Gender: Boundaries of Identity in a Multicultural Perspective

By Noemi De Luca

The concept of gender in its binary opposition male/female linked to characteristics, attitudes and behaviors associated, appears to be the result of social and cultural construction. Indeed from a multicultural perspective and through history for instance in Ancient Greek culture, the traditional boundaries of gender concept are not sufficient to include the large variety of sexual behaviors and identities of the individuals. Feminism movement and Queers theory participate to enlarge gender's conception and especially since this reductive classification exclude several people from civil rights and lead often to social exclusion.

Introduction

Gender issues are a crucial theme for all societies and for those who lead and make policies for them. They are pivotal in the explanation of social roles and relational processes within every community, in that they set many of the rules for social interaction. These roles are very often based on the sexual difference between individuals, and are defined as "gender roles", term coined in 1955 by John Money.[1] In order to understand the processes that occur and the dynamics at work in all societies, body-related themes need to be explored from the point of view of cultural differences. Despite the fact that culture has always been important in the analysis of gender issues, examining its role nowadays has become particularly central: the present world is characterized by increasing interconnectedness which requires us to take a close look and research the elaborated way in which gender differences are apprehended across varied spaces.

Keeping this investigative goal in mind, this paper is intended to report on the understanding of gender and body-related issues across time and space, with the ultimate aim to offer a (hopefully unbiased) conclusion on the necessity to rely on a reformulation of the gender category as it is understood by Queer theorists. In the attempt to do so, a brief account of the history of gender will be outlined in the first section of the essay, presenting an insight on the processes that have led to the idea of gender as we conceive it nowadays. The following section will critically engage with uncovering the cultural origins of the binary gender classification, by exploring the implications that cultural differences have had on gender in their general trend to create a correspondence with the female and male sex. Before concluding, the author of this writing will describe the appropriate theories that have shaped the ideas around gender identity and sexuality, from Second-Wave Feminism to Queer theory, particularly reflecting on the possibilities opened up by the queer.

The Making of a Category: a Short History of Gender

A good part of the world population is brought up with a mindset that assumes that only two sexes and two genders exist: male/female and men/women. Their behavior throughout their lives is deeply affected by this axiom. As a consequence, we see that homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexualism are still a taboo in several cultures and

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[1] Money, John and Ehrhardt, Anke, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: Gender Identity from Conception to Maturity*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1972.

religions, where people have to live hiding themselves and their feelings both from their communities and authorities. Why is this status quo? How did this become the way we conceive gender diversity? And, most important, do we find the binary system of gender in all cultures? The first step to understanding the issue at stake is to outline a definition of what gender, and sexual orientation are. Sex can be defined as a set of physical characteristics determined by the presence of specific chromosomes. As it is well known, XX chromosomes give birth to a girl, whereas XY bring about the essential characteristics of a man. Defining gender and sexual orientation can be slightly more challenging, as the two ideas are often confused with one another. If we go by the definition we can find in dictionaries, gender is "the state of being male or female" (Thesaurus). This certainly entails that having two sexes to choose from, an individual can either feel that they belong to one or the other, hence adopt those behaviors that are prescribed specifically for a man or for a woman. In this sense, gender can be meant as the feeling of belonging to a sexual category. It is necessary to contribute further to the definitions outlined above by including a perspective. Understanding the two dimensions of gender is a pressing issue: on the one hand, gender is a feeling of belonging that every individual experiences; on the other hand, a whole other dimension needs to be considered, which is the idea that society perceives individuals as being part of a specific gender or another. The inner dimension of gender, or gender identity, may or may not correspond to the sex of a person. The lack of correspondence between the two unveils the cultural origins of the gender category. A look at the way that the ideas of gender roles and sexual orientation have developed throughout history may assist us in the difficult endeavor of showing how gender is a classification of identities and roles created and "cultivated" by people, a mere trait of some cultures.

The earliest documents about gender and homosexuality can be found in the history of ancient Greece. Same-sex relationships were tolerated within that society, and seen as ordinary practices. Frequently, this kind of relationship occurred between master and student (pederasty had no negative connotation and was integral part of the education of a child). Ancient Greece also presented some examples of transsexualism and cross-dressing: the goddess Cybele, for instance, was worshipped by those who were castrated and wore female clothes. Greek philosophy itself engaged with the theme of intersexuality. In his myth of the androgyn, Plato described the existence of a third sex, a synthesis of man and woman, and used it to explain the origin of love:

"The original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and a union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which once had a real existence, but is now lost, and the word androgynous is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; one head with two faces looking in opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men do now, backwards or forwards as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace [...]."[2]

The Roman copy of a Greek statue from the 2nd century BC is exhibited at the Louvre museum in Paris: Sleeping Hermaphroditus depicts a hermaphrodite, an intersexual individual showing characteristics of a female and a male body at the same time. Biologically, combinations of the sexual chromosomes different from XX and XY do exist, and can give birth to various types of intersexuals, called "true hermaphrodites". Moreover, intersexuals can also present a regular XX or XY set of sexual chromosomes, without manifesting the physical characteristics dictated by their genes (they are defined as "pseudohermaphrodites"). Despite being accepted and accounted for in ancient civilizations, to the point that, as we have seen, an intersexual goddess existed in ancient Greek culture, nowadays intersexuality acquires a cultural connotation in the term "disorders

[2] Plato, *The Symposium*, Benjamin Jowet (trans.), Great Books of the Western World, Chapter 7, p. 157.

of sex development" (DSD), which is the technical jargon to describe what is understood to be a medical condition by many professionals. What is negatively described in some societies, compared to the "orderly" development of sexual characteristics that we can find in female and male individuals, is fully recognized by other societies. The Indian government was prompted in 2009 to give recognition to the hijra community, by giving third-sex individuals the choice to define themselves as "other sex" in the official voter rolls.[3] This news from 2009 reinforces the viewpoint that a binary system of gender is not necessary, nor is it essential to maintain a two-sex system.

Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality[4] describes the scheme that the "authority" (ie. those who can exercize their power over society) put in place so as to control the productivity of people through the prescription of accepted sexual behavior. Contrary to what we might think, it was Foucault's opinion that the discourse on sexuality and sex was not suppressed, but it was rather implicitly censored through the creation of codified and accepted channels to discuss those issues.[5] Peripheral sexualities were therefore obscured in the discourse about sex, in order to silence a threat to economic productivity, which would be in turn favored by forms of sex functional to procreation.[6] Thus, Foucault's understanding was that the censorship of some manifestations of sex was utilitaristic, because the conception of women as individuals engaged in marriages and functional to procreation made it possible for the rising bourgeoisie to be reassured that their wealth would be passed on to their heirs. Robert Nye echoed Foucault's theory when he stated: "The rather sudden appearance of a "two-sex" system essentially locked men and women into a form of biological determinism that

experts, and, increasingly, individuals throughout society believed to be their sexual destiny"[7].

This part of the essay has dealt with the history of how some societies have adopted a two-gender/two-sex system and have managed to keep the lid on some individuals and their characteristics with the intention to foster an easily controlled order. Whether it be the conscientious decision of the authoritarian power, in Foucault's view, or the outcome of a cultural process, as it will be discussed in the next section of the article, a binary gender system brings about issues of justice and equality that are better exposed when a multicultural point of view is adopted.

Gender-Related Differences in Diverse Cultures and Societies

Gender perception constantly changes according to time and space. Just like every cultural aspect of life, gender is a concept that has developed throughout the history of humanity, as it has been outlined in the previous section of this essay, and across countries, cities, and spatial realities. The evolutionary characteristic of gender is evident when different ideas and perspectives about it are analyzed comparatively, be it, for instance through the observation of the way it was understood in the past in comparison with how it is conceived nowadays in Western societies, or through the examination of the different ideas about gender that coexist at the present day in culturally or spatially distant societies. This section of the article will deal with different spatial and thus cultural values that gender can assume. It is important to bear in note that the use of the term "evolutionary" is not intended to show any positive prejudice nor bias by the author towards the changes that gender has gone through, but it is a way to refer to the process of diversification of this category tout court.

It is most probably safe to state that there is no cross-cultural understanding of gender unchallenged of any contradiction. In what we refer to as Western societies, for example, a piece of garment

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[3] Singh, Harmeet Shah, *India's Third Gender Gets Own Identity in Voter Rolls*, CNN, November 12th, 2009.
[4] Foucault, Michel, *La Volonté de Savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
[5] Foucault, Michel, *La Volonté de Savoir*.
[6] Foucault, Michel, *La Volonté de Savoir*.

[7] Nye, Robert, "Sexuality," in T. A. Meade, M. E. Wiesner-Hanks (eds), *A Companion to Gender History*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 16.

in the shape of a skirt would be deemed appropriate if worn by a woman. And yet those same people that are part of Western societies would not stick up their noses at the sight of a Scotsman elegantly wearing a kilt on the street, in a pub, or at a wedding in Edinburgh. Nor would they feel that gender boundaries have been crossed if a man wore a dress on Halloween. It can be then rightly assumed that gender roles are not the same in all societies, and therefore that gender norms and value undergo reinterpretation, both during time and across spaces. This statement makes itself self-evident when the three-sexes, three-genders systems of some Indian cultures (with their Hijra) and Native American societies of North America (with their Two-spirit people) are taken in consideration.

The discursive element of gender, highlighted by Judith Butler[8] in her Gender Trouble, reveals and underlines its cultural origin and bias. The recurrence to a variety of gender norms in different languages further demonstrates its cultural aspect. In their essay on the linguistic construction of gender identity through lexical choices in Greek publications, Dionysis Goutsos and Georgia Fragaki pointed out the way that female and male genders can be shaped by the choice of words to refer to men/women and boys/girls. What is of particular interest for our discussion is the fact that in modern Greek, as it was in Aristotle's ancient Greek, sex can be αρσενικός (male) or θηλυκος (female), and that this binary scheme applies to gender, so that we have a masculine (ανδρικος) and a feminine (γυναικειος) gender. Therefore, gender moves along the lines of sex, encouraging the implicit understanding that gender is as natural and given as sex, and not man-made as the theories discussed later in this essay will point out. This characteristic of gender can be traced also in the use that French speakers make of the words genre and sexe (or the use of genere/sesso made by Italian speakers): the latter is used interchangeably to signify both gender and sex in everyday and non-professional speech; whereas genre, outside of the literature realm, is only used in the academia to refer specifically to

gender. Contrasting the trend that we have outlined here, Kamla Bhasin discussed the pertinence of most South Asian languages in differentiating between sex and gender by qualifying the basic term linga (sex) with the adjective for "biological" or "social".[9] In this sense, the cultural origin of gender is easily exposed in South Asian languages. And yet, this mere fact does not make the category "gender" any more fair to the people who do not conform with the expectations of behavior that society envisages for them. A transvestite, a transsexual, a butch (a masculine lesbian), or a gay man exceed and cross the boundaries neatly set for male and female gender roles, thus creating and occupying a grey area in the gender system. If it is the case that gender roles only exist to mirror the sexes that are conceived as natural by many societies, including the Western ones, we are left with the impending task to make up our minds on whether admitting to the cultural origin of gender and to the pretence of the binary system of sexes, or otherwise leaving a good percentage of the world population out of the possibility for analysis, justice and inclusion.

Uncovering the cultural essence of gender was a necessary step to approach the issue of understanding gender from an intercultural point of view. Nowadays, in a global and multicultural world, where everything moves, mingles, changes and develops at a faster pace, uncovering the cultural aspects of gender becomes crucial in order to be able to promote a flowing and smooth exchange and contact among different societies and people. Of particular interest is Gloria Anzaldúa's perspective on the intersection between gender, ethnicity and the self. Already in 1987, the Mexican feminist author of Indian origins put forward in Borderlands/La Frontera her conception of the self marked by the fact of being a mestiza (mixed-race Latina) who crossed the US-Mexican border several times, repeatedly mediating between different cultures.[10] By writing in a mixed style, using several languages and different literary genres, Anzaldúa directed her at-

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[8] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990, p. xxv.

[9] Bhasin, Kamla, *Understanding Gender*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000.

[10] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco: Spinsters-Aunt Late, 1987.

tention to "threshold" people like herself, who challenge categorizations of identity with their mere existence from many points of view (especially that of the sexuality and ethnicity).[11]

The lack of a homogeneous comprehension of gender identity and roles also creates legal confusion: the existence of a plethora of laws discordantly regulating gender-related issues is once again evidence of the cultural feature of gender and synonym of unfair and unequal treatment that people from and in different countries can incur into.[12]

Critically Thinking About Gender: from Feminism to Queer Theory

Gender as we know it is a limited concept: since it cannot include and explain non-heterosexual non-mainstream practices, it becomes an invalid key to understand reality. Social justice and civil rights are still nowadays deeply affected from such limitation forced onto people by the binary system. Women and LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersexual) people have suffered because of unequal laws and misconceptions throughout history, treated as inferior beings even to the point of being dehumanized. Historically, mainstream culture has given a minor role to women, even when in theory promoting equality. With the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789 for instance, "man" was conceived as the overarching category, which would include all human beings, creating an imaginary unity that disregarded differences and distinctive qualities. In 1793, moving the first steps towards what would have become known as Feminism, Olympe De Gouges wrote Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen. Man as the neutral category was an idea strongly opposed by Second-wave Feminism, which underlined the "universality of female subordination"[13].

French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir laid down already in 1949 the basic arguments that would be brought forward later on by Second-Wave Feminism. In her book Le Deuxieme Sexe, she examined the causes of the inferiority and submission of women to men:

"When an individual (or a group of individuals) is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he is inferior. But the significance of the verb to be must be rightly understood here; it is in bad faith to give it a static value when it really has the dynamic Hegelian sense of "to have become." Yes, women on the whole are today inferior to men; that is, their situation affords them fewer possibilities. The question is: should that state of affairs continue?"[14]

Elaborating on de Beauvoir's idea that men and women should be equal, French philosopher Luce Irigaray exposed the injustice suffered by women as philosophical subjects always defined in relation to the male individual as "the other".[15] Monique Wittig, French feminist and novelist, author of several books (L'Opoponax and The Lesbian Body among others), strongly opposed the heterosexual discourses in her The Straight Mind: "the discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality"[16]. At the end of the 20th century a qualitative shift occurred, from strictly feminist theories and politics of difference towards a more holistic approach to gender, which took the critiques of social reality to a new level of acknowledgment of diversity. Feminism had first highlighted the importance of equality between men and women, then moved on to analyze woman as a separate philosophical and political entity, a full individual not defined in relation to man. However,

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[11] Seller, Anne, "Gloria *Anzaldúa*," in L. Code (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
[12] On this topic, Ottoson, Daniel, *State-Sponsored Homophobia. A World Survey of Laws Prohibiting Same-Sex Activity between Consenting Adults*, May 2008, ILGA.
[13] Ortner, Sherry, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lampere (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975, p. 67.

[14] de Beauvoir, Simone, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Gallimard: Paris, 1949; H. M. Parshley (trans.), London: Jonathan Cape, 1953, p. 23.
[15] Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum. De L'Autre Femme*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974. And also, Irigaray, Luce, "The Question of the Other," in *Yale French Studies. Another Look, Another Woman*, no. 87, 1995.
[16] Wittig, Monique, "The Straight Mind," in R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. T. Min-ha, and C. West (eds), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, London: MIT Press, p. 58.

the binary gender cateogory was left in place by Feminism as it was, based on the two sexes, thus leaving a whole set of individuals without the possibility to fully be part of society and to enjoy their civil rights. If with Ce Sexe Qui N'Est Pas Un[17] Irigaray underlined the need for two sets of individuals to be recognized, it was Queer theory that, some years later, concluded that the equal inclusion in society of two sexes was not enough to promote justice for all individuals. In fact, Queer theory, and specifically Judith Butler, exposed gender as an empty category, unable to analyze all sexual practices.[18]

The term Queer theory was coined in 1990 by Teresa De Lauretis, initially to avoid all the confusing terminology to address gay and lesbians.[19] Queer had already been in use for a long time: meaning diagonal or transverse, it acquired the connotation of sexual deviance only in the 18th century. With more recent theory on sexuality, queer became an overarching term, capable to grant inclusion to all different sexualities, accepted with the same equal status. Instead of flattening all differences, Queer theory understands and acknowledges all forms of sexual diversity; with its ability to contain all shades of meaning in the realm of sex and sexuality, queer represents a solution against societal violence suffered by those individuals who exceed gender boundaries.

Late scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick perfectly described in Epistemology of the Closet the lack of visibility that affects the "deviant identities", by using the metaphor of the closet. The space in which these identities are forced to act and live their sexual desires was compared to the closet, a private space where any gay, lesbian, transsexual person can hide and spare themselves other people's judgments.[20] On the same lines, professor of Biol-

ogy and Gender Studies Anne Fausto-Sterling denounced the practice of performing corrective surgery on intersexual babies in order to force them into belonging to a sex or the other. The author of Sexing the Body criticized those operations to the point of comparing them to female genital mutilation of some African societies, as in both cases human beings are deprived of the ability to experience sexual pleasure.[21]

The first theory that can be considered "queer" is the theory of performativity by Judith Butler, who introduced the idea that individuals are relational subjects in continuous development, and therefore in need of a fluid category able to include all their different stages. In her renowned book Gender Trouble, the American philosopher and feminist described gender as a repetition of behaviors and actions not related to the binary opposition male/female.[22] These performance are the imitation of behaviors which give the impression of pre-existent gender patterns and are the outcome of a social construction: "gender identity can be conceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices"[23]. Drag is also described by Butler as an imitative performance: "Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done. It implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation"[24]. The pleasure of drag can be found in the deconstruction of the heterosexual paradigm and this performance needs an audience in order to be recognized. However, the performativity of gender roles is, in a sense, a double-edged sword: parody and subversion can be a way to challenge them[25], but the mere fact of reenacting them poses a threat in that it can also consolidate them as they are. In Butler's theory

[17] Irigaray, Luce, Ce Sexe Qui N'Est Pas Un, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977.
[18] Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble.
[19] De Lauretis, Teresa, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities", in Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 3:2, 1991.
[20] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, "Epistemology of the Closet," in H. Abelove, M. A. Barale, D. M. Halperin (eds), The Lesbian and

Gay Studies Reader, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 48-49.
[21] Fausto-Sterling, Anne, Sexing the Body. Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality, New York: Basic Books, 2000, p. 79.
[22] Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble, p. 140.
[23] Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble, p. 138.
[24] Butler, Judith, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in D. Fuss (ed.), Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, p.21.
[25] Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble, p. 137.

lies the possibility to manipulate and rebuild the gender category so as to make it more inclusive and able to restore its analytical power for all sexualities.

Conclusion

The analysis of the development of the meaning of gender throughout history, as well as the examination of the different connotations that this same category has in varied societies has led to the clear conclusion that gender as a binary classification of human beings is not necessary. Even more so because its existence as a female/male scheme applied to reality has damaging consequences for many individuals: intersexuals, like homosexuals until not long ago, are diagnosed with a medical condition and often forced into changing their body so as to conform with the female or the male sex; moreover, people whose behavior crosses the boundaries neatly set for men and women are outcast, negatively judged by the society they live in, and denied even the basic civil rights, usually due to the impossibility of having their relationships officially recognized. Differences among societies in this matter are overabundant, thus increasing the complexity of the exchange and movement of people in a globalized world. This is especially true if other differences, apart from gender diversity, are taken into account: the combination of the cultural construction of gender with other factors, such as different ethnicity, age, religion, etc. represent a whole new set of challenges for the citizens of the world today, which can be better put into perspective and overcome with the help of a multicultural approach.

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A veil on power, Women on the verge of an identity crisis (because of men): the case of Turkey

By Cristoforo Spinella

Womanliness and gender identity in Turkish culture is complex. Turkey was a precursor in the protection and recognition of women individuality and rights in the public and political sphere even before European countries for instance concerning the universal woman suffrage. However, recent political declarations, the high rate of domestic violence, the lack of women representation in the decision-making process and media representation of the women, tend to maintain their role in the Turkish society from a traditional and patriarchal state of mind. Identity of Turkish women are caught between modernity and traditionalism.

Gender policies in Turkey

"It is certain that the reason of the suicide of these our girls is their excessive misery,there is any doubt, - said the sub-prefect in Ka. – But if misery was the real reason of a suicide, in Turkey half of women would suicide…"

(Orhan Pamuk, "Snow")

"All women should give birth to at least three children". It is with this hope that on the 8th March 2008 the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan celebrated the International Women's Day. Speaking to an audience that was expecting the guidelines of the gender policies of his Islamic inspiration government, in power for six years yet, he did not leave space to any ambiguity. A concept reaffirmed several times during the years, and made stronger by the initiatives that in the plans of its government should further encourage the birth rate. The last in order of time is the law, passed in the last summer, which prohibits caesarean births unless medical necessity to avoid reducing the women fertility. But even before this law – designed together with a plan still under discussion to reduce from 10 to 4 weeks the maximum time limit for abortion, making it almost impossible – there had been measures and suggestions to frame the Turkish women into the roles in which still today lots of people want to see them locked up: those of wives and mothers.

It is certainly not just a political issue *stricto sensu*. Indeed, historically the "controlled democracy" of Turkey has brought with it a significant protection of the women role in the public dimension, and not just compared to the rest of the Muslim world. Just to make some instances, the universal women suffrage began in 1934, a decade earlier than in France and Italy, and already in the next year elections the 4,6 percent of those elected were woman. In the mid-nineties, then, it arrived the time for the first woman premier, Tansu Çiller: a result that still today many European countries are waiting for. The effect of the reforms of radical secularism imposed by the founder of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk since the Twenties have guaranteed to Turkey a very advanced legislation with respect of women rights, often at the cost of a violent break with the traditions.

The above mentioned example of the ban of the Islamic veil in public places and university remains paradigmatic. Largely modified by the monochrome government of the Akp (Justice and Development Party) – heir of the Islamic parties tradition long banned or suppressed - , which has been leading the Country unceasingly for ten years now. This law which in the legislative intension wanted ensure that women have the "Western freedoms" discouraging some presumed religious constraints became surely a discrimination tool. Creating those that Merve Kavakçı, still today the veiled woman elected in the parliament history of Ankara, has defined as «second-class citizens», the prohibition *ex lege* im-

posed in a society that, mostly outside of the big urban centers, remained culturally and politically traditionalist, has effectively split into two Turkey. Even here dip the roots of dichotomies such as city/province, élite/people and modernity/tradition on which is installed the actual profile of the Country. The result is the fear that the reorganization of the social balances in a direction that is more in line with the requests expressed in the ballot boxes by most of the Turkish becomes an anew "dictatorship of the majority" in the power bodies. The alarm bell sounds strong on the basis of factual and symbolic initiatives launched in these years by a government that after a decade continues to enjoy of a large popular consent. The references range from above mentioned invitations to the social use of women's body – the exaltation of fertility adheres to religious precepts as well as to a deliberate policy of demographic expansionism that Turkey encourages massively – to the symbolic redefinition of sexuality in literature, cinema and television (a good instance could be the success of the recent video transposition of the best-seller novel of Şule Yüksel Şenler "Huzur Sokağı", published for the first time in 1970 and model of "novels for salvation" which defines the passage from the Western "libertine" life style to the acceptance of chaste precepts of Islamic religion). In this context, makes its way the fear that that the political success of the social conservatism can be used to revoke some of the acquired rights, the some of the acquired rights, although with a rigid *top-down* process, during the nearly ninety years of republican history.

Reality and representation

The representation of womanliness is, in Turkey more than anywhere else, a complex aspect. Considering for example a couple of recent episodes well deep-rooted in the popular culture. As the controversy exploded during the recent Olympics Games of London when Yüksel Aytuğ, editor of the conservative daily *Sabah* (The Morning), accused the athletic competition of "killing womanliness": an opinion, his one, which considers that the costumes and the uniforms used by the women athletes would distort the charm, and for this reason

should be favored those who manage to preserve it, until getting points for beauty. Moreover: in his article, Aytuğ launched an invitation to women's associations in order that they protest against the Olympics, explaining that it was enough "looking at the swimmers" to realize it:

"Women with large shoulders, flat breast, small hips: totally indistinguishable from men. Their breasts – the womanliness and motherhood symbol – flattened as they were mere obstacles to speed. And I do not even speak of the javelin throwers and shot-putters, of the weight lifters or the wrestlers. More you look like a man, more you are successful..."

Beyond the immediate and inevitable criticism coming from half world, this grotesque representation resends, however, to an image of the woman that in Turkey still conserves a place: the exclusive mean of the men taste satisfaction and the perpetuation of the family institution. Another important effect in the definition of the female figure in the public space comes from, as often happens, the imaginary conveyed by the television. In these years, dramas and sit-coms produced in Turkey have lived a real boom in terms of commercial and audience success, even outside the Country's borders. However, in some cases, it appears to be controversial the representation of gender identity offered by these mass productions in which women are depicted as weak and generally victimized, like in the case of famous soap opera "Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?" (What is the Fatmagül's fault?). "Turkish women are so impressed by these characters to take them as model. But then they face the ones of globalized society and this causes confusion. To this must be added that Turkish men are still too reluctant to share their power and responsibility", already suggested some years ago by the researcher Sengül Hablemitoğlu, professor at Ankara University dealing with gender studies.

Power is perhaps the real key for change that is still lacking. As Sibel Gönül, Akp deputy leader of the Commission on Equal Opportunities and therefore part of the present ruling class, explains:

"For me, the main area in which Turkey needs to improve is the role of women in decision-making mechanism.."

The Judicial power, for example, is too much in the hands of men. According to data of judiciary, only 25% of 7600 judges and hardly 8% of prosecutors are women. In the Parliament, the women representation does not reach 15%. It does not astonish, then, that the Country is in last places (126th on 131) of the World Economic Forum classification on gender gap. Actually, there is a lack of basis. The percentage of female employment is still below 30% and consequently the dependence from man – husband, brother or father – still remains too strong. According to latest UN Human Development index, only 24% of women work and only 27% had completed at least upper cycle of secondary school (compared to 47% of men). The Turkish Organization for employment (Işkur) has repeatedly raised the issue by launching a campaign aimed to increase the number of women at one third in the total workforce, by 2015. Certainly, progress has been noticed. Since 2001, for example, the number of mothers under 15 years fell to 87%. But the rate of juvenile marriages for women is at 32% (compared to 7% of men), a fact that makes of Turkish "children brides", the largest group in Europe after Georgia. They seem too many, but it astonishes less if we consider that a third of them could not complete even the primary school. There is then another problematic issue. The dependence from man is fed also by cultural assumptions, thus it continues to exist. All the surveys show that not only the majority of Turkish men, but even of the women consider the carrying out of domestic activities as the main women task. In the most reactionary contexts, the work has almost the character of social wound since it takes them away from their "function".

The Turkish femicide

It is here that the femicide, that in silence devastates the Country, dips its roots: in the idea that women choices cannot be free, nor contrary; in the said "no" or even just assumed. Almost a victim at day: according to "Bianet" observatory, 257 in 2011, 217 in 2010, and many other dozens in the still partial count of 2012. A massacre that is consumed mostly within the home walls, and however, generally, by hand of husbands or relatives. A tragedy that last year brought Turkey to be the first Country to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention of violence against women and to move forward a series of campaigns on the theme by the Family and Social Policy Minister Fatma Şahin. *"If statistics are not improving despite the legislative developments, then we need to reconsider our policies starting from scratch* – reflected last months the president of the Parliament of Ankara Cemil Çiçek – *The laws are certainly important to reverse thenegative trends, but it is obvious that at the basis of the problem there is an inadequate education"*. Here it is. Even in 2005 the new Criminal Code had predicted more severe penalties for the crimes of violence, but the deterrence was not enough. The number of shame: the Turkish police speak of 78.488 episodes classified as domestic abuse or violence against women in a year and half, between February 2010 and last August. More clearly: one every ten minutes. And for the same authorities the number is underestimated, since that only one-tenth of the cases effectively recorded joins these statistics, and probably many others are unreported. Therefore, the data of NGOs dealing with the issue say more: 4 Turkish women out of ten suffered a physical violence at least once, 15% sexual abuses. In the house it is even worse: according to a research of the Bahçeşehir University of Istanbul, between 50% and 70% of the Turkish brides had suffered abuses within the domestic walls. And 15% of them even feels to "*had deserved it*". Then, where does the path of Turkish women lead, caught between ideas of modernity and calls of a severe tradition with those who break it, between emancipation and segregation? On the shoulders of optimists there is the weight of contradictions. «Abortion is a murder», says one day the Prime Minister Erdoğan, and the next one exalts the women role in the Turkish society development. But if «All women should give birth to at least three children», how does he insist saying, who will look after them?