vision. Mine has been one of seeing and living inequalities as well as the ongoing protests, large and small, to contest those inequalities. To be politically committed to ethical ideals and deeply committed to science is not antithetical. What exactly is "militant" about work that aims for social justice? Or fairness? Or that aims to study social inequality? Or that diagnoses social problems with an eye toward solving them? What an impoverished social science we would have if we did not take the politics of the social world around us into account or if we failed to consider the ethical implications of our work.

In your opinion, how is sociology developing the theme of intersectionality at the international level?

I'm not sure how I would measure this either. Since 2015, the term "intersectionality" has been circulating rapidly within academia and has now spilled out into U.S. national politics in some forms that are unrecognizable to me, but in others that make me want to shout for joy. Beyond doing a keyword search with and across fields of study and the popular press, how would we know how people understand and use the idea of intersectionality? In the early 1990s, when the term intersectionality was gradually being taken up within academia, Margaret Andersen and I launched an undergraduate reader titled *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. Through updating the ten editions of anthology of readings every three years, we were able to trace the trajectory of how race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and nation as intellectual and political pillars of intersectionality were developing within academia. This process gave me a sense of how the field was developing in real time. Stated differently, editing an undergraduate reader was an excellent way of seeing how people applied the ideas of intersectionality to a variety of themes and social problems. By the tenth edition, published in 2016, we changed the title to *Race, Class and Gender: Intersections and Inequalities* to reflect the growing institutionalization of the term intersectionality itself.

By 2015, I realized that these informal measurements of intersectionality were inadequate to defining how intersectionality was developing. It was clear that intersectionality was gaining traction, but how and why? The growing authoritarianism in the US coupled with the growing popularity of the term intersectionality signaled the need to take this term seriously. During the period preceding the 2016 US Presidential election, ideas of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation were on full display. In 2015, I published an article titled "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas" and then began investigating the definitional dilemmas that I analyzed in that article. With hindsight, I can see what a monumental task I set out for myself. It took me six years to write three different books that each emphasize varying aspects of intersectionality. These three books have different objectives, are written for distinctive audiences and use diverse methodologies. This trilogy of books constitute a three-legged stool for intersectionality as a form of

critical inquiry and praxis. *Intersectionality* surveys the history, main ideas and political uses of intersectionality (Collins and Bilge 2020 [2016]). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* examines intersectionality's intellectual architecture, specifically its epistemological and political dimensions (Collins 2019). *Lethal Intersections: Race, Gender and Violence* (Collins forthcoming 2023) investigates the methodological implications of how people do and might use intersectionality as a problem-solving tool. Collectively, this trilogy of books pivot on three core questions: first, what is intersectionality? Second, what kind of knowledge project is intersectionality? And third, how can we use intersectionality? Through these questions, the books focus on the content, theory and methodology of intersectionality respectively.

Through my research and travels, I am convinced that people in a global context are engaging intersectionality's questions, concerns, and dilemmas, even if they do not use the term intersectionality. While sociology has certainly informed my approach to intersectionality, I don't see the ideas of intersectionality as travelling internationally exclusively through the institutional structures of sociology. Just as intersectionality is interdisciplinary, its international footprint is similarly expansive. I can only speak to my personal efforts to engage international readers in the ideas of intersectionality. I am far more assertive in having my ideas translated into other languages. When I found myself travelling to Brazil and realized that I was the outlier because I did not speak Portuguese, I asked to have my books translated into Portuguese. In Brazil, I found a lively, creative, and substantive set of colleagues who were already engaged in the ideas of intersectionality. Since then, I have asked my publishers to have my books translated into other languages. I have come to see translation as far more important than a simple google translate program on my computer or on my cell phone (although those are powerful tools). The answer to this question lies less in how institutions can disseminate ideas and more in how easily people the ideas of intersectionality can be translated and shared. In this context, the internet is an immense public library.

In your 2009 American Sociology Association presidential address, you emphasized the community as a dynamic political construct, especially for the interconnections among race, sex, and gender. Do you think that community could be a pertinent description of the social life where no humans are increasingly active and independent of humans? What other social categorisations can be considered for an intersectional analysis of societies in the coming years?

In some ways, my 2009 article titled "The New Politics of Community" was a clarion call for sociology to claim and develop this crucial construct in the social world that was rapidly changing. We needed a language to analyze participatory democracy that did not valorize the individual to the detriment of the group. While I had no way knowing that, by 2016, there would be a precipitous turn to authoritarianism, with hindsight, I now see how the backlash against participatory democracy had been building throughout the Obama presidency. It became increasingly clear to everyone that racism had not disappeared and that a color-blind society was more imagined than real. I put the community project aside to concentrate on intersectionality, but the ideas of intersectionality, participatory democracy and community have long been intertwined in my thinking. A careful read of the intersectionality trilogy shows how I've continued to puzzle out the idea of community in those books, especially in chapter 5 of *IACST*, and more recently within *Lethal Intersections*. In that project, I examine forms of political organizing in response to violence, specifically, community organizing and coalition politics. I also survey how the "us versus them" beliefs of authoritarianism rest on conceptions of community.

I really appreciate this question because, now that I've finished intersectionality trilogy, I can revisit this construct of community. I'm returning the construct of community because I believe it is fundamental to politics. It's a fascinating sociological concept with immense political implications that remains theoretically neglected. Community is a powerful concept because it harnesses the power of emotion to political action. Community forms the basis of human social

organization - we all grow up in and live in communities of some sort - yet such communities are routinely treated as passive backdrops for social action rather than theaters of political action. The rise of authoritarian governments and their embrace of Far-Right ideologies shows the power of community for populism. The "us-them" thinking of ethnic nationalism, that takes form within white nationalist projects in the US, places the power of community as a political construct on full display. Authoritarian projects have realized the potential of harnessing the power of community for their own ideological ends, leaving a contentious individualized identity politics that is incapable of responding to this new threat. But the same ideas of community can serve different ends. Intersectionality constitutes an analytical tool that can be used for conceptualizing and building participatory democratic communities.

I see great potential within sociology to generate a useful analysis of connections between community that speak not just to intersectionality, but also to contemporary political challenges. I've been concerned with cultivating the ideas of intersectionality, of seeing how people are using the ideas, even if they are not using the term intersectionality at all. My sense is that intersectional sensibilities are far broader than meet the eye, mainly because we no longer live in self-contained communities with firm borders. Global warming and climate change is a stark reminder of the interconnectedness of the people on this one planet. The idea of one earth seemed fanciful then, the musings of "tree hugging" environmentalists or esoteric theoretical physicists. But now, as communications and travel have moved people and places in entirely new ways, we realize that there is nowhere to go in this interconnected world. A good deal of what used to be called science fiction, and that is now called speculative fiction deals with the dystopian future that faces us as we frantically build walls to keep the imagined terror at bay of seeing, talking to and loving one another.

Intersectionality is a language that emerges from and speaks back to decolonization and desegregation of the world. It is a language of contact among people who have spent their lives learning that race and gender and sexuality and class and ethnicity and citizenship categories and religion are reliable measures of an individual's talents, skills, motivations, and achievements. As the globe shrinks, we need a language that enables to people see and communicate with one another across such differences of power. Doing so may mean claiming the power of community and using it for different ends. Intersectionality's metaphor of a crossroads may be helpful here. A crossroads is a politically negotiated, coalitional space where we arrive at some sort of common ground because we are aiming for some sort of common cause. It's a space to stop, look around and engage people/ideas that are missing elsewhere. Intersectionality aligns with the idea of meeting others who are unfamiliar but who may be on similar paths as oneself. Participatory democracy can develop in such crossroads, places where people from different places commit to building political communities that work.

Finally, can you provide us with the references whose reading you consider fundamental to understanding your works?

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