

**MASS MEDIA AND THE  
REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER**

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### **About the project**

The project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power” is executed in terms of the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). It seeks, by challenging and changing the existing stereotypes, to reach a situation when both genders are motivated and enjoy equal opportunities to participate in decision-making on issues important for the whole society. The project partners are the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, the Giacomo Brodolini Foundation (Italy), the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.

More information can be found at the project website: [www.medijuprojekts.lv](http://www.medijuprojekts.lv)

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# 1. Main Research Report

## 1.1 Abstract

Our research considers how the disadvantageous social position of women affects the widespread diffusion of certain female images – images possessing the characteristics of a stereotype. Some peculiarities exist in a country such as Italy, for example: a long-standing division of sexual roles due to gender stereotypes in the Catholic culture; strong pressure to change these roles arising from the increased participation of women in different fields of work; a representational parity of men and women in most jobs.

Through the self-representation of female politicians and evidence provided by female journalists and experts in communication we tried to understand what cultural elements exist that oppose a rebalancing of political representation. Such a process started some thirty years ago in Italy.

We mixed the images female politicians have of themselves, of politics, and of their relationship with power with the qualitative analysis of some political information programmes aired a month before the European Elections and in which some of the female politicians interviewed participated. .

What emerges is a female representation that is more or less self-aware, associated to a mother figure characterised by a strong and intense emotional life, along with some exceptions - autonomous female politicians who are capable of imposing themselves in this arena thanks to their ability to enter or exit gender stereotypes. These two different realities seem to be in parallel and are not able to integrate themselves at a political level. At national level, there are few female representatives in governmental institutions, whereas, at regional level (especially in Central and Northern Italy), and in some cities, there are as many female politicians as in Northern Europe. Moreover, Italy has a large number of associations, cultural initiatives and centres for women which promote female participation in decision-making roles.

We concluded that, in Italy, television keeps on proposing traditional female role models. When women try and show their “difference” (competence, being able to listen carefully to others and to understand life and feelings), somehow they seem to be excluded from “practical politics” and to attain a sort of “invisibility”. Therefore, television seems to give prominence to those women who, more or less self-aware, are not contained within gender stereotypes because they can enter and exit them (even if only partially) and use them in unpredictable ways.

## 1.2. Introduction

### Some Italian and European research on women and television

Our country subscribed to the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (Peking, 1995), where media were invited to strongly promote a less stereotyped image of women, to develop strategies for the application of an equal participation of men and women in TV shows and programmes and to increase women’s participation in decision-making roles.

Within the medium-term Community Action Programme (1996-2000) two projects on the women-media relationship were financed:

The first one is an international comparative study on women’s participation in TV programmes organized by 6 European public TV channels: Holland, Germany, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark. The project availed itself of a thorough training toolkit to promote correct behaviour towards “gender difference” in TV.<sup>1</sup> Italy was not part of the consortium, but we can compare the results of that research with the results of some analogous Italian research on television.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The training toolkit ‘Screening Gender’ is a co-production between five public service broadcasting organisations: NOS (Netherlands), NRK (Norway), SVT (Sweden), YLE (Finland) and ZDF (Germany). A sixth broadcaster, DR (Denmark), was part of the consortium during its first year of operation. The project was developed over three years (1997–2000) and was co-financed by the Commission of the European Communities.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, we refer to the research carried out by CNEL: *Donne, Lavoro, TV. La rappresentazione femminile nei programmi televisivi (Women, Work, TV. Female representation in TV programmes)*. See Bionda M.L., Bourlot A., Cobianchi V., Villa M., *Lo spettacolo della politica. Protagonismo e servizio nel talk show*, Roma, Vqpt, 1998. L. Cornero ed., *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione*, RAI VQPT, Roma 2001.

Despite Northern European countries being far more advanced in dealing with the role of women, their TV channels still show signs of unequal representation of women's roles.

Northern European television companies highlight the large presence of female newsreaders compared to other roles in their programmes ("although women are only 32% of all internal participants in the programmes, 54% of television newsreaders are female. In all countries except Denmark, the female percentage of newsreaders is higher than average"). Over the last twenty years the number of female newsreaders in Italy has increased<sup>3</sup>. They quickly became popular. Is their popularity, however, derived from the implementation of women's decision making roles within journalism, or is it more a matter of "visibility without power", the so-called "shop-window effect"?

The large amount of time devoted to sport by all European television companies and the low proportion of women sports commentators was also noted. In all countries female participation is lowest in sports programmes. It is most balanced in children's and youth programmes. In Italy, the same thing holds true: in 2002, sports services were the second most-discussed topic within RAI news programmes, whereas it was first place in Mediaset news programmes.<sup>4</sup>

In Northern European TV companies, what emerges is that women are least likely to be present as experts and in the authoritative function of narrator or voice over.<sup>5</sup> At this level, it is again clear that women are most likely to be found in roles with a low status. For example, although women are 32% of all external participants, they are 37% of people presented in a 'victim' role and 47% of people shown in the role of "ordinary citizen".

In Italian infotainment programmes, women play a minor role among experts, both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view (exceptions are made for some isolated figures). Women professionals are depicted in a markedly different way than male professionals. Most of the time, their job, their career, their competence, and their expectations are associated with typical "female" topics (and thus relegated to a secondary level): job-family relationship, their household, children, husband, cooking ability, taking care of their body etc. The mixing up of

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<sup>3</sup> *La rappresentazione di genere nelle trasmissioni di informazione RAI*, research supervised by F. Marsciani, in: L. Cornero ed., *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione*, RAI VQPT, Roma 2001, p.83. We will deal with "female TV journalists" later on.

<sup>4</sup> Data provided by the Observatory of Pavia.

the public and private self (with the latter gaining predominance ) often leads to the *marginalizing of the woman's work activity*.<sup>6</sup>

Another characteristic of Northern European TV companies<sup>7</sup> is common also in Italian television and is related to the “introduction” of female guests in TV programmes. We asked female politicians who are experts in mass media whether they had perceived any differences in the way they were introduced in TV programmes. Many reported there were differences in the way men and women are introduced, the latter being in some way disadvantaged. This was confirmed by research on TV gender representation<sup>8</sup>: male experts are more appreciated than women, whereas the few female experts are not introduced with their proper title.

In Northern European television was noticed a very traditional division, with most female participation in programmes with topics such as human relations, family, health and social issues. We found similarities with Italian TV also regarding a certain “segregation” of female content<sup>9</sup>.

A second project about “Women's Image in Media” was carried out within the Fourth Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for men and women. A Report on “Women's Image in Media” was produced in 1997. It was co-ordinated by Ullamaja Kivikuru, and it analysed the studies carried out so far in more than 15 European countries (Italy was represented by Marina Impallomeni and Enza Plotino)<sup>10</sup>.

The report focused mainly on the radio and TV broadcasting system, and particularly on the reaction of the audience to certain representations. Women tend to be more critical than men,

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<sup>5</sup> Apart from their general function in the programmes, external participants (external participants are people from outside the company who take part in programmes – for example interviewees, politicians, actors, experts) might also have a more specific role.

<sup>6</sup> CNEL research, pp.345-47.

<sup>7</sup> In that research a very significant difference was founded in how the participants were introduced: although 36% of the men are presented with a title, only 22% of the women are introduced in this way . Even though the overall level of formality seems to vary greatly between countries – from Denmark at the 'informal' end of the scale to Finland at the most 'formal' – the pattern of difference between women and men is consistent across all countries.

<sup>8</sup> See S. Capecchi, Clelia Pallotta, *La rappresentazione di genere nei programmi d'approfondimento e d'attualità*, in: L. Cornero ed., *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione*, RAI VQPT, Roma 2001, pp. 124 and 162-163.

<sup>9</sup> See M Deni, *Il ruolo dell'esperto: differenze di genere*, in : L. Cornero ed., *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione*, RAI VQPT, Roma 2001, p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> The analysis compared methods and results of a large field of analysis: radio, TV, the press, and the new media such as Web sites, Minitel, and videogames.

not only about the areas they are most involved in, but also about ethical and educational issues, and infancy in particular. The research provided not only novel results at an analytical level, but also proposals for operational teams and points for further research for example:

- ❖ the building of a European monitoring team on Media (EuroMediaWatch) which constantly monitors gender images in media content throughout Europe. The Model was adopted by analogous structures in Canada (MediaWatch, since 1981) and in the USA (Women, Men & Media, since 1989). Their goal is to start up a discussion among the main media producers and among women's organisations and media female professionals;
- ❖ research on the role of mass media in shaping women's perception of political life. Do media contribute to the marginalization of women in their public life? Are they the proper medium to deal with the protagonism of petty female politicians? Do they connote institutions so that citizens of both sexes can really be interested in them?
- ❖ research on the models of access to media among ethnic groups of women. There is still a long way to go to for what concerns a multicultural Europe. Furthermore, we still know too little about the role of the media in this matter, for Third World women immigrants in particular;
- ❖ research on the promotion of conditions to allow female media professionals to impact on the content of TV programmes. A debate is currently on-going within professional journalists' work councils.<sup>11</sup>

As for Italian surveys, the first study on women's image in TV was carried out by Milly Buonanno<sup>12</sup> in 1981. Her contribution is a fundamental work both for the qualitative analysis of the content (which favoured the understanding of how TV viewers decode messages) and for starting a debate among experts. It is also a cornerstone for any observation on the development of the female image.

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<sup>11</sup> L. Cornero ed., *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione*, RAI VQPT, Roma 2001, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Milly Buonanno: *L'immagine inattesa. La donna nei programmi televisivi tra reale e immaginario*, RAI VQPT, Roma 1981. M. Buonanno is Professor of Sociology of Communications at the University of Florence. She is one of the experts who were interviewed for this survey.

In that survey, Buonanno<sup>13</sup> pointed out the active and un-conservative TV proposals devised to modify the female image by removing its stereotyped features and thus trying to modernize it. At the time, TV seemed to carry on breaking the traditional models as feminism had done before, both for information programmes and for fiction and commercials. The author, however, warned against the emergence of “blended” female models, rather than the “emancipated” ones. We will later look at what her opinion is today.

Besides Buonanno’s several studies and other essays, the following is among the most important research in the field: the survey by the Coordination of RAI TV female journalists, Roma, 1992 edited by M. Piazza: *Tv in genere. Presenze e immagini di donne in tv (Gender TV. The presence and the image of women in TV broadcasting)*; the survey by RAI edited by L. Cornero<sup>14</sup>, and published in the edited volume *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione, (One, No One, but... when will there be One Hundred Thousand? How women are portrayed in Tv broadcasting)* RAI VQPT, Roma 2001. The main subject of this research is the role played by TV in improving and promoting women. The research brings together two types of analytical observation: “content analysis” and a detailed semiotic analysis of particularly significant cases. Both approaches maintain a central prerequisite, i.e. the need to explore the strategy of the valorisation /de-valorisation of female representation.

We would like to mention the recent survey *Donne Lavoro e TV – La rappresentazione femminile nei programmi televisivi (Women, Work, and TV – Female representation in TV programmes)*, 2003, organised by CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e Lavoro) and carried out by Cares, Observatory of Pavia, under the supervision of Gianni Lo Sito. The research deals with TV fiction and entertainment programmes on Italian TV. The goal of this research was to survey and describe the representation of women in television programmes with reference to two fields or macro-genres that occupy a predominant segment of the schedules of the leading national networks: fiction and entertainment. The section of this research that addresses TV fiction is a quantitative content analysis, which differs from past studies in that it compares the representation of the feminine and masculine conditions by using variables that define not only the socio-demographic and occupational profile of the main

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<sup>13</sup> After producing her first studies, Milly Buonanno established an Observatory on Italian and foreign TV fiction. The Observatory monitors constantly the different TV productions, produces texts and critical studies on the way changing female and male identities are presented.

characters that appear in TV fiction, but also their outward appearance, their normative and value universe of reference, their personality, their antisocial and pro-social behaviour, and the way in which they interact with other characters in the context of family, friends and work.

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<sup>14</sup> L. Cornero was also interviewed for this research .

## **1.3. Methodology**

### **1.3.1. The representation of women politicians in television information programmes**

The aim of this part of the research was to investigate – from a semiotic and communications point of view - the types of representation and gender stereotypes that emerged in the period of the electoral campaign for the European elections of 2004, for what concerned the main Italian information talk-shows. By “information talk shows” we mean programmes that though, in theory strictly informative (and, in our case, political-electoral information) they often appear to be entertainment shows.

This work is based around a field that has already been frequently studied. In fact, studies on the relationship between political and televised communication, especially in the last 5-6 years, have multiplied. The relationship between politics and television has also many dimensions. Politics presents itself on television in three ways: as the content of the media (TV discussions about politics), as the subject of the media (politicians entertain and inform), and as a context of the media (TV is situated in an arena that – as in our case – has a strong political component). From this perspective the relationship between media and politics cannot in any way be reduced to just an informative relationship but something that is much more complex and arbitrated, involving networks of reciprocal constructed relationships.

From a semiotic point of view, the relationship between media, information and politics poses, above all, a narrative problem: how are events constructed by the media? Who, at different times, are the individual protagonists, the interests, methods and strategies attributed to them? And how do they vary – these strategies and representations- according to the sex of the person on screen? At the same time, each televised speech is also always argument, made up of assumptions, proof, and conclusions. It plays with generalisations and peculiarities that involve judgements; how are these judgements conditioned by the gender identity of who is involved?

In our case, this meant looking, in particular, at how the female world is presented during the electoral campaign in televised political speech and argument.

We therefore investigated, semiotically, the characteristics of an appearance, for example:

- ❖ Stereotypes and roles this appearance assumes;
- ❖ The type of “action” that this appearance involves (a political action, an interpretative action, a defensive action, an entertainment action);
- ❖ The methods of interaction (discourse, gestures, proxemics) with the other actors present;
- ❖ The “passions” of the appearance, the emotional tone that was mainly assumed.

The semiotic assumption is that identity – and therefore also gender identity – is, above all, the product of social discourse and practice; what needs to be looked at is how political and televised discourse contribute to the dominance of certain stereotypes, subverting some and creating new ones.

The analysis carried out was qualitative and was not therefore sourced from statistical data regarding number of appearances, absence of certain actors, percentages etc.. (equally important but a different specialisation) but involved instead an analysis of televised representations and communication strategies. A unified analytical framework (applied in the study of every programme) was used and the following aspects was observed:

- ❖ The choices that every programme makes with regard to possible themes (dominance of political issues, policy issues, campaign issues, personal issues..);
- ❖ The roles that actors assume (who plays what role in the televised political communication)
- ❖ The communicative styles of the actors (starting from a lexical analysis of the discourse produced by each person);
- ❖ The management of the interaction between the actors (turns to speak, times, freedom...);
- ❖ The organisation of space and the placement and movement of the actors in the space;

- ❖ The public persons present.

### **1.3.2 The interviews**

The methodological choice was that of the semi-structured interview, articulated on the basis of a general framework and sometimes changed during the interview itself.

The questions (explicit or implicit) are aimed at revealing determined aspects, past or present, in the life of the person and to achieve an understanding of any change in the behaviour of the person. The aim is to have interpersonal contact with the interlocutor.

The interview questions were structured following guidelines provided by the researchers from Latvia, reducing slightly the number of questions for the amount of time available to the women in the electoral campaign period.

Some questions were also added relevant to the participation of women politicians in talk-shows with content concerning the European Elections 2004, in order to discover if they noticed any discriminatory elements with regard to gender in the programme and what was their subjective interpretation.

A total of 14 interviews were carried out with women who in this period held a political role: parliamentarians, senators, a councillor to the Commune of Rome, and candidates for the European Elections 2004, of which 7 had participated in the programmes that had been qualitatively analysed. The age of the women interviewed was over 40.

To this number 4 interviews were carried out with communication experts as well as with 5 journalists. The age of those interviewed was again over 40.

Some difficulties arose in that there were problems in contacting the women politicians. In accordance with the other research partners we considered the European Elections 2004 as a good point from which to understand and compare the experiences of the different countries. However, the pre-electoral period, chosen together with the other partners of the research, was a critical period not only for the candidates but also for the other women politicians who supported the political parties. Numerous attempts were necessary to obtain an interview and in any case, not all the contacts were successful and many women were not available for the interview. The greatest number of refusals came from the Government side and the political Right, where there are fewer women candidates and politicians.

This meant that other women than those initially thought of were needed. Although these were always in the same field, the result, however, was unbalanced political representation. Obviously the reasons were, officially, work commitments, the electoral campaign, or the interview was considered too time consuming. These reasons could, without doubt, be valid but there also exists the fact that these themes are not considered particularly important, or there is an unwillingness to tackle them, or simply to spend time on something that during a period of a heavy work load would not be immediately visible.

As concerns the journalists, the only one who directly refused to hold the interview is also the only female director of a famous weekly news and political comment magazine. Work commitments, the limited period available for the post election interviews, and commitments before the holiday period were important factors.

## **1.4. Italian Research results**

### **1.4.1 Research Results**

As we are carrying out research on gender stereotypes, we are aware of the fact that we too automatically classify, using identity principles previously set, thus dividing men and women in two groups and thereby making any other difference within the social body null and void.

This is true. By referring to “women” as a group with pre-defined common features, we are generalising, such common features being discrimination in political representation and in accessing higher ranks in decision making hierarchies. Still, we chose to use the most general dimension, which is not “natural”, nor “real”, but operative, as we feel that a general outlook and a wider perspective might be a model for future social action. As a matter of fact, the research focused on a particular group, women, and therefore it has already accepted the stereotype of “women as discriminated persons” as its founding stereotype. We cannot avoid stereotyped visions about genders, but we must fight in order to prevent them from becoming fixed stereotypes which no one can criticise. We can achieve our goal only if we have clear in mind our reflection upon and our awareness of our cultural categories. Furthermore, we must always remember how they act upon and guide social action in favour or against certain groups of people or social categories.

#### **Female politicians and their self-representation**

In a recent note regarding the project “Women, Politics, and Institutions. Training Pathways for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities in Political Decision Centres” supported by the Ministry of Equal Opportunities in 2004, the scarce participation of women in Italian political life has been highlighted. The note observes that Italian politics is still too detached from civil society where women play an increasingly relevant role.

This is mainly due, the note states, to three factors deeply embedded in our culture:

- 1) the representation of women “often portrayed as weak subjects in need of protection, an image which make women alien to the places where decisions are taken”;
- 2) “an intrinsic characteristic of our political class which tends toward self-representation and self-reproduction, thus being self-referential as it lacks the vital, dialectical relationship with civil society.”;
- 3) If the first two factors are strictly related to cultural behaviour, “the third is more markedly political. Up to today it is possible to detect the persistence of several obstacles preventing women from taking part in the country’s political life. This is due to a difficult reconciliation of the roles of women in political life, in work, and in the family.”

We think that point 1) about women portrayed as “weak subjects in need of protection” should be revised and described in detail. In a general survey of 25 countries where remarkable similarities among gender stereotypes<sup>15</sup> were detected (there is a high degree of similarity across cultures in the traits differently ascribed to the two sexes) were detected diversities as well (there is some evidence of *variform universals* in which culture gives subtle, variable twists to simple universals).

Italy is **atypical** in its link to Catholic culture. Compared to Protestant countries, Italy presents a deviation from the standard affective meaning (i.e. positive meanings) towards gender stereotypes: female stereotypes are considered in a much more positive way than male stereotypes.

... the female stereotype in the Catholic countries appeared relatively more favourable and relatively less weak than in the Protestant countries -findings that seem consistent, for example, with the virtue and power associated with the Virgin Mary....While the differences noted are not dramatic, they seem generally congruent with the differences in status and roles of women and men in the two religious traditions. The greater visibility, virtue, and power of females in the Catholic tradition seems consistent with the findings that the female stereotypes in the Catholic countries were relatively more favourable and t relatively less weak than, and relatively less differentiated from the male stereotypes on the Adult and Adapted Child dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed analysis on stereotypes please refer to chapter “Stereotypes” in this research.

<sup>16</sup> J.E. Williams, Deborah L.Best, (1990). *Measuring sex stereotypes: A multination study*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp. 262-63.

We will not deal with the “presence” of women in Catholic religion, nor with the widespread cult of Mary. We will just point out how the mother-woman is, in Christian theology, the symbol for the deliverance of the whole of humankind from the original sin. Therefore, being a mother is the main value in a woman. Another characteristic determining the important role of women in the Catholic religion is the presence of women’s religious orders. They are women who were awarded (or who awarded themselves) a direct contact with God, a counterweight to men’s dominance in the Church.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the notorious “machismo” in Catholic cultures<sup>17</sup> might be interpreted as a way of defining and differentiating from a powerful mother figure to whom men are so devoted and bound that they fear she may enthrall them<sup>18</sup>.

Women have a “great power at an emotional level” within the family which is based on motherhood. Also, they are the object of “devotion”, once again only within the family.

This “powerful figure” has permeated the feminine and masculine imaginary over the centuries. Women trying to change and reshape such an image will lose something. Homologation is a dreadful viewpoint often proposed by the feminist movement when referring to emancipationist politics.

We noticed<sup>19</sup> how strong conflicts working exercises on women as concerns their relationship with their family. This has led to one of the lowest family birth rates in the world (1.2 children per woman). The figure is half the figure of 1960 (Istat, 1999). In the South of Italy, where the mother figure is very sacred, the birth rate decreased dramatically from 3.3% in 1964 to 1.6% in 1989. Having fewer children than the other Mediterranean countries does not mean debasing motherhood. It means reducing conflicts and trying to keep the ideal image of a mother who, being unable to pay enough attention to her children, gives them up.

When female politicians<sup>20</sup> were interviewed on what politics meant for them, most of them gave answers that were more to do with the emotional side. “Passion” was the term they used

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<sup>17</sup> See also G. Hofstede (1980, p. 293) who gives Catholic cultures a higher value of masculinity compared to job-related values.

<sup>18</sup> One of the functions of the stereotype is the defence of the individual’s or the group’s identity. See the chapter on Stereotypes.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter “Access of women to Italian politics. An historical overview”.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter on “Analysis of the interviews with female politicians, experts in communication, and journalists” for a detailed analysis of the interviews. The questionnaire was devised according to the guidelines provided by Latvian researchers.

We added some questions on the participation of female politicians in talk shows before the European Elections in 2004 in order to understand how their participation was viewed.

most. For them, politics is also linked to strongly idealistic moments; it is even more than that, the woman's whole personality being involved by politics.

Politics involves the expression and the need of an identity and of self-realization. The ideal elements which characterise femininity are very important, and women are more socially-oriented at work than men are<sup>21</sup>. According to the female politicians and journalists interviewed, the low female presence is due to the cooptation rules of political bodies and institutions. Politics is accused of having rejecting qualities that are also in contrast with each other, such as "randomness and abstractness" as well as "brutality, competitiveness, self-reference, cynicism, being slave to hidden interests which are presented as truths and obsolete moralism".

Divisions and contrasts within female roles were also accused of being the main causes and as leading to difficult management of tasks and environments (work, the family, socio-political commitment). Sometimes, women were able to devote themselves to politics because they had no family (children most of all), or because they were strongly supported by their husbands. Some women let politics become the centre of their emotional life, thus concentrating all of their interests on it. In such cases "political passion" gains dominance over anything else. This means that either their non-political life has been reduced to almost nothing at all, or their private self is completely absorbed by their public self. Politics is not a part-time commitment, except for a few. . Most of them experience politics as a totalizing relationship, a replica of their reproductive and home life (on the other hand, often considered the cause or reason for their self-exclusion).

In portraying the figure of the female politician some rational elements (i.e. party political education, general knowledge) are mixed with emotional elements (i.e. patience, firmness and tenacity, flexibility, obstinacy, being able to relate with others, being humble).

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We carried out 23 interviews, 14 of which were with women who at the time had political roles: MPs, members of the Senate, a Councillor of the Commune of Rome, and candidates to the 2004 European Elections, 7 of whom had participated in the shows we analysed from a qualitative point of view. The average interviewee was over 40. 4 further interviews were held with women experts in communication, and with 5 female journalists. The average interviewee was over 40. The analysis of the interviews is part of a different section of this research.

<sup>21</sup> "Study of work goals *by gender* have shown again and again that other things being equal, men tend to stress ego goals more and women tend to stress social goals more" (G. Hofstede, *Masculinity and femininity*, 1998, p.11).

When asked what is the ability they need to work in politics, they void politics of any practical meaning and fill it with a vision related to feelings and personality<sup>22</sup> (“you need loyalty”, you “need to be coherent, trustworthy, and reliable” and “to have a strong individuality”). They think having good looks may be helpful (a nice face, an expressive look), but the main characteristic is still “passion”. There was only one female politician who claimed the importance of “female desire” and a “training on gender” for being a good politician: she is one of the founders of the association “Emily” that promotes women’s access to politics, and was a former militant in the feminist movement.

### **Power and political environment**

As for **power**, almost every woman we interviewed stated their difficulty in managing power. Their relationship with it is not clear-cut, and is somehow felt as negative. They tend to hide their desire for power behind ethical theories. They propose the paradoxical solution of keeping an equal relationship even when they are exerting power. Sometimes power is perceived as a black hole, a *bête noir*, as the feminist movement used to claim “as much authority as possible by using as little power as possible”.

Politics can be used to do good and is perceived as providing a service. They remark how few women access power, and it seems that these are important reasons for their keeping away from power. Some of them said women no longer have problems in exerting power. Only one of them has a positive attitude towards power, though as for actually practicing it, she is the only woman who was a Minister in a previous government.

Being a spokeswoman or a support to political power is another feature of women’s relationship with power. We will talk about this later on, and we will see how important religious orders are in this respect.

Political environments and political parties are perceived as suffocating, self-preserving, and excluding places<sup>23</sup>, that are lacking in ethics. They abound in personalism and people managing “pure power”. The blame is laid upon the cooptation mechanisms of political parties, as well as upon the difficulty men have in competing with a female colleague, as this means

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<sup>22</sup> Here are two examples of the answers they gave. In order to work in politics, “*you don’t need particular abilities. You learn everything. I’m learning Arabic, and I’m 56. The important thing is how passionate you are. If you have passion, then you will do tasks you don’t agree with.*”

“*As a matter of fact, there are no abilities or knowledge. The first thing which triggers political commitment is a passion for being inside things, for being in contact with people, for being able to live within society. Then you’ll learn. I studied a lot in the beginning...*”

<sup>23</sup> Other countries adopted quotas as an autonomous solution by political groups. In Italy a specific law is needed, along with fines, in order to have things changed on a larger scale.

having her as their interlocutor, and recognizing her in such a role.. On the other hand, competing with men is also difficult for women. They claim they want to avoid a direct clash, though they admit to competition with colleagues of both sexes and to their difficulty of being part of a team.

Some of them express a “thorough contempt”. They talk of market-politics and political show-biz. They picture the political environment as degraded and used for personal goals.

They wonder why women choose to work in an environment that they perceive as negative and degraded. Only one woman (who was educated outside Italy) stresses the importance of autonomous judgement and thinks conflicts can help. According to them, what women need in order to face the political environment is strong passion; the feeling of being on a crusade; of fighting for something. At the same time, however, what emerges is a feeling of being alien that brings them back to stereotypes of women’s feelings and ideals. Such women seem to look upon the political world they belong to as if they did not belong to it at all. They are absorbed by the “myth” of their being different which, however, has no equivalent in male politicians. On the contrary, they strongly oppose such a myth as it characterises it as a secluded and protected place that goes against the figure of the woman as a mother<sup>24</sup>.

What we are stating was confirmed by the analysis on TV programmes by A. Maria Lorusso (see Research Report 2). On the basis of the presence of female politicians and candidates, she pointed out that, besides not being “subjects of action” but of “passion” and “knowledge”, they are “constantly alien to the management of public life”.

On the whole, there seems to be no advantage for women in entering the political arena. Rather, no advantage must be admitted to unless it is “spiritual” (e.g. keeping on trying to attain self-realisation or personal emancipation). They speak rather about collective advantages, i.e. having succeeded in bringing their own ideas into politics; designing a more balanced and fair society; gaining rights; defending what they conquered; working for the community. When they answer, they tend to use a rhetoric common to politicians. Also, they show the need to differentiate from the Government’s politics, which they perceive as based on the Premier’s personal interests. However, women are the counterweight to the contempt shown towards the

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<sup>24</sup> In a number of interviews collected by M. Grazia Ruggerini within a trans-national project supported by the European Commission and coordinated by FCZB, “*Data base of women in decision making*”, : “some common features emerge which can be detected in the interviews of both centre-left and centre-right politicians. In particular, they lament the basic male chauvinism of Italian politics, which has no room, so it seems, for motherhood. (see M.G. Ruggerini, F. Tei, *Uno sguardo al femminile: biografie di donne ai livelli decisionali del sistema politico italiano*, Roma, 2000).

political environment. One interviewee said: “it is politics that needs women, not the other way round. Therefore, there are no advantages ‘for women’ in politics, but ‘for everybody’.” On the whole, there is little professional politics.

When women say they face the difficulties and fatigue of double working, of their conflict within their family and with the political environment just because of “almost exclusively idealistic” reasons, some reflection is needed. It is as if they were the bearer of a creed or of some ethical principles based on a sacrificial element.

### **Female politicians and television**

Descriptions of the political environment and the descriptions women give of themselves as female politician match one of the roles they play when participating in some TV programmes: “**the victim**”, both “wounded and raging”, as A. M. Lorusso writes in her analysis.

Even the current Minister for Education, Letizia Moratti, shows that

“ She immediately puts on a defensive and insecure attitude, she says “I’m putting my heart into what I say”, she is not only wronged (statistics and data that she tries to show are not relevant), but also sorry for it” .

Regarding the fact that she says “I’m sorry”, Lorusso writes:

“men never use this way in beginning a speech, while women reiterate it very often, thus being immediately connoted as “subjects of feeling” and of “sympathy” rather than subjects of action.”

The amplifying of emotions related to the role of victim in TV programmes produces a short-circuit effect. This seems to lead to a “marginalisation” of the female figure in the field of traditional stereotypes<sup>25</sup>, or, if raging, of the modern stereotypes of the woman seen as “claimer and militant”, distant from social and political reality, more oriented to disrupt it than to build it.

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<sup>25</sup> From a report on certain television programmes presented by women it was noted that the construction of the female gender re-proposed stereotypes in which “women are left the sphere of oral communication. Intimacy and feelings” C. Demaria: *Di genere in genere: le autorappresentazioni del femminile*, in L. Cornero edited by *Una, nessuna, ...a quando centomila. La rappresentazione della donna in televisione*, RAI VQPT, Roma 2001,p.222

Through the interviews held with female journalists another aspect of the female politician emerged, which was hidden behind the idealistic features in the reasons for their “entering the political arena”: the occultation of possible conflicts with political leaders and subsequently their becoming subordinate. Because their desire **for** power is not present, nor their fight for it, leaders do not seem to object. Or maybe it is because it was their fathers who told them they could enter the political arena (therefore, they cannot object to that). We again quote from A. M. Lorusso when she says that female politicians “are not able to become leading figures (Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini being the only exceptions), only sensitive spokeswomen”; “it is as if such a sense was derived from the tradition one belongs to, and not from one’s own personality”.

Being a spokeswoman takes on another aspect, which perhaps is more intriguing, especially for centre-right female politicians. It is what Lorusso calls the role of “**the champion**”, that is the privileged witness to a certain truth.

There is something sacred in “showing” their truth to the world: they show items to be venerated like the Grail: numbers, data, real experiences that do not need explanations, or critical framings, but, if dug out, speak for and define themselves.

Half of the female politicians who were interviewed were part of the women’s movement and are over 40. In making proposals to rebalance political representation, however, it is as if they were opening a new road to follow. The commonest answer is they need to use “any means” politics offers: legislation; figures; changes to the status of the political parties; positive training actions in favour of women; forcing parties to enrol women. They stress the need to be given authoritativeness, of feeling treated in an equal way, of learning to impose themselves, of more self-esteem and thus being able to make allies with male politicians. They also claim the need to join in order to gain more strength. There should be both institutional mechanisms and policies, co-ordinated by women that help women to assume responsibility for their public, collective and personal selves.

There is a personal educational pathway; a great storing of knowledge and skills. This, though, was confined to the “personal” self and was not used for official politics. Television and media do not help in communicating such experience. They oppose it. One female politician says: “*Media ... asks you to be an individual according to the question you’re asked... Television makes you wear a mask and act in a sort of commedia dell’arte*”.

Is gender politics therefore fit for TV programmes?

In the 1980s television seemed to give visibility to the feminist movement, according to the research co-ordinated by Buonanno on the progressive modernisation of the female image. Nowadays it is no longer like that. Lorusso points out that “**female feminist politicians**” thematise feminine topics from a defensive or argumentative viewpoint. Perhaps this is because they fear being debased and stereotyped as “aggressive and claiming”.

... they permanently evoke a different world and outlook that is yet to come; but they do it referring to already abused stereotypes: the activist and the housewife...

... there is no news, no breaking of the rules, only the known repetition of a female emancipation experience that has been already carried out and legitimated, now generating polite, respectful, and balanced conversation. The women playing this role are often characterised by an attitude of active listening and attention ... [they] are often framed while they are not speaking, not so much as viewers as actively listening to a dialogue. Their participation is often very meaningful but not very communicative...

... Nevertheless, with their listening attitude, they confirm their identity as subjects who know more than they show – it means they are not active enough, and consequently not very concrete.

Measuring the presence of female politicians from a quantitative point of view is a necessary starting point. But it is not enough. Nonetheless, here are some figures provided by the Observatory of Pavia in 2003:

- 1) From 1996 the time devoted to female politicians has neither increased nor decreased.
- 2) In 2002, the six Italian national broadcasting companies (RAI and Mediaset) devoted some 79 hours to female politicians instead of 999 hours devoted to male politicians.
- 3) Women’s visibility rate is about 7.3%.
- 4) News programmes are the place in which women’s “non-presence” is more evident (only 1.5% of the total time devoted to them).
- 5) If we compare the time devoted to the first ten male politicians to the time devoted to the first ten female politicians in 2002 we notice that Girolamo Sirchia, the Minister of Health and the last man on the list, had twice as much the time that Letizia Moratti, Minister for Education had and twice that of the last name in the female list.

We do not have data regarding the European Elections, but we think that no change has occurred. We are inclined to think that “media segregation” is a constant feature throughout the

years and might have been influenced by specific female topics in TV programmes. The war in Iraq and international crises were among the main topics of the period, and women are rarely interviewed on such subjects. On the other hand, the presence of TV female journalists reporting from war areas increased.

In the TV programmes we analysed 11 female politicians were interviewees, 7 of whom were interviewed once the programme was over<sup>26</sup>.

On the whole, women think television is a necessary instrument for politics. Television power makes politician “real”. Some female politicians fear television might distort, falsify, and stereotype their image. Others think it can represent them as false, so they regard it as a difficult means to manage and to be feared. A female MP said she worried about women’s reactions. She fears the criticism she might have to face because she holds a post, which is not traditionally reserved for women<sup>27</sup>. However, the female politicians who participated in TV programmes did not consider the means itself, nor did they take heed of the message they conveyed. When they are being interviewed they did not consider the effect of their image, of their body and verbal language. They do not think about the way all this can help viewers to remember the message they conveyed<sup>28</sup>. They concentrate most on the things they have to say, and on how to say them, as though they were trying to attain the bodily invisibility they are fighting, as if they feared being debased by their physical appearance<sup>29</sup>. Or they might be trying to prevent viewers from concentrating on their body. Thus, female politicians appear to be acting as if they were “top of the class”. All of them are relying upon “their knowledge” (“to effectively state what I have in mind”), switching the attention to their being prepared and well-

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<sup>26</sup> The women we couldn’t interview used different excuses. They all belong to the current Government and to centre-right political groups.

<sup>27</sup> Somehow they fear their performance will confirm a negative stereotype since they are part of a group with certain given characteristics. Being part of a female community that is not very represented in politics can limit their performance. As long as female politicians are few, they will be subject to such a fear. In this respect the quantitative element, the “critical mass” can influence the individual’s performance. Claude Steele and his colleagues have shown that this burden, known as “**stereotype threat**,” can create anxiety and hamper performance on a variety of tasks (Steele, C. (1997). *A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance*. In: “American Psychologist”, 52, pp. 613-629).

<sup>28</sup> The body is only hinted at when it comes to what dress or what colour to dress so as not to appear technically improper.

<sup>29</sup> “(Sbarbati)Being on TV doesn’t worry me. Of course you’re exposed and therefore criticised. Sometimes you don’t like criticism. It’s important that you believe in what you say, to convey reliability. When I’m on TV I don’t bother about my image. I concentrate on the efficacy of what I have in mind. I feel comfortable, and my attitude is perceived and therefore appreciated.” “(Poli Bortone )Well, television is a mass medium. When I’m on air it’s like when I’m on the phone being interviewed for some newspaper... I don’t want to be a sensation, so I don’t use particular tones or a particular attitude. I try to keep to the facts, which sometimes are strong enough.”

trained, and on the authenticity of their political activity. Not all of them are aware of running the risk of being isolated in their field of interest. Only Tania De Zulueta, who worked as a TV journalist and hosted some political information shows, refers to the “innate skill” of being photogenic and being able to communicate – the communication skill which “works” in TV – as something that is “unfair”, thus touching upon a doleful note of female image: the importance of aesthetics.

In the last part of her report Lo Russo points out how female politicians have a tendency to “rarefaction” and depersonalization. Except for some exceptions, two “eccentric” subjects such as Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini, female politicians act mainly as *representatives* of a political group (right- or left-wing) or of a culture (feminism). On the contrary, our media (including the press) are daily shot through with different forms of protagonism, personalization, narrativization, exalting the individual’s protagonism and their personal history. On the other hand, when on TV, it is impossible for people to have a personality regardless of the body (considered as a whole image, a set of attitudes and non-verbal messages). It is not easy for women to avoid a conflictual relationship with their body as television tends to constrain the female presence according to two main guidelines: either it makes a one-dimension image of it, or it makes it invisible if compared to male figures, i.e. the subjects of action in this world.

One of the goals of this research was to detect short-circuits, or connivances among the different social actors preventing women from promoting a policy of rebalancing of powers and an equal redistribution of decision making roles.

On this occasion there is a convergence-connivance among the subjects due to opposing reasons: female politicians are not able to use television (they tend to put themselves in the background), whereas television uses them for proposing them as “representatives” of politics. Television tends to use the female body in a quite different way, as a “pure value” referring to nothing else. If female politicians can’t realise this, they will fall into the trap of invisibility in which they turn into representatives or spokeswomen of a politics they can never manage.

### **Female figures in TV fiction<sup>30</sup>**

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<sup>30</sup> The results of the survey of TV programmes by the Study Group of the Commission for Equal Opportunities (December 2002 – March 2003) on female representation complain that, apart from some exceptions, television

TV fiction production from the 1980s up to today shows a sad picture of how female subjects are portrayed. Female characters may vary, but their relationship with power stays the same: none at all. The most recurring discriminating stereotypes of the representation of women refer to the following aspects:

- women's decision making skills, both in their private and public lives, are weaker than those of men;
- female characters are portrayed as always depending on men (no difference was found among the production of the different TV companies);
- female characters are portrayed more in their household environment than at work, even though there is an increasing tendency to a balance between the emotional and private environment and the public one, both for men and women.

Italian TV fiction is no longer sexist in the traditional way. Still, it retains an under-representation of the female world. Female characters are based on male and female stereotypes, and what distinguishes them is their loyalty to social, aesthetical, and emotional values. On the contrary, male characters are striving to affirm the social aspects of their life, and their individuality. As Milly Buonanno maintains, there are long-lasting models, which, in the end, are evident.

Italian fiction is mainly centred on male protagonists. This year we have had a large increase in the number of female characters, even if those set in the past<sup>31</sup>. It seems that we are unable to have contemporary heroines. Most of all, they are always bound to the idea of motherhood. No woman is single of her own accord. They are always married. They have children to fight or die for. No woman chooses to terminate her pregnancy. They get pregnant by mistake, there is no control of the birth rate. They think they should have an abortion, they are about to visit the doctor, and then they change their minds. Among this year's large number of female characters, not a single modern heroine, not one! Women are given an obsolete specificity that is now

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"ignores the problems related to gender diversity". Television keeps representing the traditional model of the woman who is subjugated to the man and built upon dated stereotypes: "the mother of a family, the uncompromising housewife", "or the working woman who is haunted by a sense of guilt". Anyway, the woman is "confined to second-rate professional roles". The survey reveals that the female body is used as a decoration, taking no heed of the woman's artistic talent or intellectual skills. Sometimes, as is the case of a well-known "infotainment" programme (*Maurizio Costanzo Show*), they make use of grotesque female figures (such as a bulky drag queen who wears too much make-up).

<sup>31</sup> Two historically-based TV fictions had great success: *Elisa di Rivombrosa* (set in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and *Orgoglio* (set in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century).

simply differently worked out and represented. Italian TV fiction presents straightforward, one-dimensional female and male representations.

Italian TV fiction has women represented as positive characters. There are few women villains. Italian fiction offers a mimetic representation of the average man and woman taken from daily life. Characters rising above the average representation are rare. They tend to be petty and small. Female characters are often heroines of melodrama and there are very few powerful figures. There has been a slight change lately, as TV fiction has centred around the Roman Empire.

Young people are little represented in Italian TV fiction. We are unable to do this. Italian TV production is devised for a generalised audience, i.e. families. Our generalist TV is aged, as is the Italian population. Italian young people watch American TV fiction.

### **The female body and “infotainment” programmes**

A common feature to all European infotainment programmes is the so-called “phagocytizing body” effect (according to the definition given by the CNEL research<sup>32</sup>). In Italy, this effect has had a dramatic diffusion.

**Entertainment** and infotainment programmes make use of a large number of powerful, famous and professional people. Among *professionals* (both male and female), female underrepresentation is beyond any doubt. The same holds true for powerful people, whereas, among famous people, the female figure is offered to the masculine imagination as the “pure representation of a given femininity”, i.e. as an available object of desire, thus becoming suddenly omnipresent.

They are “suspended women”, as the CNEL research defines them, whose success is due to their being easily recognisable thanks to their constant presence in TV programmes. Still, they have no clear-cut, fixed, professional identity, and they lack specific artistic skills. Therefore, their image is exalted and the attention of the audience concentrates upon their mundane life.

In Italy, almost every entertainment programme has its host helped by a young woman, called *valletta* or *velina* (assistant), whose only function is to catch the attention of the audience and to show her body. They are young, good-looking girls who, unlike stars, anyone could meet in the

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<sup>32</sup> “Donne Lavoro e TV – La rappresentazione femminile nei programmi televisivi” (“Women, Work, and TV – Female Representation in TV programmes”), 2003, by CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e Lavoro), carried out by Cares, Observatory of Pavia. The scientific supervisor was Gianni Losito.

street. The body is no means to convey different messages: it is just *the body*. Non-verbal interaction comes up to some tentative dancing aimed at just showing the body. And they speak very little. The body represents only itself, desire and sexuality seen from a man's point of view which even women agree upon.

Excess in representing the body on TV goes far beyond ethics. Moreover, it cannot be explained only as a way to consider the woman as an object. Somehow, it explains the process of modernizing Italian culture. The more scantily dressed these women are, the more they stand as a symbol of the progressive liberalisation of sexuality and in the choosing of one's partner, from the 1950s onwards. At an individual level, this process might represent a way of becoming emancipated as being present on TV means social promotion and wealth.

At a collective level, the recurring visibility of the female body has ambiguous meanings.

Television quenches dangerous sexual freedom and makes it a more familiar element : the girl next door, the teen-age sweetheart. The eroticised body is more accessible and rebellious. It is a **domestic body**, which retains its eroticism though removed of its most dangerous and disquieting characteristics. It is sexuality made "lay", or "trivial". This does not mean that the disquieting and threatening aspects of femininity contained in the female body are eliminated. It just becomes more accessible and less contrary to family values. We are talking about a process within the processing of the roles of the two sexes: sexuality, motherhood, masculinity and femininity.

The extent to which sexual freedom and pleasure are linked to an idealised female figure, secluded within the family, was proved just a few months ago. In May 2004, in a letter to Catholic bishops by Joseph Ratzinger, for the first time ever the Catholic Church gave a positive judgement on pleasure in the relationship among men and women, even outside wedlock. Facing the changes in sexual relationships, the Church steps back and tries to defend the last stronghold in favour of the couple and the family: gender distinction. In the above-mentioned letter Mr. Ratzinger declares himself against English theories on "gender". Such theories tend to eliminate sexual differences because they are considered mere effects of historical conditioning. The document provides readers with a corollary to the admission to free pleasure: the woman will not be thought of as only a mother. This is due, in the words of Mr. Ratzinger, to the exalting of the biological fecundity of women that leads to a dangerous debasement of them. Housework is no longer the most important duty for a woman. Women are

invited to be “present at work and in social organization”, and to get “access to important roles giving them the possibility of inspiring national politics”.

Women, however, are advised not to take revenge on men, and not to search for the power that endangers the family. Women should (?) integrate with the masculine element without being the rivals of men. Recommending women that they should not be rivals to men at work and in politics seems to transfer their mother-figure aspect to the level of social relations, thus erasing what made so difficult the relationship between women and Italian politics in the past. Also, it reminds us of the way female politicians described their relationship with politics when interviewed. We might ironically comment upon the fact that religion gave up to the models of changing female roles that television was showing in fiction and entertainment programmes.

In the **1970s**, it seemed that female figures in TV programmes were symbolically voided of any meaning and value to make the female body an object of desire. Nowadays, thanks to different female figures, we should think about “cultural resistance” towards female representation. There are many changes at a superficial level, whereas at a deeper level there still persist ancient attitudes. It is true that TV programmes are filtered through the eyes of a man. This attitude is the symbol of a nostalgia for too simple a distribution of tasks and a power hierarchy between the sexes. Nevertheless, when masculine attitudes are not matched by feminine ones, there are new possibilities. This is the case for female TV journalists.

### **TV female journalists**

A common feature to all European TV broadcasting companies was the invasion of female journalists, female newsreaders most of all. In order to become more entertaining, TV used the female image. The way people think of information has changed, and so has the way of presenting it to the audience. A more powerful, emotional, management of information was felt necessary and female presence was the best way to help news to remain in the audience’s mind. Young, good-looking, and confident female journalists cope with a wide range of topics, including those, which were thought of as traditionally “masculine” such as politics, labour, economics.

The large number of media journalists mirrors the invasion of women in social reality.

In television, as well as in social reality, however, this was not followed by an actual implementation of their decision making power. What we would like to emphasize here is that,

in certain exceptional cases, the “body-presence” system helped women to move from their usual environment and to promote their professional skills as well as their visibility. For instance, we had the first woman as President of the RAI, Lucia Annunziata, a female journalist. Her main value, however, was confined to her being a custodian of the political groups that had been excluded from the board of directors of the Italian state broadcasting TV company.

Furthermore, during the months of the war in Iraq, many TV channels sent female journalists to report from the war scene. It was a great success because something new was being presented: the traditional stereotype of the woman related only to peace and the family was being broken. The contrast between the female figure and the war and violence of male territories was strong enough. On this symbolic strength Lilli Gruber built her political success at the European Elections in 2004. Lilli Gruber, a TV female journalist, won a million votes, thus beating Silvio Berlusconi, Italy’s President of the Council of Ministers.

### **Three eccentric (ex-centric) women** <sup>33</sup>

We would like to now talk about the three female politicians who do not let TV overwhelm them. On the contrary, they seem to be able to use TV in order to make the most of themselves and step outside traditional roles.

The first two are Alessandra Mussolini and Emma Bonino. They share the fact that they were at the head of their list in the last European Elections. Ms Mussolini has recently left Alleanza Nazionale, Italy’s right-wing party, to found the list “Libertà di Azione”. Ms Bonino ran for her own list, since she is the Secretary of Italy’s Radical Party. The third woman is Lilli Gruber who ran for the centre-left coalition, “Uniti nell’Ulivo”, as an independent candidate.

All of them challenged political structures, or managed them, or kept their distance from them.

Alessandra Mussolini is an explosive mixture of contrasting features. On the whole, though, she represents the most traditional aspects of Italian culture. She comes from a right-wing political party, which was somehow born out of the former Fascist party. Now she has founded a list called “Libertà di Azione” (“Freedom of Action”). She has quite good looks, and is garish. She worked for the television and made some films in the past, but now she has dropped any star-like attitude and is no seductress. As Lorusso states:

“she does not respect behavioural codes and rules of any political parlour, especially on TV; she speaks in a very loud voice; she has a clumsy posture, her arms tight, always frowning; she uses grammar rules in a very loose way, and uses slang expressions”.

“As a matter of fact, we are facing a personality who, by claiming her femininity, wants to create a new role in the political arena, to make a role for herself, the icon of human instincts and passions. Thus she proposes, in the political context that seems absolutely incongruous and inappropriate for this purpose, the most abused female stereotype: a woman who is a mother and a wild animal at the same time, subject of both aggression (seducing) and protection (maternal). What is new and “unclassifiable” in her is her shifting this double stereotype to the realms of Politics ... from which women are normally excluded, the more so if women have primordial instincts”.

Emma Bonino is different from other female politicians as she worked as an EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid from 1995 to 1999. This helped her to win a great personal success (her list won 8.5% of the national vote) in the 1999 European Elections. According to Lorusso, Emma Bonino

is, at the same time, subject of willingness and knowledge: she knows what she wants and she can get it. For instance, she can manage – and she is the only one in the corpus we analysed – the interaction with the host of the programme and the other interlocutors

We are facing a personality who is overtly trying to subvert gender representations. Her professional skills seem to refer to male role models, but she refers over time to her being a woman.

She does not act according to the softening strategies typical of the way women interact (hesitating, intonation, asking for approval from the interlocutor, deference, mitigating sentences...) nevertheless she plays strongly with her face and her image, by means of a typical female consciousness

During the interview Emma Bonino comments on her political role of disobeying the codified rules of the ideal mother figure: *I started to work in politics when I was 17. I was under no one's influence. I had a clandestine abortion. I had to do something ...* In her choices, such as those she made when she was a European Commissioner, she always shows a passion typical of her being a woman. Most of all, she knows how to keep together her individual and collective rights. When she was asked if, when speaking on TV, she was referring to a feminine community and was speaking as a “gender spokeswoman”, she said decidedly:

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<sup>33</sup> I'm using the term as it was used by T. de Lauretis in *Soggetti eccentrici*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1999. The term referred to detached, ironic people outside gender rules.

*I can't void myself of being a woman, luckily, but I refuse to speak for women because that would mean taking on responsibilities. Women are no category. It's hard enough to speak for myself. I never speak for women. I don't like saying "we, the women". After all, who gave me permission to do so? (More than to a community of women) it's a community of the world's oppressed that I belong to. It's too easy to find a large number of women who were excluded from some place or another.*

Her answer, and her behaviour as well, is shot through with the desire to differentiate and be freed from any "generalisation" which might make her part of a scheme. For instance, even if her skills are feminine, since she is speaking of female genital mutilation, she says:

*I always try not to be isolated in a ghetto, not to be framed and forced to deal with social security and education, as some of my colleagues are. One of the first things I did was a minority report on the secret services. Then I went to the Foreign Affairs Committee, instead of going to the Committee on Industry. But I never set foot in the Commission on Health Care because it is a symbol of the mediocre.*

This is a refusal of any possible generalisation, which might turn into stereotypes, both good and bad. In doing so, Ms Bonino takes TV formats by surprise, and at certain moments she is leading the game.

We feel that Lilli Gruber should be included in the group of eccentric women because she was part of the proliferation of female newsreaders and, despite this, she was not limited by the phenomenon. On the contrary, her image evolved from "a set of potentially seductive features"<sup>34</sup> (her flame-red mane, her lips, her posture when she read the news) to a fully autonomous subject.

When she decided to run for the European Election for the Olive Tree coalition, one of whose leaders is the former President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, she declared that "Mr Prodi convinced me, I am an independent candidate ... The only condition I imposed was that I should not be considered a member of any party in the coalition". On the other hand, the main reason for her being a candidate and quitting her job as journalist and newsreader in

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<sup>34</sup> See C. Demaria, *op. cit.* p. 220

Italy's main TV channel was her rebellion against the Government's political influence on Italy's state broadcaster.

Her return from Iraq in the days of her candidature, and her subsequent duel with Berlusconi soon added a feminine hue to her title: she was the *Cavaliere* opposing *Cavaliere* Berlusconi<sup>35</sup>. In a lively article shot through with what might be termed as "benevolent sexism", Gianpaolo Pansa, a well-known journalist for the weekly magazine *L'Espresso* (06 June, 2004) gave an ironic introduction to Lilli the Red. The article brings together a number of female stereotypes which are soon contradicted: Ms Gruber is good, top of the class, but has a roguish eye; she can be mischievous, but tough; she is seductive, but not too much; and she can be a dangerous opponent. In this case, the danger a powerful female figure can engender is directed towards an opponent, and the "super-male from Arcore (i.e. Mr Berlusconi) will be defeated by a female", a novel David against Goliath with the advantage of being a gorgeous woman.

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<sup>35</sup> *Cavaliere* is the Italian for "Knight", an honorary title the President of the Republic awards people who are distinguished in a particular field. *Cavaliere* is the ironic feminine form for "she-Knight", and has no standard form in Italian grammar.

## 1.5. Conclusions

The Italian TV system is being invaded by a stream of strong-willed women who subvert a number of generalisations and clichés, reshaping them in a different way. They re-activate sexual roles and gender behaviour that is already established. They show you can play with stereotypes, moving them about, but you cannot eliminate them.

Sometimes individual cases are no longer homogeneous with the category they should belong to. On the contrary, they contradict the generalisation upon which the category is based. In such cases some sub-groups of stereotypes can be born, which add already existing ones. As a matter of fact, there can be sub-types of stereotypes. The presence of strong-willed and authoritative women does not mean that the strict generalisations of gender stereotypes have been eliminated. It only means that new realities are being born which add to the old ones. Female representation in Italian TV is an example of how new and old stances can live together.

Italian politics presents a similar relationship between institutional and political bodies that has one of the lowest percentages of women in the European Union. Furthermore, the Italian social fabric has a large variety of initiatives: study centres and centres for documentation on women; researches; national women's associations; equal opportunities bodies<sup>36</sup>. Italy's regional governments present different situations: in 4 out of 20 regional governments women are 44; 33% of the total members. In 7 regions, no woman is part of local governments.

The similarities between TV and political realities (one the mirror of the stereotypes of the other) make it clear that Italy lack structures connecting and integrating the changes in the role of today's female image with the mother figure of the past.

As has been noted before, it seems that the Catholic Church could only recently recognize the right of the woman to step outside the family. This means that a change occurred even in those places where changes in the female figure were strongly objected to. Still, Italian culture is nonetheless characterised by a high degree of masculinity and relating stereotypes.

As for stereotypes, we have seen that a change can occur if people have a valid reason for it or if it can give them some advantages, i.e. when people do not perceive changes as a threat.

Some American scholars say that a change in stereotypes could be achieved by implementing empathy, “simply by taking the perspective of out-group members and “looking at the world through their eyes,” in-group bias and stereotype accessibility can be significantly reduced” ; “even implicit stereotypes can be modified.”<sup>37</sup>

This could be a further step to be taken for a fair redistribution of power among the different genders, i.e. by making male stereotypes less rigid and fixed, for both men and women.

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<sup>36</sup> Between 1989 and 1992 all Regions established an Equal Opportunity body, as 43 Provinces out of 94 did. One Commune out of 5 has a similar body, mainly in central and northern regions.

<sup>37</sup> (Blair, I. V. (2002). *The malleability of automatic stereotypes and prejudice*. In: “Personality and Social Psychology Review”, 6, pp. 242-261).

## 2. Research Report on Stereotypes

The yearning for rigidity is in us all. It is part of our human condition to long for hard realities and clear concepts. When we have them we have either to face the fact that some realities elude them, or else blind ourselves to the inadequacy of the concepts.

Mary Douglas

*Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of Pollution and Taboo*

It is thought that in today's society, with the expansion of knowledge, frequent cultural exchanges and the tolerance of democratic countries, stereotypes and prejudices should be on the way out, although they have always existed. Nevertheless, they perpetuate themselves: they may shift or change, but they are still very much alive although not so easily perceived, being so widespread and automatic.

### 2.1 History and Definition of stereotypes

The term "stereotype," (from the Greek stereos, rigid, typos, model, imprint) was coined in 1798 by the French printer Didot, as a technical designation for the casting of multiple papier-mâché copies of printing type from a papier-mâché mould. The aim was to produce printed images with fixed moulds. The term was used in 1922 by the journalist W. Lippmann in his book *Public opinion*, (New York, Free Press, 1965) in relation to the processes behind the formation of public opinion. Since the cognitive relationship with reality is not direct but

mediated by images with which we interact, these images are often simplified and made very clear-cut to be more readily taken in.

- a) Thus the stereotype is a clear, simplified form of a mental representation of reality through categorical generalizations, but it takes on static connotation. These generalizations function to create or sustain differences or inequalities in value, power, and/or wealth among socially constructed groups (by race, age, sex-gender, class, religion etc.). It is commonly believed that stereotypes form the core of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of xenophobia. To these representations we connect our emotional reactions and consequent actions.
- b) The process of simplification does not come about accidentally, but remains in the individual sphere.
- c) Stereotypes circulate repeatedly and systematically in a culture so that they are accepted as "common sense" truths by many people in the culture, even (and mostly) those who are the object of the stereotype. This produces the effect that stereotypes can be seen as tools to use in understanding reality and for defence of personal identity, since they maintain a certain culture and certain forms of social organization deriving from them.
- d) They can have a negative effect as regards the object of the stereotype, or can reasonably be predicted to do so.
- e) They tend to disguise or distort the truth through caricature and misrepresentation based on only partial aspects of a person or situation.
- f) For a stereotype to become established there must be agreement between individual image and group image; images that may hold contradictory contents are thus rejected, and stereotypes can therefore be sustained over the generations, and indeed can be seen even as forming a sort of biological substratum to humanity.
- g) Various stereotypes exist according to the degree of social endorsement or the level of generalization or rigidity.

## **2.2 Stereotypes and prejudices**

The simplified mental image individuals have of some category of people is referred to as a stereotype. It is usually but not necessarily accompanied by prejudice, that is, positive or negative attitudes to members of the category in question.

The conviction that judgments exist preceding actual experience or in absence of it, and that they may be wrong, is already found in the philosophical thought of Bacon.

Prejudices regard specific social groups more than facts or events, and are usually unfavourable, tending to penalise the object of the judgment. Thus by prejudice we may understand “the tendency to form an unjustifiably negative idea of people belonging to a certain social group”. Furthermore, to complete the definition, it is able to “orientate concrete action” vis-à-vis some group, generating discriminatory action (B. M. Mazzara, *Stereotypes and prejudices*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1997, p.12). This is a restrictive definition as compared with the vaster phenomenon that sees every individual facing the world in daily life with a baggage of theories, opinions, emotions and sentiments that precede the experience encountered. Obviously, there are negative and positive prejudices, and both can be equally strong and deep-rooted.

Psychological research on prejudice first emerged in the 1920s and was based upon American and European race theories that attempted to prove white superiority. Theodor Adorno and his colleagues described how a politically conservative form of authoritarianism, known as "right-wing authoritarianism," does correlate with prejudice. Also, people who view the social world hierarchically are more likely than others to hold prejudices toward low-status groups. This is especially true of people who want their own group to dominate and be superior to other groups -- a characteristic known as “social dominance” orientation. Social dominance orientation tends to correlate with prejudice even more strongly than does right-wing authoritarianism, and studies have linked it to anti-Black and anti-Arab prejudice, sexism, nationalism, opposition to gay rights, and other attitudes concerning social hierarchies. Adorno and his co-authors pointed out that rigid categorical thinking is a central ingredient in prejudice.

The relationship between prejudice and categorical thinking was first systematically explored by Gordon Allport (1954) in his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*. In a much-quoted passage of the book, Allport wrote that: The human mind must think with the aid of categories....Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it. (p. 20)

Social categories form an indispensable part of human thought, but because attributes such as race, sex, and age lie along a continuum, social labels are never more than approximations. In fact, it is surprisingly difficult to think of two categories that do not overlap with each other (that is, two categories with a fixed boundary that cleanly separates each side). At first, you might think of well known opposites such as night and day, earth and sea, or alive and dead. Upon reflection, though, it

becomes apparent that there is no fixed point separating these categories. Night and day form a continuum rather than two discrete categories.

You might think of categories such as women and men, or people and the environment, but these divisions are also more blurred than they might seem. For example, many people cannot be easily categorized as female or male; they are, instead, "intersexuals" born with ambiguous genitalia. An intriguing and important consequence of categorical thinking is its tendency to distort perceptions. Typically, these distortions take the form of minimizing differences within categories ("assimilation") and exaggerating differences between categories ("contrast").

In an old Yiddish story of a peasant whose farm was located near the border of Poland and Russia, the boundary markers shifted with every international dispute: the peasant did not know from one year to the next whether his farm was in Russia or Poland, and eventually hired a surveyor to resolve the uncertainty. After weeks of painstaking assessment, the surveyor finally announced that the farm was just inside the Polish border. "Thank God," the peasant cried with relief, "now I won't have to endure any more Russian winters!". (S. L. Gilman, *Difference and pathology*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1985 ).

Prejudice and stereotype are bordering concepts: indeed, they are often used as synonyms. Stereotypes are like **mental images** that have the characteristic of being – often gross – simplifications, and almost always very rigid. They may be defined as “the cognitive core of prejudice”.

### **2.3 Stereotype and generalization**

All statements of fact or truth require generalization. A generalization is a statement based on a finite set of observations and experiences and yet which claims to hold true for the larger set, even for those cases that have not been seen or experienced. All generalizations, can be said to be theoretical; they offer a theory about how things are in general.

The generalization originates in a rational effort to categorize, not in an irrational effort to oppress. The effect of the generalization, however, is to increase people's ability to manipulate nature to human ends, and so like all acts of knowledge this one affects the power balance between knower and thing known.

A stereotype is a particular kind of generalization, a subset of generalization.

Stereotypes invariably refer in a generalized manner to - often arbitrary - groups of people, usually minorities. Stereotypes need not necessarily be derogatory or cautionary, though most of them are.

We could suggest three differences between "group generalizations" and "stereotypes":

1) Group generalizations are flexible and permeable to new, countervailing, knowledge - ideas, interpretations, and information that challenge or undermine current beliefs. Stereotypes are rigid and resistant to change even in the face of compelling new evidence.

2) Group generalizations incorporate intragroup heterogeneity while stereotypes foster intragroup homogeneity. Group generalizations embrace diversity - 'there are many kinds of Jews, tall and short, mean and generous, clever and stupid, black and white, rich and poor'. Stereotypes cast certain individuals as exceptions or deviants - 'though you are Jewish, you don't behave as a Jew would, you are different'.

3) While generalizations provide mere clues about group culture and behaviour, stereotypes purport to proffer immutable rules applicable to all the members of the group. Stereotypes develop easily, rigidify surreptitiously, and operate reflexively, providing simple, comfortable, convenient bases for making personal sense of the world. Because generalizations require greater attention, content flexibility, and nuance in application, they do not provide a stereotype's security blanket of permanent, inviolate, all-encompassing, perfectly reliable group knowledge.

When the phenomenon of stereotypes or prejudices is traced back to a way of conceiving or being acquainted with reality, we may wonder to what extent the generalization can be valid as truth and where the error or falseness begins in attributing certain characteristics to certain particular groups.

The risk in seeking a core of truth in stereotypes and prejudices is not only that of deriving them from biological characteristics, but above all of holding them to be immutable, a-historical phenomena and so authorizing discriminations. On the other hand, if we wish to modify stereotypes, i.e. making it possible to process a rigid thought, separating elements of diversity by categorizing them, we must begin by recognizing them.

In an age of information overload, "nutshell" stereotypes encapsulate information compactly and efficiently and thus possess an undeniable survival value. Recognizing the function of stereotypes is not to deny that they are prejudices and can produce discriminations, but simply to try to understand their persistence, and their power. That the social world is perceived in terms of categories seems inevitable for our way of thinking and construing our identity, just as it is inevitable for a large part of personal identity to be rooted in belonging to a group, and also in processes of comparison and competition between groups. However, this is not to say that there must be the same inevitability in the course the processes follow.

Admittedly, many stereotypes are self-reinforcing, self-fulfilling prophecies. The usefulness of stereotypes as "reality tests" and serviceable prognosticators. Stereotypes - like fables - are often constructed around middle-class morality and are prescriptive. A by-product of this primitive rendition is discrimination and segregation.

## **2.4 Stereotypes and discrimination**

Much separates stereotypes and generalizations from discriminatory practice.

Stereotypes are not only harmful in their own right; they do damage by fostering prejudice and discrimination. As used here, "discrimination" involves putting group members at a disadvantage or treating them unfairly as a result of their group membership. More specifically, "personal discrimination" refers to acts of discrimination committed by individuals, whereas "institutional discrimination" refers to discriminatory policies or practices carried out by organizations and other institutions (e.g., an anti-Semitic immigration policy). Prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination often go hand-in-hand, but it is also possible to have one without the others. When an ethnic group is stereotyped with a neutral or positive attribute such as "family-oriented," prejudice and discrimination may not be involved – at least as far as negative discrimination is concerned, but we have little idea of what happens when a positive discrimination becomes rigid and stereotyped.

A generalized prejudice against "foreigners" may not include specific stereotypes or acts of discrimination. There are even times when discrimination takes place without prejudice or stereotyping, either intentionally or unintentionally.

## **2.5 Stereotypes and thought structures**

According to the psychological theory considered, stereotypes can be denominated in various ways. However, they are recognized as categories, images, cognitive maps, prototypes of representations necessary for the psychic development of the individual.

A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of commonsense fact and tries to see if he might be able to understand other areas in terms of this one. This original area becomes then his basic analogy or root-metaphor. He describes as best he can the characteristics of this area, or, if you will, discriminates its structure. A list of its structural characteristics becomes his basic concepts of explanation and description.

We call them a set of categories. In terms of these categories he proceeds to study all other areas of fact whether uncriticized or previously criticized. He undertakes to interpret all facts in terms of these categories. As a result of the impact of these other facts upon his categories, he may qualify and readjust the categories, so that a set of categories commonly changes and develops. Patterns of association are most commonly based, however, on a combination of real-life experience (as filtered through the models of perception) and the world of myth, and the two intertwine to form chimerical images, neither entirely of this world nor of the realm of myth. The analogizing essential to this process functions much like systems of metaphor.

Since analogies are rooted in a habitual perception of the world, they are understood as an adequate representation of reality. The mental representation that results, of course, divides the world into categories in accordance with stereotypical perception. All experience can thus be measured against this "reality", and since this experience is structured through a system of mental representations in precisely the same way as was the overall structure of the world, the experience reifies the stereotypical image of the world. Analogy thus becomes the basis for the association between otherwise disparate categories.

However, the use of analogy in the creation of such categories does not guarantee their validity. Indeed, the moment of creation of such categories is one of the moments when the vocabulary of stereotypes crystallizes. We learn to perceive in terms of historically determined sets of root-metaphors, and they serve as the categories through which we label and classify the world. These categories are non mutually exclusive. Often they contradict or supplement one another.

It is the ability to hold simultaneously two (or more) images of the reality, which makes it possible to link them. Thus when models for perception are built, these models are heuristic structures that the self uses to integrate the various stereotypes associated with analogy.

Stereotypes, like other generalizations, frequently serve as mental shortcuts and are especially likely to be applied when people are busy or distracted. In one of the typical studies of American culture it is demonstrated that having had their attention diverted for about 25 second students remembered more of the stereotype attributes of a person than a sequence of numbers. How is it possible to measure implicit attitudes and beliefs when people may not even know that they have them? One of the most common ways is with an experimental technique known as "priming" (Wheeler, S. C., & Petty, R. E. (2001). *The effects of stereotype activation on behaviour: A review of possible mechanisms*. Psychological Bulletin, 127, 797-826).

Typically, participants in these studies are exposed to a word or image that brings to mind thematically related ideas or associations concerning a target of prejudice (e.g., an ethnic minority group). Then, once an implicit prejudice or stereotype has been activated, researchers can assess its strength, content, and effect on other attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. In many cases the immediate effects of stereotype activation fade after a few minutes, but regardless of their duration, each activation reinforces stereotypic thinking in the long run. Additionally, evidence suggests that once a stereotype is activated, it can be reactivated by something as simple as a disagreement with someone in the stereotyped group, and if brought to mind frequently enough, can become chronically accessible. Thus, even though media-based stereotypes may seem harmless when considered individually, their cumulative effect over time can be substantial. Once stereotypes are learned -- whether from the media, family members, direct experience, or elsewhere -- they sometimes take on a life of their own and become "self-perpetuating stereotypes".

One of the most popular techniques for probing implicit biases is the Implicit Association Test, or IAT. The Implicit Association Test has been used to measure a variety of hidden associations, such as implicit racial and gender stereotypes, attitudes toward elderly people, and preferences for particular political candidates (Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. K. (1998). *Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74, 1464-1480). The IAT is a computer-based test that measures how rapidly people are able to categorize various words and

images, and it capitalizes on the fact that most of us identify words and images more rapidly when they come from closely related categories than when they come from unrelated categories.

For example, the two words femininity and irrationality are linked in common-place thinking, and instantly associated with typically stereotyped terms like sensitivity, sweetness, emotiveness, etc. On the other hand, if we come across two terms like masculine and sweetness, we take far longer to find associated terms since the two words are not connected by stereotypes. Thus, by comparing the speed with which people categorize words or images, the IAT indirectly assesses how closely people associate certain elements with each other.

When stereotypic representations of behaviour are activated, relevant behaviour also becomes activated. In addition to the effects of priming, people who are stereotyped face a second burden: the threat that their behaviour will confirm a negative stereotype. Claude Steele and his colleagues have shown that this burden, known as “**stereotype threat**,” can create anxiety and hamper performance on a variety of tasks (Steele, C. (1997). *A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance*. In: “American Psychologist”, 52, pp.613-629).

## **2.6 Stereotypes and individual psychic development**

*How and why do we create stereotypes?*

The creation of stereotypes is a concomitant of the process by which all human beings become individuals. Its beginnings lie in the earliest stages of our development.

The vulnerability of children to stereotype threat implies that stereotypes are learned early in life. Several studies have observed ingroup biases by age 3 or 4 and the development of racial and gender stereotyping soon after.

The infant's movement from a state of being in which everything is perceived as an extension of the self to a growing sense of a separate identity takes place between the ages of a few weeks and about five months. As the child comes to distinguish more and more between the world and self, anxiety arises from a perceived loss of control over the world. Stereotypes reflect certain basic perceptual categories, which are in turn projections of internalized, often repressed models of the self and the Other. The resulting basic categories of difference reflect our preoccupation with the self and the control that the self must have over the world. The

definition of the reality and of the Other must incorporate the basic categories by which we define ourselves. And of course the central role of sexuality in our nature, and our necessary relationship to some greater group are the first and more important ones.

They are palimpsests on which the initial bipolar representations are still vaguely legible. They perpetuate a needed sense of difference between the "self" and the "object". An imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self. This can be observed in the shifting relationship of antithetical stereotypes that parallel the existence of "bad" and "good" representations of self and Other. But the line between "good" and "bad" responds to stresses occurring within the psyche. Thus paradigm shifts in our mental representations of the world can and do occur. We can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. We can move from loving to hating. The most negative stereotype always has an overly positive counterweight. As any image is shifted, all stereotypes shift. Thus stereotypes are inherently protean rather than rigid.

Stereotypes arise when self-integration is threatened. They are therefore part of our way of dealing with the instabilities of our perception of the world. We can and must take the distinction between pathological stereotyping and the stereotyping all of us need to do to preserve our illusion of control over the self and the world. Our Manichean perception of the world as "good" and "bad" is triggered by a recurrence of the type of insecurity that induced our initial division of the world into "good" and "bad". Everyone creates stereotypes. We cannot function in the world without them. They buffer us against our most urgent fears by extending them, making it possible for us to act as though their source were beyond our control.

Stereotypes can and often do exist parallel to the ability to create sophisticated rational categories that transcend the crude line of difference present in the stereotype. We retain our ability to distinguish the "individual" from the stereotyped class into which the object might automatically be placed. While the deep structure of the stereotype seems simple, its realization is much more complex. The complexity of the stereotype results from the social context in which it is to be found. The deep structure of the stereotype can reappear in the adult as a response to anxiety, an anxiety having its roots in the potential disintegration of the mental representations the individual has created and internalized.

The models for control are linked to structures in society, which provide status and meaning for the individual. Self-esteem is linked to the image of the self and of the meaningful objects in the social world. Our self-image not only reflects our mental representation of the external world, but, by influencing our perception of objects and their integration into that mental representation, shapes it as well. The objects exist, we interact with them, they respond to (or ignore) our demands upon them. But when we relate to them, we relate to them through the filter of our internalized representation of the world. As the ethnic group identity of a child develops, critical concepts of other groups come automatically. The development of stereotypes can thus be seen as a part of the identity work of children and young people. One Israeli investigation even documented anti-Arab prejudice in children as young as 2• years of age (Bar-Tal, D. (1996). *Development of social categories and stereotypes in early childhood: The case of "the Arab" concept formation, stereotype and attitudes by Jewish children in Israel.* International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 20, 341-370.).

Although it may seem hard to believe that children can distinguish among social groups at such an early age, research on gender recognition has found that children typically begin to form social categories within the first year of life. Infants are often able to discriminate between female and male faces by the age of 9 months, and sometimes as early as 5 months (Leinbach, M. D., & Fagot, B. I. (1993). *Categorical habituation to male and female faces: Gender schematic processing in infancy.* Infant Behaviour and Development,16, 317-332.).Exceptionally strong moulding and emphasis of in-group/out-group aspects and stereotypes can be seen as a natural process during certain periods of the identity development. Young people can become strikingly intolerant and cruel in their rejection of those who are "different". Such intolerance can, for a period of time, be a necessary defensive measure to guard oneself against loss of identity, which can occur because of all the adjustments that adolescence entails. Young people help each other to cope with these troubles by forming coteries and creating stereotypes of themselves and their enemies.

## **2.7 Gender identity**

The body's growth and attainment of sexual maturity is bound up with the construction of sexual identity, which begins in the first years of life and reaches completion during adolescence, so that self and behaviour can be perceived in sexual terms.

**Gender** is among the first of the configurations, or sets of concepts and images, forming in the child, thanks to which he or she has a certain understanding of him/herself and participation in

social life. A vast research project carried out in the late 1960s on children with sexual organs still undeveloped at birth, and thus with undefined sex, led to formulation of the concept of **gender identity**. The child's early development goes through progressive separations from the mother's body, and at the same time distinction between mind and body is handled with the construction of a bodily image including the genitals. This, however, entails the complication that the own body image may be superimposed and confused with that of the mother, with the result that the problems and conflicts of maternal relations concentrate on the body.

Gender identity forms in the **first three years of life** and has powerful psychological determinants that constitute male and female, but this may be independent of biological sex.

**Self-recognition as male or female** is the first process in becoming men and women: this **gender identity core** consists of:

1) a **'biological force'** originating in fetal life and deriving from the process of neurophysiologic organization of the brain. In mammals the female sex is the substratum upon which masculinity develops only when the fetal androgens make their contribution. In the absence of these, no male anatomy or behaviour will develop, even though male chromosomes are present, but a pseudo-feminine structure will come about. Biological development follows a discontinuous process during which critical periods emerge, and it can be obstructed in its course.

2) **attribution of sex at birth**. The force of this attribution has been verified with newborn children coming into the world with no evident sexuality, which showed the influence of the mother's and father's expectations, attitudes and fantasies in determining the baby's sexual identity. The psychological attribution of sex on birth made by the parents was found to be just as strong a factor in determining sexual identity as the biological force. An example can be seen in the case of twins who exhibited male genitals although female at the genetic and endocrinological level and in terms of the internal organs. Labelled at birth, one as male, the other as female, they developed gender identity in accordance with the sexual gender thus attributed.

3) **the pressure exerted by mother and parents** in the direction of attitudes culturally befitting the sex attributed, and the phantasmal transformations the child makes of the experiences marked by sexual difference: name, colour of clothing, way of being taken in the rams, choice of sounds, vocabulary, etc. After recognition of belonging to the biological sex has been structured,

i.e. "I am a girl or a boy ", in the first year and a half of life, the characteristics of the sex are superimposed: "I am a very feminine, not very feminine, somewhat masculine girl", etc.

4) **'biopsychic' phenomena**, i.e. very primitive transmission by the mother of messages using pronominal, or bodily, channels, and modifying the reactions of the nursling's nervous system. We might speak of **imprinting**, a sort of gut conditioning, an operative conditioning in that it is not mentalized by the mother. It is not easy to define these forms of sensorial transmission, perhaps only now beginning to emerge in recording exchanges between mother and child: actions, stimuli and sensorial qualities of the relationship that have no mental representation.

5) **the development of bodily sensations**: this level has to do with the quality and quantity of bodily sensations diffused and localized in the genitals which gradually integrate and define the bodily space, confirming attribution and recognition of own sex. The sensorial experiences take on meaning to the extent that they become rooted in the emotional experiences of the relationships. This means that perceptions of one's own genitals cannot be isolated, as a single component, from the tissue of experiences contributing to the process of acquiring gender. Components of an anatomical and biological nature do not represent a solid base if they are not included in the structure of shared significance operating within the relationship.

6) **endopsychic development**, i.e. the gradual process of integration and mentalization of all the earliest components, described here, which are mentally experienced by the child.

With development through childhood and adolescence this gender identity becomes more complicated, further connotations being added to the condition of being male or female: one may feel a virile or effeminate man, or even a man who fantasizes about being a woman.

With physiological development early adolescence is a period that sees intensification of behaviours connected with asserting own gender identity: boys and girls feel the need to adopt manners and roles, to express interests and aspirations typically masculine or feminine.

## 2.8 Gender difference

We classify infants by sex at the moment of birth and, subsequently, we treat them differentially as a result of the expectations adults base on this classification. As children mature and reach developmental points where talents and traits are assessed, these characteristics are often given differential attention and approval depending on the sex of the child .

Underpinning this differential treatment of boys and girls are certain widespread beliefs concerning differences in the "basic nature" of males and females. Since men are supposed to have certain characteristics and women others, many persons consider it appropriate, if not obligatory, to encourage the development of the former traits in boys, and the latter traits in girls.

From both the individual and social viewpoints gender is cultural declination of the biological dimension of sex. In every society sexual differences find expression in behaviours held to be the prerogatives of the two sexes – behaviours commonly recognized as male or female by the relevant social group.

Two classes of theories, biological and social psychological, have attempted to explain these gender differences in personality traits. The biological theories consider sex-related differences as arising from innate temperamental differences between the sexes, evolved by natural selection. Evolutionary psychology predicts that the sexes will differ in domains in which they have faced different adaptive problems throughout evolutionary history. For example, for biological reasons, including pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, women have more invested than men in relations with children.

Women who were more agreeable and nurturing may have promoted the survival of their children and gained evolutionary advantage.

Other biological theories have been proposed to account for gender differences for examples in feelings and emotions. These explanations point to hormonal differences and their effects on mood and personality. But some studies considered that the evidence in support of these explanations was inconclusive.

Social psychological theorists argue for more proximal and direct causes of gender differences. The social role model explains that most gender differences result from the adoption of gender roles, which define appropriate conduct for men and women. Gender roles are shared expectations of men's and women's attributes and social behaviour, and are internalized early in development. The same problems of gender differences affect gender roles: there is considerable controversy over whether they are purely cultural creations or whether they reflect preexisting and natural differences between the sexes in abilities and predispositions.

The social psychological approach called the 'artifact model' explains gender differences on personality scales in terms of method variance. Social desirability bias may lead men and women to endorse gender-relevant traits, and some traits (such as fearfulness) may be less undesirable for women than for men.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible that social roles and other environmental influences can modify a biologically based pattern, and there is always a danger that findings from any single method of measurement will be biased.

Each human being was and is perplexed by the fact that another being, congruent in nearly every respect with his (or her) selfmodel, should, in one respect - sexuality - be so different.

Cross-cultural studies could provide crucial evidence on the relative importance of biological versus cultural factors in gender differences in personality traits. If they are in fact biologically based, the same differences ought to be seen in all cultures, so pancultural gender differences would provide evidence for a biological basis. This might consist of direct effects on personality traits, mediated through neurological or hormonal differences between the sexes. But it is also possible that pancultural gender differences result from universals in learned gender roles. For example, because men in all cultures are physically stronger than women, they may universally be assigned roles as leaders, and in these roles may learn to become more assertive than women.

Even if all cultures show the same pattern of gender differences, they may show variations in the magnitude of differences seen. In some cultures, gender differences may be exaggerated; in others, they may be masked. There are several reasons to expect such variation, but the literature to date is somewhat puzzling.

For a better understanding of the greater or lesser gender differences in the various cultures certain parameters are employed, including for example the different roles in the family, the division of labour and the goals thus pursued. Various societies have shown a universal tendency for the males to look to work to achieve the goals that concern their ego and themselves: thus they are more interested in careers, earnings and training, while the women look to social goals. This difference in work goals is a worldwide phenomenon.

The magnitude of gender differences might also be related to a cultural dimension G. Hofstede called *masculinity*. This dimension was derived from contrasting work values. G. Hofstede

(*Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980 ), analyzing the answers of 40.000 interviewees on what the ideal job was, from a section in the values questionnaire that asked for the importance to the respondent, in an imaginary ideal job, of 14 work goals, found the answers to be polarized in two categories, identified as the **male and female dimension**.

Male/Female concerns first of all the emotional roles in the home. In some societies, men specialize in ego-boosting, and women in ego-effacing, roles. In others, the emotional roles are more equally divided, with men also being oriented toward ego-effacing goals.

Masculinity is identified with the prevalent capacity to be assertive, rational and orientated towards material success and reinforcement of the ego, while the femininity of a context defines the degree of diffuse empathy, cooperation and orientation towards quality of life and social goals.

Such are the characteristics to be found in an organizational environment, regardless of the prevalent gender composition. Even a context characterized by strong male presence may, on account of particular factors in the cultural background, show a female orientation. Similarly, a context where women predominate may structure prevalently masculine behaviours.

In masculine cultures (like Japan and Austria), emphasis is placed on occupational advancement and earnings; in feminine cultures (like Costa Rica and Sweden), cooperation with co-workers and job security are valued. Hofstede (1998) argued that gender differences are accentuated in masculine countries. For example, fathers in masculine cultures are said to deal with facts, mothers with feelings, whereas both fathers and mothers deal with feelings in feminine cultures. Both boys and girls are allowed to cry in feminine countries, but only girls may cry in masculine countries. Presumably such values could affect the development of gender differences in personality traits.

It is worth noting that of the countries analyzed on the basis of the masculinity index, Italy comes fourth, after Japan, Austria and Venezuela, while the last four places (50<sup>th</sup>-54<sup>th</sup> place) are occupied by Denmark, Holland, Norway and Sweden.

The studies by Hofstede (*Masculinity and femininity: The taboo dimension of national cultures*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998) reveal that the Male/Female dimensions are more

anthropological than psychological, being present in all cultures worldwide, and reflecting society's response to one of the fundamental enigmas of humanity, namely sexual dimorphism.

Without going too deeply into the model – although we shall be referring to it in our comments on the Italian scene – a point to stress is that, comparing thinking and behaviour in 40 countries, this framework takes gender difference (Masculinity/Femininity) as one of the five cultural dimensions largely independent of other factors on the basis of which the various cultures can be analyzed. This means giving weight to, or at least placing side by side with social, economic and cultural factors something concerning gender difference as an autonomous factor – a “cultural projection” of biological difference that conditions social relations. This cultural dimension does not in itself explain the phenomena of different levels of power between men and women, but is to be taken in combination with other certain dimensions, namely: Power distance (unequal versus equal) Uncertainty Avoidance (rigid versus flexible), Individualism/Collectivism (alone versus together), and Long/Short Term Orientation (Virtue versus Truth).

Hofstede also points out that masculinity and femininity are taboo in national cultures, adding that the taboo applies to “ultimate values,” “deeply seated values” that are not open to discussion.

Religion and sexuality are the major areas in which society maintains implicit masculinity and femininity. These researches do not aim at arriving at the “real definition” of male or female, or what the right characteristics of femininity and masculinity are. Rather, they warn us that sociological or anthropological researches on culture must deal with sexual individuals, no longer seen as indistinct or neutral, which means that the male/female parameter must be taken into account when collecting data as is now the case, for example, in statistics. Indeed, this parameter is by no means accessory but fundamental, to be correlated with other cultural dimensions.

## **2.9 Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes concern differences in the “psychological makeup” of women and men. We define them as the constellations of psychological traits that are said to be more characteristic of one sex than the other. The definitions of sex stereotypes used by researchers have identified four generally accepted characteristics: a sex stereotype is usually considered to be cognitive; it

is a set of beliefs, deals with what men and women are like, and is shared by the members of a particular group.

Gender stereotypes are not only a widely shared set of beliefs about the characteristics of individual because of gender, but also a rigid and “nearly” perpetual system of beliefs that have spelt discrimination and segregation for women.

This categorical observation does not mean that things are doomed to remain the same, but it does imply recognition of the extreme difficulty of change in sexual stereotypes .

Let us not lose sight of the fact that one of the mysteries of human existence is that we are divided into two sexes, male and female. The need was for the mystery of biological sexual difference enabling reproduction of the species to be transformed into thought – into mental categories representing the difference, in images and narrative, with which instincts, desires and emotions are related. With today’s scientific knowledge we can see just how falsified by ideological assumptions were the descriptions of the physiological functioning of male and female bodies in the centuries gone by. This serves to warn us of the ever present need for cultural reinterpretation and reconstruction of sexual dimorphism.

There is an elemental anxiety, an inability to tolerate difference, a threat to narcissism. "She (or he) is not like me." And the anxiety that surrounds the experience is frequently silenced with an elemental denial. Alternatively, the difference may be taken as negative, or in terms of positive complementarity: “He/she is my opposite”, and therefore needs me, and cannot exist without me.

Over the centuries gender stereotypes have generated a sexist ideology.

A case of the phenomenon is what Max Weber defined as *Herrschaft*, a relationship of dominance and subordination; through this system a most ingenious form of "interior colonization" is achieved. It is one, which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, and certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power.

Psychoanalytic theories of sexism have shown that sexism has many modes: it can involve idealizing women, derogating them and emphasizing their "castrated" physical and mental

inferiority, envying and fearing their bodies and reproductive capacities, viewing them as "other" than the fathers, excluding them from male peer groups, using them indirectly for homoerotic purposes. These different modes have diverse developmental origins – developmentally, they constitute many layers of sexism, and they command or suffuse diverse kinds of social organizations.

It is recognized that some stereotypes may be false and have no objective behavioural data to support them. Other stereotypes may contain elements of truth but fail to take into account the individual differences in traits occurring within groups or the degree of overlap between groups. Thus, if we speak of men as more aggressive than women, we are ignoring important individual differences in this trait among both men and women. Contrary to the implications of the stereotype, there are wide variations in aggressiveness among persons of both sexes, and there are some women who are more aggressive than some men. The stereotype makes no allowance for this variability and, when we use it uncritically, we act as though all men were more aggressive than all women.

**Sex roles** are defined in terms of activities of social significance in which the two sexes actually participate with differential frequency - that is, predominantly male activities, such as repairing cars and doing construction work, and predominantly female activities, such as keeping house and nursing. **Sex stereotypes**, on the other hand, have to do with general beliefs about men and women, and they may be conceptualized as operating at two different levels: **sex-role stereotypes**, which consist of beliefs concerning the general appropriateness of various roles and activities for men and for women; and **sex-trait stereotypes**, which consist of those psychological characteristics or behavioural traits that are believed to characterize men with much greater (or lesser) frequency than they characterize women. Sex roles (there are more men than women construction workers) are often "explained" by reference to sex-role stereotypes (construction jobs should be performed by men), which in turn are "explained" by reference to sex-trait stereotypes (men are strong, robust, and so on, and are therefore more suited for construction jobs). The sex-trait stereotypes underpin both the sex-role stereotypes and the sex roles themselves. Supporting the belief in the appropriateness of the conventional adult sex roles are the male and female sex-trait stereotypes. These stereotypes purport to describe differences in the psychological characteristics of males and females, which, if accepted as true, make reasonable the assignment of men and women to different occupational, homemaking, and leisure roles.

Thus, it is not uncommon to hear observations of the sort, "Women are too temperamental and submissive to make good judges" or "Men are too aggressive and insensitive to make good elementary school teachers." It often seems that the person making such remarks is not focusing on the characteristics of the individual person under consideration but rather is thinking primarily in terms of sex stereotypes – that is, "This person is a woman, women have certain characteristics, women's characteristics are (or are not) appropriate to this occupation; therefore . . ." Sex-trait stereotypes also appear to be implicated in the educational development of the young child.

In order to determine empirically whether there exist gender stereotypes common to the different cultures, researches were carried out in 25 countries with 100 university students divided according to gender for each country. The students were presented with lists of 300 adjectives to determine which were the most common characteristics defining male and female stereotypes. The answers given by the two sexes showed a high degree of correspondence. Among the 25 countries there was substantial quantitative agreement on various common psychological characteristics of men and women.

Here Italy, together with other Catholic countries, was distinguished by the use of a greater number of adjectives to define the male stereotype, suggesting that the male image was more detailed or precise than in the other countries. In twenty-four countries the adjectives generally taken to characterize women were: sentimental, submissive, superstitious affectionate, dreamy, feminine, sensitive, while the adjectives for the male sex were: dominant adventurous, forceful, independent, masculine, strong, aggressive, autocratic, daring, enterprising, robust, stern.

Associated with these stereotypes are affective meanings, "favourability, strength and activity". In all twenty-five countries the male stereotype terms were more active and stronger, the female stereotypes more passive and weaker. There was some variation among three countries with regard to the activity difference scores. In Italy and particularly in France, the usual finding of greater activity associated with the male stereotype was noticeably reduced, but in Peru this effect was more pronounced than usual. ....

There were differences for favourability; the favourability difference scores indicated that the traits associated with the female stereotype were more favourable than those associated with the

male stereotype. In addition the usual strength differential between the male and female stereotypes was reduced .

In Italy the female stereotype was much more favourable and the strength and activity differences were noticeably reduced. However, the magnitude of this effect was greater in the Catholic countries than in the Protestant countries. For the activity and strength scores, the usual cross-cultural findings were seen in both groups of countries, with the male stereotypes higher on both components. It seemed, however, that the Catholic stereotypes were not as highly differentiated on strength as were the Protestant stereotypes. Thus, the female stereotype in the Catholic countries appeared relatively more favourable and relatively less weak than in the Protestant countries – findings that seem consistent, for example, with the virtue and power associated with the Virgin Mary.... While the differences noted are not dramatic, they seem generally congruent with the differences in status and roles of women and men in the two religious traditions. The greater visibility, virtue, and power of females in the Catholic tradition seems consistent with the findings that the female stereotypes in the Catholic countries were relatively more favourable and relatively less weak than, and relatively less differentiated from the male stereotypes on the Adult and Adapted Child dimensions. (J.E. Williams, Deborah L.,Best, (1990). *Measuring sex stereotypes: A multination study*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.p.262-63)

Although the general differences between the male and female stereotypes were clearly present in the data from all countries, there were variations between countries in terms of the degree to which a particular effect was observed. Some of these variations could be explained by relating them to variables from other sources indicating cultural differences.

It is a basic rule in cross-cultural research that observed differences between different cultural groups are not necessarily cultural in origin; they may also reflect error variance, such as inaccuracies in translation and differences in subject sampling. In keeping with this principle, the observed differences between countries in male and female stereotypes should not be considered cultural unless the observed differences correlate with significant cultural comparison variables. Consequently, gender stereotype scores across the 25 countries were correlated with a variety of other indices, including economic-social development, religion (for example, percentage Christian and percentage Muslim), status of women (for example,

percentage of women employed outside the home and percentage of women in the university), and general demographics (for example, percentage urban and geographic latitude).

No significant correlations were found between M% scores and these comparison variables, but when affective meaning (favourability, strength and activity) scores were examined, several significant relationships emerged. For example, the magnitude of both the strength and activity differences between the male and female stereotypes was greater in the socio-economically less developed countries than in the more developed countries. Strength and activity differences also tended to be greater in countries where literacy was low and the percentage of women attending university low. These findings suggest that economic and educational advancement are accompanied by a reduction in the general tendency to view men as stronger and more active than women, however, the effect was merely reduced, not eliminated.

“In sum, in the area of gender stereotypes the evidence for pan-cultural similarities greatly outweighs the evidence of cultural differences, but there is some variation in the gender stereotypes from country to country that can be attributed to cultural variables.” (D. Best, J. E. Williams, *Masculinity and Femininity in the Self and Ideal Self Descriptions of University Students in 14 Countries*, in: *Masculinity and Femininity. The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures*, ed. Geert Hofstede, Sage Publication, Thousand Oaks, London New Delhi, 1998, pp.109-110).

There is also another point worth considering, above all to understand the resistance that men may show in producing thoughts that are not neutral, and that women may show in recognizing themselves always as women: for both gender groups the ideal self was relatively more masculine than the actual self. It appears, therefore, that there is a general tendency for both men and women to wish to be more "masculine" than they are.

In other transcultural studies on 22 countries (R.Burkholder, D. Moore, *Gender and Society: Status and Stereotypes*, Princeton NJ, The Gallup Organization World Headquarters, 1996) the gender stereotypes emerged much the same: women are seen to be emotional, affectionate and talkative by both men and women alike. Women are defined as patient, men as being more aggressive and more ambitious.

Paul T. Costa, Antonio Terracciano, Robert R. McCrae , *Gender Differences in Personality Traits Across Cultures. Robust and Surprising Findings*, in : *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2001 Vol. 81, No. 2, 322-331

## 2.10 Old and new gender stereotypes

Even when people encounter a stereotyped group member who violates the group stereotype, they often continue to maintain the stereotype by splitting it into subtypes. For example, when encountering a "strong woman, good at mathematics!" people with gender stereotypes may distinguish that woman from the other "sentimental, fragile and irrational women" by creating a subtype for "smart women." As a result of subtyping, stereotypes become impervious to disconfirming evidence.

Traditional displays of prejudice have not disappeared, but rather contemporary forms of prejudice are often difficult to detect and may even be unknown to the prejudice holders.

"Modern sexism," is a form of prejudice analogous to the "modern racism". In contrast to old-fashioned sexism -- which portrays women as unintelligent and incompetent -- modern sexism can be characterized by a denial that sex discrimination continues to be a problem, antagonism toward women's groups, and a belief that the government and news media show too much concern about the treatment of women.

Sexism is marked by an ambivalence and "ambivalent sexism" includes two separate but interrelated components: (1) hostile sexism, which involves negative feelings towards women, and (2) benevolent sexism, a chivalrous ideology that offers protection and affection to women who adopt conventional gender roles. Because benevolent sexism may superficially seem like positive regard rather than prejudice, it can go unnoticed or even be perpetuated by women themselves. As in the case of positive stereotypes, however, benevolent sexism is far from benign. Not only does it restrict women's freedom and encourage dependence upon men, but the presence of benevolent sexism among females means that women often act as prisoner and guard at the same time.

More recently, however, researchers have proposed that prejudice toward many groups reflects ambivalence: a combination of both positive and negative affect, attitudes and behaviours.

From an intergroup relations perspective, persuasive arguments said that subjectively positive feelings play a critical role in maintaining stratification in group relations marked by long-term social inequality.

On the side of the debate that claims that there is an actual reduction in prejudice, there is extensive evidence that attitudes about race, gender and sexual orientation are changing in this less-prejudice direction.

Researchers studying these modern forms of prejudice point to the strong evidence that, for example, behaviours toward women and current structural inequalities are inconsistent with the more liberal attitudes toward women and women's roles that are reported. Again, this is evidence of the existence of modern sexism! The positive stereotype of women as nurturing can be used, for example, as a justification to limit women to careers of education, childcare and nursing. This stereotype is dissonant with the image of women as trained soldiers marching into battle or cutthroat executives managing a hostile takeover.

Such terms as "covert discrimination," "subtle discrimination," and "unintentional discrimination" are beginning to appear with greater frequency in common parlance, newspapers, textbooks, and feminist articles. There has been an increased awareness of the importance of addressing non-overt sex discrimination. The research on sex-stereotypes much cited by Williams and Best (J.E. Williams, Deborah Williams, J. E., Best, D. E. (1990). *Measuring sex stereotypes: A multinational study*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage.) was repeated 16 years later, in 1988, in the United States, to see whether any appreciable changes had occurred. It was found that no substantial change had come about in the stereotypes. On the other hand, the same research conducted by the authors after an interval of 10 years in Norway showed that the female stereotype had become more favourable and stronger, male stereotype less favourable, less active, and less strong, although the same research repeated after 10 years with 5-year-old Norwegian children revealed no appreciable difference. Limited in scope as this finding is, it may have various implications, suggesting that gender stereotypes could be connected with the biological difference, but also that the inevitably more rigid, schematic categories of the early years of life may become more complex and flexible over time.

Change can take place if there is motivation, or there is some advantage in changing it, or when we are not threatened by the change of the stereotype. Consequently, one way of generating effects to transform the stereotypes would be through greater empathy. Simply by

taking the perspective of outgroup members and "looking at the world through their eyes," ingroup bias and stereotype accessibility can be significantly reduced “; even implicit stereotypes can be modified (Blair, I. V. (2002). *The malleability of automatic stereotypes and prejudice*. In: ‘Personality and Social Psychology Review’, 6, pp.242-261.).

## **2.11 Gender stereotypes and television**

Socialization is the way people learn about their culture and acquire its values, beliefs, perspectives, and social norms. It is an ongoing social process; we are socialized and resocialized throughout the life cycle. Traditionally, parents, peers, teachers, and the clergy have had the major responsibility for socialization. Numerous studies have found, however, that, in today's society, the mass media play a very important role in the socialization process. Social or observational learning theory examines the role of modelling in a child's social development. It posits that viewers, especially children, **imitate** the behaviour of television characters in much the same way that they learn social and cognitive skills by imitating their parents, siblings, and peers.

The actual processes of media socialization, however, are different from those used by more traditional agents of socialization. Media socialization does not permit face to face social interaction and may lack some of the seductive or coercive powers of traditional agents who have the tools of interpersonal communication at their disposal. Nevertheless, the media have their own brand of seductiveness, and much of the socialization through the media may involve observational and/or social learning.

Television provides not only specific responses but the strategies and rules viewers may apply to copy what they observe. As we already know, stereotypes are conventional representations or standardized images or conceptions. Stereotypes, in particular, play an important part in television's role as an agent of socialization. Stereotypes typically lack originality, they fall back on commonly known and often one-dimensional elements of portrayal. Television stereotypes provide simplistic models of behaviours, strategies, and rules that appear regularly in many different genres of programs, which means that the more time viewers spend on television, the more likely their conceptions about the world and its people will reflect what they see there.

TV gender stereotypes appeal to people's emotions rather than their intellect and their creative fantasies. Television programs with limited time to devote to character development often resort to stereotypes. Research on the impact of such images with regard to conceptions about sex roles points to the existence of a relationship between television viewing and having more stereotypic conceptions about gender roles. These relationships exist in all stages of the life cycle. In essence, television may be contributing to the maintenance of notions of more limited roles for women in society because the images seen on television typically foster the maintenance of the status quo vis-à-vis men's and women's roles in society.

The concern is that viewers, especially children, who are continually exposed to television's stereotyped roles may develop conceptions and perceptions about people that reflect the stereotypical images they see in the media. (N. Signorielli, *Television's gender Role Images and Contribution to Stereotyping*, pp. 341- 358, in D. G. Singer; J.L. Singer, *Handbook of Children and Media*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, London ,2001.)

Television has scant interest in faithfully reflecting reality, offering above all fiction, shows and entertainment. What it does set out to do, however, is to construct a reality of its own that is endowed with a truth value equal to that of the real world. In order to do so it must draw upon the widest possible consensus, and so exploit, for example, the most widely shared representations of women – the traditional, stereotype brand. It is after all clearly by starting off from observations most definitely shared by the majority of the population that it can organize the new values in such a way that, combined with the traditional values, they become authoritative sources of truth.

Thus it makes ample recourse to generalization and categorization, creating models that facilitate understanding of the new elements but using old materials.

# 3. Research Report on Qualitative analysis of the participation of women politicians in political information programmes in Italy

## 3.1. Abstract

The elections for the renewal of the European Parliament were held on June 13, 2004. Italian talk shows, inspired by the widespread logic of infotainment, had several candidates as their guests, giving shape to electoral debates, which didn't always focus on electoral issues. Nonetheless, they played a major role in building, reinforcing, and defining the identity of every single politician.

We therefore decided to analyse such programmes to investigate the gender stereotypes they contained. Is the distinction today between the roles of men and women still valid? To what extent is such a distinction clear-cut and thematized? Is politics a male-only issue or does it offer the same opportunities to women as well? Have role stereotypes changed or are they still linked to traditional gender models? Are women aware of their gender identity, or do they deny it, challenging and ignoring it?

Our job, of course, moves from the assumption that identity can be negotiated and that it is linked not only to individuality but to social and cultural aspects as well. As Goffmann maintains, communication is – at all levels, concerning media and politics as well – a *game of faces* (*character contests*, as Goffmann puts it), a role-playing game where interlocutors exchange representations and enact practices that define, little by little, each person's identity.

It is this role-playing and such game of faces that we decided to analyse. We will make use of the tools of semiotics, i.e. the investigation of meaning phenomena at any level – from the meaning of a written text to the meaning strategies of the motion of a camera, to the meaning processes conveyed by gestures and by proxemics.

In being loyal to semiotics, we carefully avoided psychological introspection. We do not know (nor are we interested in knowing) how women experienced their participation to this kind of show. We noted, though, that sometimes their presence led to the creation of a sort of victimization effect, and sometimes to a militancy effect. On some occasions they acted like

they were champions of efficiency and reality, on some others they turned out to be icons of a political party made in the image and likeness of themselves.

Theirs were role-playing games where they were wearing a given mask, which was then negotiated. In so doing, stereotypes were brought to the surface: some were ancient (the woman seen as a passive victim who needs protection), some more recent but not original (the woman seen as a feminist, claimer and militant), some others only based on passions (the woman seen as a sharing character).

On the whole, the results confirmed the long-standing extraneity of women to politics – if by “politics” we mean the public managing of the public self. Women seem to still prefer a private and individual point of view of their own self in politics (“a room of one’s own”, as Virginia Woolf said). Their (self)representation involves sensibility, desires and memory. They are not objects of action, they are objects of “passion” and “knowledge”. They are not able to become leading figures (Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini being the only exceptions), only sensitive spokeswomen.

## 3.2. Introduction

### The corpus

Our research aimed at investigating – from a semiotic and communication point of view – the kinds of representations and gender stereotypes within the main Italian information talk shows, over the period of the electoral campaign for the European elections. In Italy, such a period coincided with the administrative elections for the Communes and Provinces. Therefore, in the electoral debate the two competitions overlapped (sometimes candidates for different elections and different thematic agendas are confronted).

By “information talk shows” we mean those TV programmes, which, though they have information as their main communication goal (and, in this particular case, political-electoral information), take on many characteristics of entertainment shows. They are not TV electoral debates (which have only candidates as their guests and discuss electoral issues as though they were small-scale media rallies). They are shows whose format is more flexible and “friendly” and which:

- compare candidates and other participants (sometimes mere opinion leaders or politicians who are not running for elections, or politicians who are running for the administrative elections but not for the European elections);
- discuss electoral and political issues on a larger scale, with no direct link with the forthcoming elections (i.e. social issues: violence against women in non-Western countries; political choices relevant for the current Italian government, such as the reform of the Italian university system);
- are hosted by someone who is more of a show man rather than a neutral journalist and who is as much of a protagonist as the guests are; someone who guides and controls the debate (which has mostly more than two participants, as opposed to TV electoral debates which have only two). In so doing, he is the master of a media ceremony whose main goal is *to show* the politicians’ personalities (rather than listening to their electoral manifestoes), thereby making them accessible to viewers. He also creates marked participation dynamics and emotional identification (which is quite different from the critical distance of TV electoral debates)<sup>38</sup>.

In particular, the corpus was made up of shows of *Porta a porta*, *Otto e mezzo*, *Ballarò*, *La zona rossa*, and *Excalibur*, which were aired in the month before the elections and which had women as guests. There were eleven such shows in total. The choice of such a corpus was made according to the criteria of genre homogeneity (the shows share a common format and the same communication goals) and the criteria of *fair treatment (par condicio)* among the networks (which are more or less equally represented).

The situation of Italian television is, by and large, well known. Italy's television service came into being in January 1954 when the public company RAI officially inaugurated its first television channel, followed, in November 1961, by a second one and, in 1979, by a third (this latter based on a network of regional centres). The first private television stations popped up in the years 1974-8, following the partial (and unintended) deregulation of (cable) television, while the first channels broadcasting at a national level were re-listed between 1981 and 1982. Nevertheless, in 1984, because of financial difficulties, two of those Channels (Rete 4, owned by Mondadori, and Italia 1, owned by Rusconi, both press publishers) were bought by Silvio Berlusconi, who had already set up a successful commercial television network, Canale 5.

In general, the television broadcasting scene is characterized by a duopolist structure: the two biggest groups (RAI and Mediaset) share 90 per cent of the audience and of the television advertising resources (RAI: 32 %; Mediaset 58 %).

The RAI group represents public broadcasting. The public service is contracted every three years by the state to RAI. It is a publicly owned company, governed by a board appointed by the Speakers of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. It enjoys the financial privilege of getting its income from both the household licence fee (50 %) and advertising (30 %). Sales of programmes and other commercial activities account for the remaining 20 %. Beside broadcasting, through a number of subsidiary companies, RAI undertakes a series of related activities: publishing, records, advertising, programme sales. RAI controls three television channels, a live free satellite channel and seven pay-television channels including the D+ package (Tele+). The three RAI channels (with 46 per cent share of the total audience in June 2002) are: (1) Raiuno, the most popular and 'family' channel with a typically rich offering of news, entertainment and fiction, (2) Raidue, a channel which attempts to gain the loyalty,

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<sup>38</sup> In talk shows, participation is often induced by the scenography which remind one of a living room (*Porta a porta*), or of a private and restricted assembly around a table (*Excalibur*), or of an arena with a participating audience from the terraces (*La zona rossa*).

especially of young audiences, with ad hoc transmissions, (3) Raitre, more keen to identify with the original 'public service' mission of RAI, by offering culture, in-depth information, regional programmes, etc.

The commercial broadcasting Mediaset group is quoted on Milan's stock exchange but 48.3% of its shares are firmly controlled by Fininvest, Berlusconi's personal financial holding. Through the same holding the Premier-media baron controls 50.3 % of shares of the publishing house Mondadori, 99.9 % of football team AC Milan, 36.2 % of the Mediolanum Bank and 100 % of Medusa film distribution. The 'generalist' channels controlled by Berlusconi's trust, are: Canale 5, which repeats the main features of its public competitor Raiuno by offering a wide programme range of information, entertainment and fiction; Rete 4, which has an audience in which the elderly and housewives are overrepresented. Finally, Italia 1, the 'young' channel, addressed to children, teenagers and youngsters. Compared with the variety of the programming of the public channels, the offering of the commercial channels appears quite inclined towards entertainment, and commercial television is perceived as such by the viewers. In January 1991, however, the three commercial channels inaugurated a regular daily news service, thus presenting themselves as well as key information outlets, in competition with the previous news monopoly of public television.

There is a third Italian television pole as well: La7. The birth in 2001 of the third television pole, in a media market place almost completely dominated by the 'duopoly' of RAI and Mediaset, was very troubled and controversial. In the last few years, the film producer Cecchi Gori, owner of the Italian channels of TeleMonteCarlo (TMC and TMC-2), because of serious financial problems, sold TMC-2 to the MTV group and, in January 2001, TMC to Seat-Yellow Pages (controlled by Telecom Italia). Seat renamed the old TMC network La7 and tried to set up a channel that voiced the interests of all those - cultural, political and industrial - who did not, or would not, identify with the two opposed giants. However, whilst La7 was still being launched, the Pirelli industrial group, more interested in telecommunications than in the television sector bought up Telecom Italia

The original industrial plans (and ambitions) were eventually downsized and fewer financial resources were pumped into the La7 venture by the new bosses of Telecom Italia.

Consequently, the 'third pole' is struggling for survival, unable to seize more than 3.9% audience share in June 2002<sup>39</sup>

Within this communication context, the programmes we chose differentiate in the way they use the same format and common infotainment communication programme:

- *Porta a porta* is aired five days a week, generally late at night. It is one of Rai Uno's (and perhaps Italy's) most popular shows. It set the standards for a whole TV genre, the "current affairs entertainment show". The host, Bruno Vespa, the champion of moderation and media self-control, welcomes several guests in each show, then questions them about a number of issues and urges them to a personal confrontation, which is often revealing. Its model is the living room where people gather to politely discuss late into the night.
- *Ballarò*, named after a popular market in Palermo, is aired once a week in prime time, on Rai Tre. The show is hosted by Giovanni Floris and is centred upon political debates and the exchanging of opinions. It offers more close examinations than entertainment, as it is devised to shed light on reality and to provide viewers with clues to interpret it.
- *Excalibur* is Rai Due's information programme. It is aired in prime time on Mondays. It is hosted by Antonio Soggi. Through its scenes and the way the different issues are handled, the programme acquires a living-room-like, militant aspect (as if it was a TV electoral debate). The guests gather around a table, and the programme lacks the home-like atmosphere of *Porta a porta*, nor does it create suspense, and offers more information than entertainment.
- *La zona rossa* is the most recent programme of those we analysed. Hosted by Marco Taradash, it is aired every week in prime time on Rete Quattro. Its format reminds one of the arena, where few guests (usually, two) face one another while they are being questioned by Marco Taradash. Questions are often intentionally polemical. The audience is not involved in the debate, but is frequently framed as it were an impending presence for the guests.

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<sup>39</sup> Data was derived from G. Mazzoleni, *Italy*, in M. Kelly, G. Mazzoleni, D. McQuail (eds.), *The Media in*

- *Otto e mezzo* is La 7's infotainment programme. It is aired daily (except at weekends), and its airtime is 30 minutes. Its structure is intentionally polarized, being hosted by a man and a woman of opposing political views (Giuliano Ferrara, eccentric opinion leader of Forza Italia, and Barbara Palombelli, left-wing journalist and wife of the ex mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli, President of the Margherita party) and having two guests of opposing political views as well.

### **Hypothesis and goals**

At first, we assumed that, besides the negligible quantitative female presence, there should have been a sort of modality according to which female presence differentiates from that of men. Current TV programmes – both entertainment and information ones – including a dominating tendency towards customization. To what extent is this feature a characteristic of female presence as well?

We had the feeling that women were represented only as part of a political group where they lose their identity or, on the other hand, they were induced to overemphasize it, thus turning into icons. Being an icon and being a person are quite different things, as different as the way Bruno Vespa customises his hosting of *Porta a porta* is from the way Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini dominate the scene.

If customization implies both protagonism and a sort of “happy” subordinating of the world to oneself, iconization implies a more marked hiatus between the icon and its background, a separation that cannot be overcome and is rather evident. This brings to mind some examples mentioned before: Bruno Vespa and Emma Bonino. Vespa is a major contributor to the customization of TV space, thanks to his creation of a new way to host talk shows, blending condescending *savoir faire* and firmness, protagonism and spirit of service, apparent balance and militancy. He is part of a *legacy* that presents no discontinuity with the past, by creating new semantics from within TV talk shows, summarising opposing, or heterogeneous, modes of operating – which might be perceived as ambiguous. On the other hand, Emma Bonino regularly underlines the fracture with her past, with a common way of making politics, and the way media are managed that most people accept. Her unquestionable protagonism is proportional to her breaking every rule – a breaking that becomes a banner, self-satisfaction, a programme (the Radicals are a party which tend to make their choices look extremist as a rule).

She both sums up and polarizes contradictions, and here is where the difference between customization and iconization in TV lies.

We found it interesting to investigate how female politicians chose to “enter the lists” individually and in a different way from men, differentiating also from dated stereotypes (the woman seen as militant and claiming, and as a weak figure). Most times we had to face solutions and representations that were more traditional than we expected, and which are oriented towards the neutralization of one’s own gender specificity on the one hand, and towards resentful vindication on the other.

### **Select bibliography**

This work is part of a much researched field of study and which has already produced many in-depth examinations. Studies on the relationship between political and TV communication have recently increased, especially over the last five-six years. The relationship between politics and television is manifold. As a matter of fact, politics can take on at least three different aspects when compared to TV: it can be the *content* of media (TV speaking about politics); it can be the *subject* of media (politicians are a source of entertainment and information); it can be the *context* of media (TV becomes a sort of political arena). From this very point of view, the relationship between media and politics cannot be compared to an *informative* relationship, whereas it can be compared to a more complex and mediated network of relationships of mutual *mise-en-abime*.

The most important studies in this field are:

Bionda M. L., Bourlot A., Cobianchi V., Villa M., *Lo spettacolo della politica. Protagonismo e servizio nel talk show*, Rome, VQPT, 1998

Calabrese O., *Come nella boxe. Lo spettacolo della politica in TV*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1998

Cornero L., *Una felice anomalia*, Roma, VQPT, 2004

Livolsi M., Volli U. (eds.), *La comunicazione politica tra prima e seconda repubblica*, Milano, Angeli, 1995

Idem, *Il televoto. La campagna elettorale in televisione*, Milano, Angeli, 1997

Idem, *Personalizzazione e distacco. Le elezioni europee e regionali (1999)*, Milano, Angeli, 2000

Marini R., Roncarollo F., *I media come arena elettorale. Le elezioni del '96 in TV e nei giornali*, Roma, VQPT, 1997

Novelli E., *Dalla TV di partito al partito della TV: televisione e politica in Italia*, Firenze, la Nuova Italia, 1995

Within the field of research, on the relationship between media and politics – at least in Italy – there are few close examinations about gender specificity. Studies upon *female specificity* were mainly confined to feminist “militant” groups, and could rarely be shared among larger audiences such as those in universities. We must highlight, though, the interesting works of at least four female researchers who have contributed (and are contributing) to this kind of discussion: Patrizia Violi, Cristina Demaria, Teresa De Lauretis, and Rosi Braidotti.

For further bibliographical clues please refer to:

Bonner F. *et al.*, 1993: *Imagining Women. Cultural Representations and Gender*, Oxford, Polity Press

Braidotti Rosi, 1994: *Nomadic Subjects* (partly translated into Italian as *Soggetto nomade. Femminismo e crisi della modernità*, Roma, Donzelli, 199\_)

---, 2002: *Nuovi soggetti nomadi. Transizioni e identità postnazionaliste*, Roma, Sassella

Brundson C., D'Acci J., Spigel L. (eds.), 1997: *Feminist Television Criticism. A Reader*, Oxford, Clarendon Press

Buonanno Milly, 1999: *Faction*, Napoli, Liguori

Butler J., 1994: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London, Routledge (Italian translation *Scambi di genere*, Milano, Sansoni, 2004)

De Lauretis, Teresa, 1996: *Sui generis. Scritti di teoria femminista*, Milano, Feltrinelli

---, 1999: *Soggetti eccentrici*, Milano, Feltrinelli

Demaria Cristina, 2003: *Teorie di genere*, Milano, Bompiani

Doane M. A., 1991: *Femmes Fatales. Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge (Italian translation *Donne fatali. Cinema, femminismo, psicoanalisi*, Roma, Pratiche, 1995)

Héritier Françoise, 1996: *Masculin/Féminine. La pensée de la différence*, Paris, Odile Jacob

---, 2002 : *Masculin/Féminine II. Dissoudre la hiérarchie*, Paris, Odile Jacob

Violi Patrizia, 1986: *L'infinito singolare. Considerazioni sulle differenze sessuali nel linguaggio*, Verona, Essedue

Zoonen van, L., 1994: *Feminist Media Studies*, London, Sage

Some recent, relevant sociological and statistical studies are worth noting, even though their approach is quantitative and more heterogeneous than ours. Reference should be made, nonetheless, to “Women, Labour, and TV. Female Representation in TV Programmes” by CNEL (2002), and “Women and Politics. Old Legacies and New Chances” by CENSIS (2003).

### 3.3 Methodology

Our approach to gender representation within electoral TV communication was a *qualitative* one. We carried out our research without the aid of statistical studies or focus groups. We concentrated instead on only the *text* of TV programmes, i.e. on their internal organisation, their communication and international dynamics, the image of the self that every interlocutor enacted during communication exchanges (i.e. in TV shows). We mainly made use of semiotic tools. From this point of view, the relationship among media, information and politics poses a *narrative* problem: how do media *build* events? Who are the protagonists, and what are their desires, *pathways* and strategies? How do such strategies and representations vary according to the sex of the interlocutor?

From a semiotic point of view, any text – and any human experience in this sense – is organised in a narrative way<sup>40</sup>: selection of a *subject*, a *value object* (according to the subject), an *anti-subject* (opposing the subject's efforts for realisation), *helpers* and *anti-helpers* who enter the scene in different ways and at different times, and a *sender*, legitimising, claiming, imposing or indirectly presenting a task.

In such role-playing games, power, will and social competence and duties are defined and negotiated. This is what semiotics investigates in its theory. Every subject is characterized by a number of internal qualifications, which *affect their way of doing things* (from a grammatical point of view, *modal* verbs ad to and *modify* other parts of the sentence: can, must, will).

*Must* and *will* are the modals inaugurating the *possibility* of an action: an action is *planned* (before being performed) because one is willing to or must do it. *Can* is the modal allowing for the fulfilment of one's plans, which needs knowledge and the possibility of being performed. When making plans (e.g. to cut taxes), a politician can be defined as one of the following: a willing subject (he is willing to do a thing); a committed subject (he must do a thing in order not to lose face); a powerful subject (he can really do something); a competent subject (he knows how to do something, even though he isn't able to do it yet). Modal games create

complex identification and meaning: a subject can be willing to do something but he may not be able to do it; or he must do it, even if he does not want to; or he knows how to do it, but he cannot.

Modal attributes and such can/must, will/can, can/must games strongly affect the interaction, the image, and the identity of those who participate in talk shows. We will see how female figures are often and *regularly* characterised by certain modalities (*can* or *will not*, “I’m sorry” being one of the most recurrent expressions in their speeches), and how they correspond to common stereotypes, and how they differentiate from typically male modalities (e.g. *must* – as if male politicians already possessed social and political acknowledgement) – and *can’t but* do something and react in a given way – as if their successful lives had been previously devised.

Actors and actresses have not only different narrative programmes and modals. They also possess different *faces* (e.g. the way they look at their interlocutors, the way they use and convey their femininity, and the way they look different from men), and they convey different *passions* and moods (are there TV and political passions that are specifically feminine?). The whole of these tracts (always negotiated between the public and private, and social and personal self) define and *build* the actors’ identity. Identity – and gender identity – is the product of social practices. We will investigate the way political and TV issues both create the dominance of certain stereotypes by subverting some and creating new ones within a process of continuous symbolisation which brings any image back to the culture it belongs to.

We will therefore analyse each show according to the same scheme of analysis devised to evidence:

- favourite and dominating themes (with a distinction between political, policy, campaign, and personal issues)<sup>41</sup>;
- the actors’ narrative roles (*who* is playing *which* role in political TV communication) and the stereotypes such roles convey;
- the way female candidates “make” things (political, interpretative, defensive, spectacular...);

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<sup>40</sup> See: A. J. Greimas, *Du Sens*, Paris, Seuil, 1974, and *Du sens II*, Paris, Seuil, 1984 ; A. J. Greimas and J. Fontanille, *Sémiotique des passions*, Paris, Seuil, 1991. See also the handbook by M. P. Pozzazzo, *Semiotica del testo*, Roma, Carocci, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> By “political issues” we mean themes related to political debates, sides, and parties; by “policy issues” the practical problems against which parties define their programmes; by “campaign issues” the themes related to electoral alliances; by “personal issues” the issues related to the candidates’ personal, private, and professional life.

- the modal and pathemic characterisation of the “actresses” in TV programmes;
- how the interaction among actors is managed (turn taking, freedom of speech...);
- the actors’ communication style (starting from a lexical analysis of each actor’s speech).

### 3.4. Results

As already mentioned, our research involved monitoring some talk shows aired over the period of the electoral campaign. Eleven shows of different talk shows were selected:

*La zona rossa*: 7-5; 14-5; 4-6.

*Porta a porta*: 17-5; 31-5; 3-6.

*Excalibur*: 10-5; 17-5.

*Otto e mezzo*: 21-5; 25-5.

*Ballarò*: 2-6.

The women who were guests in these shows were:

- Letizia Moratti (*La zona rossa*, 7-5), current Minister of Education, University and Research, not running for the European elections but summoned to give her opinion on an issue which is central to the debate over domestic politics: the reformation of the Italian educational and university system.
- Luciana Sbarbati, two presences (*La zona rossa*, 7-5; *Porta a porta*, 31-5), running for, then elected to, the European Parliament in the list “Uniti per l’Ulivo”, already elected in the last legislature.
- Margherita Boniver, two presences (*Excalibur*, 10-5; *La zona rossa*, 4-6), undersecretary of the Foreign Office, taking sides with Forza Italia, not running for the European elections.
- Emma Bonino, three presences (*La zona rossa*, 14-5; *Otto e mezzo*, 25-5; *Porta a porta*, 3-6), former member of the European Parliament and running as the head of the list “Lista Bonino” for this year’s European elections (then elected).

- Gabriella Pistone (*La zona rossa*, 14-5), MP for Comunisti Italiani, not running for the European elections.
- Cristiana Muscardini (*La zona rossa*, 14-5), Alleanza Nazionale, member of the European Parliament in the last legislature and running for this year's European elections (then elected).
- Pasqualina Napolitano (*Excalibur*, 14-5), head of the DS delegation to the European Parliament, running for the European elections (then elected).
- Alessandra Mussolini (*Porta a porta*, 17-5), head of the list "Alessandra Mussolini – Libertà di azione", running as a member of the political alliance "Alternativa Sociale" (then elected).
- Adriana Poli Bertone (*Otto e mezzo*, 21-5), elected member of the European Parliament in 1999 as a member of the list of Alleanza Nazionale, running again for this year's European elections (then elected).
- Pia Locatelli (*Otto e mezzo*, 21-5), president of Socialist International Women, running for this year's European elections as a member of the Ulivo group.
- Tana De Zulueta (*Ballarò*, 2-6), senator of the Ulivo, running as a member of the DS party for this year's European elections.
- Laura Pennacchi (*Ballarò*, 9-6), MP of the PDS party from 1994 and Teresa Armosino (*Ballarò*, 9-6), of Forza Italia, undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance – both not running for these elections and not relevant for our research as they were only present in a short recorded interview.

The first quantitative result to regularly be brought to the surface is the *under-representation* of women.

Female presence seems to have mostly a *representative value*: five men and one woman; four men and one woman; six men and one woman, as if female presence were more a mirror to a need of representation and political correctness than of actual interest and relevance.

The only two exceptions concern the same programme, *La zona rossa* (7 and 14 of May, 2004), when two women were guests in the same show (Letizia Moratti and Luciana Sbarbati) and three women (Emma Bonino, Pistone, and Muscardini) were summoned together with only one man.

*Otto e mezzo* sometimes presents a one-to-one confrontation between a man and a woman. For example, the show aired on May 21<sup>st</sup> hosted a confrontation between Pia Locatelli and Ias Gawronsky, and one between Emma Bonino and Rocco Buttiglione was hosted on May 25<sup>th</sup>. It is, therefore, a framework that somehow reasserts a certain idea of female “inconsistency”. In *Otto e mezzo* more men can be guests in the same show, whereas women cannot, as they need a male interlocutor to become relevant and have their presence legitimised.

We will now look at some data regarding *thematization*. In general terms, a direct and constant thematisation on Europe is lacking. Even though it was a campaign for the European elections, such an issue is marginalised. The only exception is perhaps the show of *La zona rossa* aired on May 14<sup>th</sup>, which was different, also because there were three female candidates as guests: Bonino, Moscardini, and Pistone. Most of the times, guests deal with central policy issues: the war on Iraq, first of all, and the line Italy should take – an issue which catalyses many others: terrorism; the relationship between Islam and the Western world; American politics (and George W. Bush’s visit to Italy during that period); the several wars going on in forgotten countries at the edge of the Western world; the attitude of the media towards the horror of the war. Sometimes, the following issues were discussed: the reformation of the Italian university system and assisted fertilization.

Both men and women consider campaign issues less important. The debate only hints at election alliances. There are only few polemical insinuations on the heterogeneity and the chances of survival of the alliance among the Left-wing parties (see *La zona rossa* aired on May 14<sup>th</sup>, with the Hon. Pistone; *Otto e mezzo* of May 21<sup>st</sup>, with Pia Locatelli). On the other hand, political issues play a major role, especially for women. If we consider ideologies, political fronts and parties as political issues, we note a very interesting polarization: male guests are little questioned about their political identity, nor do they feel the need to express

their opinion about it. We have the feeling that their political profile is a well known and established fact posing no problems at all. The opposing fronts and parties face one another as is expected in a political debate, with no need of being introduced. The political identity of female guests, on the contrary, is less clear-cut, and needs reasserting. Not only, as I mentioned before, do the only two (controversial) moments devoted to campaign issues involve two women – and upon request of the journalist hosting the show – but the women themselves feel the need to define themselves through a comparison to the political side they are part of. No thematisation of political issues is present in their speeches (this making female and male speeches alike), whereas there is a constant need of pointing out their political identity – which is a party identity as well as a “socio-historical” identity related to the feminist movement.

As a consequence, Luciana Sbarbati recalls the political choices of some years ago made by the Left-wing parties on the reformation of the Italian university system (*La zona rossa*, 7-5); Hon. Pistone speaks as a true “woman of the Left” (*La zona rossa*, 14-5); Hon. Napolitano speaks for “her party, her list”, and recalls the feminist movement (*Excalibur*, 17-5); Pia Locatelli speaks for “the big party she is part of” (*Otto e mezzo*, 21-5); Tana De Zulueta is a member of the group which would protest against Bush’s visit to Italy (*Ballarò*, 2-6).

Female figures generally call for a contextual and historical political thematisation drawn from memory. What emerges is the figure of the spokeswoman holding a personal opinion on any policy issues, as well as the political point of view of the party she belongs to. This essential reference to the “group” is valid not only for one political front – the opposition, which might as well perceive its particular weakness (as Adriana Poli Bertone does when she refers to the need of socialisation of Alleanza Nazionale and to its need for a Right-wing identity). The need of “team support” expresses a rather strong feeling of uncertainty and weakness referred to one’s political, public, and individual dimension: it is as if such a sense was derived from the tradition one belongs to, and not from one’s own personality.

Emma Bonino is a case apart, as she is more than a spokeswoman. She is the *icon* (the face, the image) and the *symbol* of a whole party, and therefore possesses a long-standing tradition of meanings, memory, and references. In her case, the distinction among policy, political, and campaign issues doesn’t hold because every intervention of hers summarises all of these dimensions. She made a point of being coherent and integrated, as an autonomous woman would be, without allies, committed first and foremost to reasserting the identity of her *being*,

true to itself. An icon is, doesn't do. Emma Bonino is a list herself, therefore a party – a party which is made up of a number of stances which are political and part of her electoral campaign. No articulation is present in her figure, nor in her speeches, whereas density is – a semiotic density which will be analysed further on. As for personal issues, they are lacking in most of the debates – both male and female. Once again, Emma Bonino is the only exception to the rule. When she speaks about fertilization and maternity she reasserts her willing choice to not have children, and the way her decision affected her political ideas about fertilization.

Let's have a look now at the *roles* assumed by the participants in these debates. I will mainly focus on female guests' roles. We have already remarked the spokeswoman role assumed by all of them – with the only exceptions of Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini (who represent a list bearing their own name). Besides that, each of them plays another role which specifically sets the standards for the figure of the spokeswoman. For the sake of clarity, I have divided such roles into four groups, each label referring to a stereotype:

- the victim
- the champion
- the feminist
- the icon

We include in the role of the victim – maybe the predominant one – all the women expressing a sense of having been wronged, and therefore in need of protection in different ways. We deal with an ancient stereotype – from time immemorial women have been the subject of male protection and violence – which, in different ways, is also played by the most emancipated women.

Two different versions for the same role are emerging – the wounded victim and the angry victim. For what concerns the “angry victim”, I would like to point out the attitude of Letizia Moratti (*Zona rossa*, 7 of May). From the beginning, facing *both* the aggressive attitude of the host, critical at least (Taradash), *and* of a very polemic interlocutor (Luciana Sbarbati), she immediately puts on a defensive and insecure attitude. She is unwilling to say “I” and prefers to mitigate her own individuality by using the institutional “we”; she moves her eyes in a clearly embarrassed way, without focusing on anything particular; sometimes, she even starts stammering; she repeats “I'm sorry” when facing Sbarbati in a quite heated discussion; she

closes her speech in a subdued, almost pathetic tone, remarking “I’m putting my heart into what I’m saying”. What emerges is the figure of a woman in trouble, weakened by her own sensitivity, not only wronged (statistics and data that she tries to show are not relevant), but also sorry for it.

In any case, Letizia Moratti is not the only one whose turn-taking begins with “I’m sorry”; men never begin a speech in this way, while women reiterate it very often, thus being immediately connoted as “subjects of feeling” and of “sympathy” rather than subjects of action.

The figure of what I termed the “*angry*” victim is quite different (and exemplified in the same show). Sometimes, such a figure can be identified with the feminist woman. Sbarbati is the perfect incarnation of this image (as well as Napoletano and sometimes Bonino). Let’s have a look at the ways she reacted. Both in *Zona Rossa* aired on 7 of May and in *Porta a Porta* aired on 31 of May, Sbarbati has a defensive and polemic attitude from the start. And she says it openly, explaining (*Zona Rossa*) that “I must protect myself; this is a good principle in life”. She takes a strongly polemical, rather dramatic view on life, dialogue, and politics. There are not only rivals, but also victims and offenders, someone who has the power and others that must fight tooth and nail to seize it. This comes as no surprise, since it is not interaction (therefore reality) to disclose this aspect of life. This is the way it works, and we know it from the start.

Thus, the first framing of Sbarbati during *Zona rossa* has proven to be very interesting, when, by means of a wide camera movement showing the studio together with all the interlocutors, she, whose bust is framed, persistently addresses her eyes towards the camera, and holds them more than the time requested by a spontaneous gesture, acting like she was facing a challenge. It seems that Sbarbati is expecting a fight, that she will face someone who dominates her but she can unmask the injustice. And then she acts: she chuckles while Moratti is talking, she starts speaking before a dialectic clash occurs; she puts herself as the subject of dispute (“contest”, “contradict”, “protect myself” are the most used expressions); she chooses distant, conceited and polemic tones when addressing her interlocutor, trying to de-legitimise her as soon as Moratti opens her mouth. This kind of managing interaction is repeated and becomes exasperated during *Porta a porta*, when Sbarbati participates live from outside the studio. Also in this case she presents herself as the victim wronged by the person hosting the show who does not let her speak. After the open denunciation of the disparity in treatment (“At last, I can

speak!”... “let me finish!”), she keeps and extends her turn in speaking against the host’s will, wasting her extra time in quarrelling with Vespa. The debate thus becomes a personal controversy, neglecting the political controversy played according to party differences. Sbarbati says to Vespa “You don’t like me”, producing almost a comic effect, while Vespa, exasperated, concludes by saying “I won’t reply because you’re a lady”.

It is clear that gender stereotypes triumph. When the guest presents herself as a victim and shifts the controversy from the political issue to the personal, the host also (usually a very clever and self-controlled master of ceremonies) loses the kind and easygoing register characterising the talk show. Thus he silences her by means of the worst female cliché: women seen as “ladies”, without any depth and somewhat lower than men (I’m not offending you not because you don’t deserve it or due to some personal qualities that you have, but just because you’re a lady).

On the show of *Excalibur* aired on May 17<sup>th</sup>, Baget Bozzo, outside from the studio, used the term “lady” in the same way. The programme hosted Pasqualina Napolitano, another “victim” of the talk shows over the period of the electoral campaign for the European elections. In this case the interaction did not start from immediately defensive attitudes. Nonetheless, the only woman in the studio was indirectly framed as a victim by the programme’s thematisation, violence against women (indeed, the show’s main theme was “Women, twice victims”), so that it is hard to avoid such a theme. It is remarkable how Pasqualina Napolitano plays her role, trying to confute it all the time and using speech to fight it by means of reasonableness (she seems to put on relaxed tones, suggesting an open social attitude and then showing a sort of superiority towards Baget Bozzo, who polemically defines her as “lady”). On the other hand, it has to be noted that she plays her role in proxemics; she is strained, defensive, she keeps her eyes downcast, she does not fully control the interaction and tends to intrude in the other guests’ turn (acting as if she lacked self-discipline, though without arrogance); moreover she uses softened and deferential forms, (“let me say...”, “I would like to say”, “I’d like to present some elements”) looking for the approval of the interlocutors more than for the legitimacy to speak.

If the priority for the victims is to protect themselves, the *champions’* aim is to make things known – it means they are defending a fact more than themselves. Women representing the centre-right parties play this role more than others; for example Boniver, Muscardini, Poli

Bortone, and, for specific personal attitudes, Alessandra Mussolini, who is worth being treated apart. These women call the interlocutors' attention to facts by means of the rhetoric typical of the parties they belong to. They tend to assimilate male interaction models more than other women (in fact, the role of the champion is a typical male role). Since they are *witnesses*, they become champions of truth and they show all the confidence coming from a real, present-day experience (they do not seem to have historical memory; their memory has proven to be mainly based on experiences). There is something sacred in "showing" their truth to the world: they *show* items to be venerated like the Grail: numbers, data, real experiences that do not need explanations, or critical framings, but, if dug out, speak for and define themselves. Therefore, Margherita Boniver remembers that "she was there when..."; the truth she is presenting is the truth of a person who knows things because she was a witness, and of a person who can report (so she quantifies numbers and figures).

Poli Bortone corrects and asks Pecoraro Scanio to be honest, saying to him, although in a kind way: "You were there that day! Like me" and at the same time she refers to her own daily experience of a woman who goes shopping. These female politicians manage turn-taking in different ways, breaking off when the others are speaking in order to correct them, point things out, and unmask reality. Their task is to make-things-known and their strength lies in the way they know-how-to-do their job. They know how to manage themselves in public.

The "feminists" play a different role, representing themselves as women, and as women aware of their specificity (the term "feminist" is not intended here in its more literal meaning, i.e. who participates in the female emancipation movement belonging to Left parties). We list in this group all the women who appear to have *double thinking*, that allows them to be thought of as both the subject and object of discussion. Not only are the feminists aware of being women and then of doing politics in a different way, if compared with men; they also want to focus this question, to make it the subject of a discussion, to openly thematise female specificity. They want to present themselves as subjects who will and can – with double knowledge. This is more historical for the centre-left spokeswomen (Napolitano refers to the "great feminist movement", Pistone to the awareness of the Left women's movement", Locatelli to the experience of International Women's Issues), more practical in the case of the centre-right representatives (Mussolini refers to the almost biological "limits" of men regarding their psychological introspection; Poli Bortone to the shopping experience, as though she was a housewife: "When women go to buy a kilo of turnips..."). They are women whose knowledge about women is due

both to a cultural competence and to an incarnate knowledge. This kind of *thinking* is double since it has two objects (the world and women themselves) and two subjects (*the self*, the body with its flesh, and *the culture* which inhabits the self and forms the body).

In interacting with the other guests, these women thematise female issues by an approach that is more defensive or reasonable than aggressive or controversial. The women playing this role tend to use “we” more than “I”, and when they say “I” they immediately soften it assimilating their personal experience to the other women (for instance Poli Bortone who goes shopping like ordinary women). Since they are subjects of will, they permanently evoke a possible world and a different possible outlook that is yet to come; but they do it referring to already abused stereotypes: the activist and the housewife. The critical charge of these claims is weakened: there is no news, no breaking the rules, only the known repetition of a female emancipation experience which has already been carried out and legitimised, now generating polite, respectful, and balanced conversation. The women playing this role are often characterised by an attitude of listening and attention; Napolitano, Locatelli, Poli Bortone, and also, partially, Pistone, are often framed while they are not speaking, not so much as viewers as actively listening to a dialogue. Their participation is often very meaningful but not very communicative.

Their self-awareness gives them a kind of knowledge that affects their feelings and emotions: they are self-controlling and “polite” for what concerns their emotions; they respect their turns to speak, and are able to control their verbal reactions (see the controversies between Napolitano and Baget Bozzo or Poli Bortone with Pecoraio Scanio), keeping under control their own narcissism (Locatelli corrects Palombelli who calls her Honourable). Nevertheless, with their listening attitude, they confirm their identity of subjects who know more than they do – it means they are not active enough, and consequently not very concrete.

The only break in traditional role playing is embodied by two absolutely eccentric figures in the Italian political panorama: Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini. To tell the truth, we are faced with two completely different personalities, and listing them under the same heading is partially forced. Nevertheless, both Bonino and Mussolini share the image which more closely resembles the icon whose face sums up many dimensions. Bonino embodies a more symbolic dimension (intellectualistic, like an emblem), whereas Mussolini represents the folkloric dimension (popular, like a mask). We deal, in both cases, with the image of two women who

are strongly characterised, first of all by their faces, since they do not need to be defined (it should be noted that in *Porta a porta* aired on May 17<sup>th</sup>, Alessandra Mussolini was the only guest whose name and qualification did not appear on the screen when she was framed). The political and electoral dimensions, as well as the personal and gender dimensions, unite in a uniquely strong media representation.

Alessandra Mussolini's imperatives tend to be excessive and to turn the icon into a caricature. She is always exaggerating: she does not respect behavioural codes and rules of any political parlour, especially on TV; she speaks in a very loud voice; she has a clumsy posture, her arms tight, always frowning; she uses grammar rules in a very loose way, and uses slang expressions; and without flinching she compels Bruno Vespa to reprimand her all the time. She plays the role of the insubordinate and aggressive but at the same time persistently and consciously she claims to be a woman: she calls the attention of politics to humanitarian issues, delivers tirades in favour of non violence, accuses men in the studio of not understanding (i.e. they are not shown to be sensitive enough) for the only reason that they are men, and then she strategically ends by delivering a heart-breaking sentence, asking Vespa (when the host has to close the talk show) to let her say that "the image of those children struck me" (and it is hard to understand which children she is referring to).

As a matter of fact, we are faced with a personality who, by claiming her femininity, wants to create a new role in the political arena, to make a role for herself, the icon of human instincts and passions. Thus she proposes, in the political context, which seems to be absolutely incongruous and inappropriate for this purpose, the most abused female stereotypes: a woman who is a mother and a wild animal at the same time, subject both of aggression (seducing) and protection (maternal). What is new and "unclassifiable" in her is her shifting this double stereotype to the space of Politics (which is mediation, re-elaboration, and domestication first and foremost) from which women are normally excluded, the more so if women have primordial instincts.

At the other end, we can find the Culture embodied by Emma Bonino, icon and leader of a party, subject of thought and action, always with her pen and block-notes in hand, and permanently clear-headed, critical, self-possessed. Emma Bonino is, at the same time, subject of willingness and knowledge: she knows what she wants and she can get it. For instance, she can manage – and she is the only one in the corpus we analysed – the interaction with the host

of the programme and the other interlocutors; most of the time she awaits her turn to speak, she decides how to address the interlocutor (Ferrara, in *Otto e mezzo* of May 25<sup>th</sup> realizes that Bonino has started addressing Barbara Palombelli calling her by her first name without having been granted permission), she looks alternatively at the camera (speaking to the audience at home) and at the interlocutor (who is in the studio) in the most efficient way, acting at the same time as the subject both of a real and media interaction, questioning both the real interlocutor and her potential electors.

The subject of her speech does not consist of repeating “I” (she is not the spokeswoman of a party, she *is* the party) but a subject of choices: she chose not to have children (*Otto e mezzo*, 25 of May), she thinks that Law must always guarantee the freedom of choice (hence her positions concerning contraception and assisted fertilization), she asks Vespa not to talk always about the same things in his show (i.e. Bush, Iraq, and so on). Here is a personality that overtly upsets gender representations, crossing opposite or distant dimensions: her professional competence seems to refer to models of male roles (Ferrara calls her “a professional politician” – a qualification usually intended for men) but she refers often to her being a woman (when she speaks about her choices concerning maternity, when she asks for support from the host, specifying that does not mean to be protected – as if a man protecting a woman were the worst situation to face); she does not act according to the softening strategies typical of the way women interact (hesitating, intonation, asking for approval from the interlocutor, deference, mitigating sentences...) nevertheless she plays strongly with her face and her image, by means of a typical female consciousness. She seems to be the only one who is aware of her own mediatic power, making it a resource, a strength, a responsibility. Her icon is not only political but also ethic; that pen, playing its role on the set together with her, symbolizes her task to care, her clearness of mind, responsibility and critical approach..

If female roles differentiate on the narrative plane (with a little creativeness) and can be divided into four characters or stereotypes at least, there are no noticeable internal differences on the more properly emotional plane. Women are characterised by a specific universe of passions which show great differences when compared with the male world, but present little variations within it (hence, perhaps, the weak impact characterising female customization and individualisation). These passions belong more or less to all – the centre-left feminists and the centre-rights champions of the results, the victims and the eccentric.

In any programme, whatever host or interlocutor may be present, the female guests show a more sensitive humanity: they oppose the use of violence more resolutely; they are moved to tears in facing the horrors of tortures. They recall personal experiences characterised by a strong emotional impact: Bonino recalls what her mother used to say when she was a little girl... (*Zona rossa*, 14 of May), while we have already mentioned Mussolini and the image of children ending her speech during *Porta a porta*; Sbarbati commemorates “our guys” in Iraq (*Porta a porta*, 31 of May). They seem to be committed to introducing a more human aspect in politics, being aware of the fact that the world is made of flesh and blood *persons*. They convey sympathy more than passion: they can participate in social issues, they can go beyond their own boundaries, wishing several times a wider outlook, less self-centred (Bonino closes her speech in the programme *Porta a porta* of 3rd June saying “you’d better look at yourselves in a less introverted way”; Locatelli, (*Otto e mezzo*, 21 of May), points up how women’s problems regarding jobs, family and other issues like maternity do not belong to women only, but to men and women alike; Napolitano (*Excalibur*, 17 of May) invites to “look the other way”, stopping always being self-centred).

As well as being subjects of pity, women are also always subjects of sorrow; this is the second other passion characterising them all.<sup>42</sup> It cannot be stated that they feel grief or pain for something specific or personal but they all use persistently, with different degrees of intensification, words of sorrow. In fact, women many times start speaking expressing words of sorrow: “I’m sorry, I’m very sorry, I’m really sorry...” (as well as other recurring propositions, though less used, “my worry is that...”, “let me say that my worry is...”). These forms are used to express a difference of opinion (regarding the other interlocutors or the members of their own party who they do not agree with) to introduce a “troublesome” topic, to mitigate the supposed eccentricity of a personal interpretation, to denounce the others’ prejudices. Sometimes “I’m sorry” is a sad stock phrase. Anyway, its recurrence (and its being used mostly by women) is so striking that it cannot but convey a feeling of being not comfortable and confident when speaking, in turn-taking, and when entering the lists. Clearly, it is the signal of a long-lasting feeling of not being confident.

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<sup>42</sup> In this case, by “passion” I mean “sorrow” as semiotics define as passion any mood that is somehow culturalized and thus recognisable. From a semiotic point of view, shame, fear, envy, love, waiting, anxiety are “passions”, even though, from a psychological point of view, such moods correspond to different terms.

### 3.5. Conclusions

Female under-representation (from a quantitative point of view) in electoral debates is surely the most striking characteristic. More striking still, though, is the “rarefaction” female presence somehow takes on. Besides the exceptions by eccentric subjects such as Emma Bonino and Alessandra Mussolini, all the other cases present a tendency to depersonalization which goes against the dominant tendency in TV. Italian media (including the press) are daily shot through with forms of protagonism, customization and narrativization that exalt the protagonism of individuals and their personal stories. Female politicians, on the other hand, prove this trend wrong. They do not show a leading personality, do not exalt their personal stories, do not express distinctive personal passions, do not become peculiar models people can identify with. They mostly act as *representatives* of a political front (both right and left-wing) or of a certain culture (feminism). When speaking, they often say “we” so that they are part of a group – and when they do not (as in the cases I grouped under the stereotype of the “champion”) they use the rhetoric and strategies typical of the male leaders of their political group. In conforming to the male political style, they lose their personality and become more of a stereotype sacrificing their specificity.

It is hard to define a female modality of individualization and customization. It is not conveyed by the body (which in such shows is neglected both by the director – never lingering on female body figures – and by the women involved – they choose sobriety and “normality” by wearing dark, professional suits, or wear the light colours of everyday dresses), nor is it by enunciative methods (as they often say “we”), nor by thematization – mostly shared by men and women alike.

Female specificity can be defined only at modal and passion level. As a matter of fact, women, though spokeswomen and part of a group, define themselves within the individual. They are subjects of passions (will or will not) and knowledge, they are not “must” or “can” subjects. It is men, already part of society, of the public and political scene, acknowledged and with responsibilities, who have duties and power. They have a social mandate: they were elected. Women, on the other hand, still *aspiring* to be in politics – at least actual politics, i.e. being elected and having a role – have desires, competence, memories, i.e. they have an inner weight which can emerge from their private self and become practice. However, they have no mandate (even though some of them are European MPs and, therefore, were elected), or they do not

mention it when speaking. If *must* and *can*, male attributes, activate and allow actual practice, creating a relationship between the individual and the world and the public self, *will* and *can* are consumed in the private and only create “conditions-for”. Women, therefore, are still optative subjects, subjects of the will and of awareness, not of action.

This identity is reflected in the precautions they take and in their feeling uncomfortable when speaking. They use “I’m sorry” quite a lot; they seldom look straight at the camera; they often keep their eyes downcast. Female place in politics seems to be more inner than factual. Female contribution is made of awareness and compassion, it is not an *actual* contribution.

Female politicians participating in these debates seem to have only ethical duties. They made no contracts with the civil world; they do not have to fulfil requests; they have no mandates; it is as if they (still) wanted to be by the side of male politics – unless they choose excess and individualization, the sympathy of those who have no supporting parties any longer and create one in their image, name and likeness.