MATERIALS

Lorenza Perini, Margherita Verzola

The contended body: the construction of public discourses on women's body that makes violence possible. A study case in the Italian North East

Abstract

The present work historically framed the issue of citizenship of women's rights, such as continuing discrimination that continually reproduces itself through the way in which the female body is represented by the media. Stereotypes and prejudices that build the imagination of common sense with respect to the role of women in society reproduce a scenario of extreme depersonalization up to the dehumanization of their body, scenery that makes it possible to consider the violence of that body made object an act possible. Examines some recent cases of femicide long remained under the media spotlight.

Keywords: Citizenship, media, body, femicide, policies.

The problem of a multi level citizenship

About twenty years ago in a famous study entitled *The Sexual Contract*, Carol Pateman (1997), feminist and political scientist, highlighted that the French Revolution was the moment when the modern concept of the so-called "universal citizenship" was founded, but it was also the moment when the estrangement of women from this "universe" was sanctioned. The citizen as a "free and individual subject of the new era" was not to be considered representative of all human beings, since his freedom and uniqueness was based on what Pateman calls "a sexual contract," which effectively excluded those who were identified as "dependents"-primarily women, and certain specific categories of people of low social class. The exclusion of women from political citizenship is therefore strongly linked to an actual denial of individuality, since they were considered lacking the two vital qualities that, after the Revolution, defined the modern concept of the "individual:" the possession of one's own person and the control of one's own body.

In the nineteen-fifties, the redefinition of the concept of citizenship made by the English sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall in "Citizenship and Social Class" provided a quick and schematic view of the transformations of modern society by an increasing participation and integration of the lower classes. However, women's

citizenship was still far from being conceived: in this lexicon the concept of citizenship implied the sense of belonging to a political community. According to Marshall & Bottomore (1987), in the modern age this membership is inseparable from a comprehensive set of rights that can be grouped into three distinct categories: *civil rights,* including the basic conditions of human beings, i.e. the rights of freedom of the individual (personal freedom, freedom of speech, thought, conscience, right to have properties and sign contracts, right to seek justice before the law); then *political rights*, i.e. the right to participate in the exercise of political power (voting and being elected for example); finally *social rights*, a subset of rather indefinite tools ranging from the right to minimum economic subsistence to the right to effective access to corporate wealth in its various components: labor, health care, education and so on. It is therefore clear that the sequence identified by Marshall, not only has a different historical basis for women, but also sees a different timing and a lot of discrepancies between the two sexes. Indeed, as the political scientist Alisa Del Re highlights, if citizenship is a set of duties and rights, women seem not only to have a different chronology from men but also they always seem to have more duties than men- at least most of the duties of the reproductive sphere. This situation corresponds to a decreased intensity of citizenship's rights. Women are definitely "lower-level citizens" (Del Re, 1997).

This "lower level citizenship" is an issue that even the political journalist Rossana Rossanda questions: "Women have always entered the wars, they were holy martyrs, writers, scientists, they got through periods of power, they were queens and they were always working as a real leading force of every economy, they had large estates and they administered them wisely," says Rossanda. In the course of History women have always been all this, but in the political sphere, from the outset the structures of the institutions were stubbornly founded without women, limiting their horizons by confining them to the private sphere in the name of their primary maternal function. The places of sociality and of the making of rules have always determined and regulated the self-exclusion of women, so it is the law itself that enshrines them as "unequal" (Rossanda, 1987).

In the Western world men have been citizens since the eighteenth century, from the time of the Declaration of Human Rights, which followed the French Revolution (with adjustments in relation to political rights in our country until 1912, the year of universal male suffrage). Instead for women, the same story follows a very different path: when men became citizens, women were not yet considered and for a long time they remained without most political rights, like children, illiterates, criminals, the mentally ill and exiled. In order to explain this "scientific" and obstinate exclusion, one must ask who really benefits from this situation (and it is not a mere economic issue). It is convenient to have one sex subject to the other: at any time in history someone has been declared "lower" and for this reason exploitable. Slaves are useful, that's what History teaches us. Luckily, over the past sixty years, in all the European countries the path of women towards equality-though slow-has been undertaken throughout, so, even if infinitely few, they are now everywhere almost without preclusion and, at least on paper, they have a good availability of rights.

However, it remains implicit that, once they have achieved access to the "polis," what they have been compelled to do was (and in some cases still is) to learn how to

move and act in the new public space "as a man," given that the rules of the political playground are neither "made by" nor "made for" women. They are "male rules." The institutions responsible for the government of the society, for shaping the cities and for scheduling the daily life of citizens are not all ruled to permit decision making by both sexes, but rather by just one of them; everything is set on a division of the spaces that sees women in the private sector and men in the public one, and women are asked simply to adapt to manage an increasingly burdensome "double presence" without support, without sharing, without choices.

Asking why these rules didn't change in the past and are still not changing now, is an idle question. It seems normal to assume that a change should take place when the institutions receive –in their male chauvinist, archaic tissue- the "other" half of mankind. It sounds logical, but as we can see, sometimes the course of History is not logical. The situation we are facing now is that women in the "polis" are still few and even awkward, and when numbers are so low, you can be happy to have your rights "written on paper," but you still have no voice. Without the cooperation of men and without working together, loading the weight and the responsibilities of the building of our society on the shoulders of both sexes, as Simone de Beauvoir wrote, there won't be any sort of step forward.

From no other place have women been so tenaciously excluded as from the "polis," from the public space that governs the existence of a democratic society. In the globalized society of the twenty-first century it seems increasingly necessary not to lose sight of, or better yet, to make a point of, observing the local dimension since this is our very existence, our daily life in the cities we live in, made up of women and men in constant relations. This –the gender space of relationship– is the primary dimension of life and it must become the primary dimension of the polis, the space of decisions and the formulation of laws. Within this context, we must work to ensure that the discrimination that occurs on a sexual basis would be the first to be eliminated.

Something is still going wrong: a female body that "doesn't matter"

In the context of *political rights* a conflictual relationship between women and politics persists, beginning with the denial of the belief (which in the past was common –for different reasons– both among suffragists and anti-suffragists) that the granting of the vote would have created half –or more– of the parliaments formed by women. This has obviously not occurred anywhere in the known world. In the range of *civil rights*, the self-determination of the woman's body remains a key point, challenged over time by male visions of the world and society, and never truly and ultimately achieved. Why is it so difficult to consider women "human rights holders" as much as men?

Why has this ongoing and historically unjustified discrimination been perpetrated by one sex toward the other since the Stone Age until today without interruption?

The truth is that today we are faced with everyday concepts, statements by politicians and intellectuals, continually repeated by the media, that can be classified –to put it mildly– as misogynist, sometimes causing outrage in the listeners. And alongside

all these reasons, we can add some others, due to discriminatory practices and cultures, automatically put into action within organizations and political institutions.

Mechanisms of exclusion also pass through the simplifying and mystifying vehicle of linguistic stereotypes. As stated by the psychiatrist and sociologist Francesca Molfino, stereotypes are now required to solve the "mystery" of sexual difference, to make people able to think and justify the diversity which we could not account for on any logical basis. They also represent one of the most change resistant areas, especially in Italy, because, "compared to other European countries it seems to be affected by a peculiar imperviousness of the institutions to gender issues" (Molfino, 2006).

In the field of stereotypes, the structuralism oriented toward "language and power" (Foucault, 2001) helps to reveal how, on the basis of what we believe to be "natural," there is actually a solid social and cultural construction. Everything is given in the language; all human activities are operations in the language and even what seems to be as immutable as the biological difference between the sexes, is made up of discourses, meanings, interpretations. The language thus becomes a constructive value, holding the power to train, orient, decide and rule. It is an organizational element for society, not only on how to talk about a topic, but the language represents the same argument. It is what draws the boundaries that determine what "can be said" and what "is said:" "the Limits of Acceptable Speech," as defined by Judith Butler. In this perspective, the relationship between women and men may not be simplistically interpreted as: "men have power, women will stay behind." In a context of this complexity, we must analyze the meaning of (the discourse on) categories of "men" and "women," wondering about their construction, understanding how the power of language can create true images of them and how to organize their difference and their imbalance, presiding over their intelligibility.

In *Bodies That Matter* Judith Butler (1993) clearly emphasizes the importance of putting in place a discourse on the body of men which is necessarily different from the discourse on the body of women, thereby exceeding the guidance of Foucault and raising the issue of "differently sexed bodies that produce –necessarily– different languages." Therefore, the language is not a set of universally given rules, but there are as many speakers as languages, as many interpretations as the possible points of view of each single person.

In political action the question of language is certainly crucial. Ideas and world views take shape through language, as well as ideological differences that determine actions and laws, making language even more significant in a society that has given a lot of power to the media (Crespi, 2005; Ciofalo, 2007). Political discourse is no longer measured just by the contents. Rather, we take for granted a common interface that simplifies, summarizes, frames, refers to an imaginary, acquired knowledge through which we automatically build both our pre-formed opinions (useful for understanding the world in which we move without constantly asking why) as well as prejudices and *stereotypes:* sort of synthetic forms of unverified and simplistic coding (Mazzara, 1997). In this process, a specific kind of gender speech (seen as a relationship between – at least two– sexes) may be easily grasped in the words and in the images that are historically attributed to femininity or masculinity.

The main point is that none of the languages in the world can be considered completely neutral, not only because each speaker leaves traces of his own personal statement in the discourse, revealing his subjective experience, but also because the language –especially the Italian one– symbolizes, in its internal structure, the sexual difference, in an already hierarchical and oriented form. Therefore, the claim of the male sex to be universal, imposing itself as neutral, absorbing the feminine, has become, in all its forms and expressions –but above all in political language– totally unacceptable. In addition to sex discrimination, stereotypes sediment languages (in relation to other components such as belonging to a particular ethnic group, practicing certain religions and crafts), deeply affecting and transforming themselves in social and cultural representations, taken –sometimes at an unconscious level– as if they were *natural.*

In addition to this complex mechanism, the almost exclusive attention to the vicissitudes of the body and the everyday objects that are historically attributed to women produces knowledge and adaptations of language reflecting this sense. These adaptations, however, do not explain, do not fully speak, do not recognize women as well as men, and they do not submit to the entry into the public scene of the feminine body. Attention to the language's tools that represent and are represented by not only the standard grammars and vocabularies, but also by special languages by which women are described, their description changing over time, becomes, therefore, crucial to understand the tenacity of many –too many– common places that we still accept, suffer and help to create.

All discourses on "citizenship of rights" continue, in the twenty-first century, to be almost blind toward the biggest part of society. Language still considers women invisible, even when they are the main subject of political and social debate; it sees –and has always seen– neutral citizens even when it is clear that we are referring to sexually different persons. Numerically poor in decision-making politics, women do not affect the collective stereotype that governs the creation of a law, so that the stereotypes tend to conform to a "language of power" without going forward in a systematic point of view.

Inside and outside the institutions, the speeches on women's bodies are somehow still very male oriented, filled with an imaginary sometimes very far from real. It is still a taboo in most societies and –still responsible for profound social fractures. Discussing this particular matter in a 90% male Parliament is uncomfortable and when the rights related to the female's body are "reproductive rights" (abortion for example), the use of stereotyped images and the question of how to construct the language in order to approach and describe these rights becomes even more difficult and awkward. It is the historical problem of the male patriarchal culture in which –today as thirty or fifty years ago– our socialization takes place that binds women to the figure of "eternal mothers" in order to fix their identity in a culture imbued with sexist language and "male produced" reference models.

Now that we are aware that one of the hardest obstacles to overcome towards "equality of rights in the difference of sexes" are definitely the stereotypical social

construction on women's body, since it lies in the deep conscience and in the oldest layer of the culture of our society, a second concrete step must be taken, because rights must exist in substance, not only in theory or in formal laws and this second step consists in make people aware and responsible. Something that seems obvious but it is not.

Beyond laws, beyond codes: a matter of accountability

Fortunately, in recent decades, tenacious and evident forms of violence have been defeated, since their purpose was to legitimize the domination of men on "their" women –honor killings, shotgun weddings, condemnation of abortion and forced motherhood, all coming from a culture historically based on the concept of honor, always accompanied (and strengthened rather than weakened) by the Catholic religion. On the other hand, many subtle kinds of violence are still continuing to remain hidden in our culture, living "under carpet," free to undermine our way and emerge at some particular times of crisis and then disappear again. As Anna Rossi Doria points out, there isn't a more creeping, ineradicable and durable form of violence than the reduction to silence of women's bodies (Doria, 2007) and no act of violence is more subtle and stubborn than being kept in ignorance about the consequences of sexuality, than the exposure of the female body to a linguistic and media system capable of suppressing all its human characteristics. Doing so is quite easy: no outward acts are needed; we can remain perfectly within the perimeter of the law and yet build all sorts of deadly devices in order to reduce the female body to a desired, dominated and then possessed object. It's a sort of bias, a distorted frame, in which the media system "asks" men to own "things" to show their strength, to demonstrate power deriving only from "having," while women are told that they are worthy only because of their bodies, a body that no longer needs to be "human," but is just an object, a tradable, buyable object. In a frame like that, the silence of women is essential and necessary, to the point that, as Lea Melandri stated, they are not even given the possibility to identify themselves as "victims," because "sometimes women are the first to assume the prerogatives that men recognize in them, trying to turn the minority status in which they've been historically rooted to their advantage" (Melandri, 2011).

Nowadays, a silent body exhibited almost everywhere by the media system, is not the result of women's emancipation of the seventies, but a perverse form of it, in which "the feminine" is set free as a body without a voice, a body that believes to be living modernity while instead it finds itself in the old world of men.

A woman's body "torn apart" and without a face is stuck on almost every billboards, to advertise a brand of frozen foods –thighs and breasts– or to sell a pair of jeans only legs and buttocks are needed– or even her swollen eyes to advertise beauty products, effectively covering any "imperfection:" cut in pieces. But maybe this is not enough to understand that not only are we not facing a form of liberation but rather a new problem of slavery ("the bright slave girls" mentioned by Virginia Woolf is in front of us. What's more, the environment in which we produce these representations is not healthy. Something is seriously undermining the foundations of the mutual recognition of dignity between sexes that was the very legacy of the struggles of thirty years ago (Giomi, 2010). Instead, what happens is that these situations are not categorized as

MATERIALS

demeaning the dignity of women any more. On their own, since they are not recognized as violent as they are, these images are catalogued immediately as something possible, an acceptable behavior, and a legitimate way of acting. In a word: plausible representations of ourselves.

And, even though this applies to a living body, the dead body of a raped woman suffers no better fate. What caused her death is something with no proper name, generally defined as a "a degenerated love-affair," or at the least "manslaughter" and thus not premeditated, so implicitly someone can argue that the woman may have taken an active part in her own death. But words like passion, love, sentiment in this case are very misleading terms. Even though a newspaper can choose to condemn the murderous violence of a man against a woman as such, calling it with its real name – "femicide," it is quite probable that in the next page, the same newspaper would not hesitate to give space to women's bodies treated as objects in an advertisement, forgetting that violence is primarily a phenomenon of cultural construction, in which the media themselves contribute for the most part with their messages. Then the media try to look for the reasons behind a fact of violence, in most cases the strategy is to trace the origin of the problem to the community. At first glance the crime always takes place "somewhere in the urban space," in a sort of nowhere populated by foreign and strange figures, where everything suddenly happens in the dark, perpetrated by unknown hands; a space that defines the "violent city" and that determines –conversely– the house, the private space, the closer family circle, as the only safe places for a woman.

The measures identified as suitable to combat degradation in the public space show that violence leads to exasperation and control, to the marginalization of the foreign and the self-marginalization of the women themselves as potential victims. But it has been clear for a long time that the violence issue is neither an alien nor a weirdo from another planet. Violence is something that comes out of the tightest human relationships we have, nested and hatched very often in the family itself, within the "safe" walls of our homes (Istat, 2007). The construction of narratives of this type, in which violence always comes from the outside, is not just a simple (and useful) invention of the media. It is the result of the fact that the communication system is not intended to inform the public, rather it assumes the role of Public Opinion acting as the mouthpiece of the "power," telling us what to think, telling us that the monster is outside, outside of our communities, hiding the fact that, if violence against women is now a sort of daily ritual this is simply the consequence of the same measures that condemn the public space as "the space of violence," that burns social relations and tries to keep women at home for fear of the alien enemy.

From violence to death: a matter of numbers

According to the first survey on a national scale dedicated to violence against women in Italy (Istat, 2007), the true extent of the phenomenon has been estimated in these terms: a third of women between 16 and 70 years of age are involved; 6,743,000 women throughout life have suffered at least one form of violence (physical or sexual); 7 million have also suffered psychological violence perpetrated by their partners and

about half of them are now still suffering (or very often suffer) from this kind of oppression. This means that 1 in 5 women who has a partner undergoes a form of psychological violence (control, isolation, devaluation and economic violence). But what is most striking is –as we have already mentioned– the silence of women. Research has brought to light a vast submerged land, where more than 90% of the cases of violence are not reported at all. Women can experience violence from a variety of sources: partners, acquaintances, friends, colleagues (and also strangers, of course). Dividing the sources in the macro categories of partners and non-partners, it is important to emphasize that in most cases the perpetrator is well-known to the victim; he is a man with whom she has - or had- some form of relationship, both in the case of physical abuse and in cases of more serious forms of sexual violence. Rape and attempted rape are primarily committed by acquaintances, friends, colleagues and relatives, and occur mainly at the victim's or at the perpetrator's home. In 69% of cases the perpetrators are the partners, while only a small proportion, 6%, can be attributed to strangers. Violence inflicted by partners thus appears as the most serious, not only for the type of conduct engaged in, but because the violent action is often multiple and repeated: about half of the 2,938,000 women subjected to violence by their partners have suffered it several times. The survey confirms what women's movements have always reported: violence is not an exceptional event, owing to individual forms of deviance or disease, nor can it be circumscribed to situations of marginalization and social disadvantage. The high number of women who suffer a form of violence is the sign that, on the contrary, is has become a phenomenon of ordinary lives and normal relationships.

In Italy, between 2005 and 2011, 767 women were killed (Ioriatti & Crociati, 2012); more than 100 women were killed each year, thus roughly one woman every two or three days. Although it is impossible to determine whether the phenomenon is decreasing or increasing (as it depends a lot on the role played by the media), it is evident that the trend of femicide is at least constant and this is a sign that it is not an exceptional and sporadic event, but a structural problem, deeply rooted in our society. In 2011, 68% of women killed were killed by men with whom they were having or used to have a romantic relationship. In most of the cases a reason could be found in separation: it was the will of the woman to put an end to the relationship and the inability of her partner to accept the decision. Femicides are mainly concentrated in the north of the country, due to the fact that women in this area are almost fully employed, and this allows them to exercise autonomy and independence, adhering less to the traditional female role (Giari, Karadole, Pasinetti & Verucci, 2009). It's quite impossible to trace the antecedents of violence of a specific case through the media's reconstruction of a fact, however, national and international studies have shown that in most cases of women being killed by their partners they had been raped previously (Adolfi et al., 2011). That's why domestic violence can be considered an important risk factor that can have lethal consequences for women.

Newspaper coverage: an overrepresentation of murders and an underestimation of violence

But how is violence against women represented by the media? And what is the relationship between the reality of the problem and its representation? Today the media are our main source of knowledge of social reality; our experience of the real world is increasingly mediated by means of mass communication that inform us about issues and problems of the society we live in. So it is important to investigate whether they help bring about a deeper knowledge and increase public awareness on this issue or, on the contrary, if they contribute to reproduce the myths and stereotypes that impede a full understanding.

Many research studies on media treatment of violence against women have shown how the mass media often provide a misleading and distorted view of the phenomenon. The frames and the language used in reporting the news do not return a real image of the problem –its dimensions, causes and implications. Often episodes of domestic violence and killings of women by their partners are represented as punctual and occasional events, concerning only the parties involved, rather than considering them as part of a larger social problem.

One must distinguish between an "episodic frame" –a frame that focuses on violence by considering each case an isolated incident, finding explanations for it in the perpetrator's own individual problems– and a "thematic frame" –a frame that focuses on the broader social context in which the case is inserted (Carlyle, Kellie, Slater, Michael & Chakroff, 2008). Research shows that the former frame is the predominant one (McManus & Dorfman, 2003). In most cases the social origins of violence and the power imbalances in gender relationships, as well as social and cultural factors that contribute to these imbalances, are completely ignored, and violence appears to be only an individual matter. Berns highlights that a frame-type based only on individual responsibilities inevitably suggests solutions on an individual basis, particularly that the female victim must take responsibility for putting an end to the violent situation she is in. The social and collective responsibilities are not even called into question. The frame-type chosen is thus decisive for the effects on public opinion. As argued by Taylor and Sorenson, "News story frames influence how people think about issues and how they assign responsibility for causes and solutions. Responsibility for solving problems is assigned more often to government or society when an incident is discussed in its broader social context than when it is described as an isolated event" (Taylor & Sorenson, 2002).

Another aspect of media coverage of domestic violence is the sensational nature, as it is focused mainly on its extreme forms, i.e. on those cases ending with the killing of the victim. The reason why murders receive more attention from the media than "simple" violence cases is because of their particular "newsworthiness." Compared with the treatment of other forms of violence, the tendency to prefer the most sensational cases is greater when the scenario refers to "domestic violence." (McManus & Dorfman, 2003). This overrepresentation by the media of women's murders contributes to distort the vision of domestic violence, not only because it is represented as more

lethal than it really is, but also because it tends to focus only on one aspect of the problem instead of paying attention to the less visible –but much more widespread– forms of violence occurring in the home. In this way, relevance is given only to physical violence, underestimating psychological and economic forms that, in addition to physical signs, produce severe consequences for the mental and physical health of women victims, and that are considered important risk factors for physical violence itself. However, most cases of femicide are not contextualized in their broader scenario of domestic violence; the use of the "episodic frame" prevails, and such events are discussed as isolated and unrelated incidents, thereby failing to grasp the continuity and common aspects that bind them. Murder being the ultimate consequence of previous domestic violence fails to emphasize that it is the last "event" of a larger problem and a widespread phenomenon.

As demonstrated by Bullock and Cubert, these episodes are rarely referred to in terms that specifically mention the word "domestic violence" (Bullock & Cubert, 2002), making it comparable to other types of crimes, such as killings or generic conflicts in the couple, not allowing one to fully grasp the specificity of the problem. Indubitably the use of language is very important: a key element produced by feminist analysis on male violence is to label violence through the introduction of gender terminology capable of unequivocally bringing out the actors and their responsibilities. Not labeling these episodes as "gender violence," or using gender-neutral terms, highly conceals the comprehension of the real entity of the problem. Furthermore, there isn't any reference in the media narratives to the violent situation in which a woman was in before being killed (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Adolfi et al., 2011), but femicides are almost never unpredictable events, rather they are the outcome of a crescendo of violence that persists over time, not reported to anyone or not well investigated. So when we hear the words "excessive jealousy" or "fit of madness," which are terms emphasized in the Italian press, we may have the impression of a reduction in the size of the entire issue: the language is used to reproduce the stereotype of violence against women as an illness, a particular mental disease of the perpetrator.

Failing to talk clearly about "domestic violence" can have important consequences for the perception of risk by the woman who suffers the violence, who may underestimate the potential danger of the situation she is living. While there is evident difficulty in tracing the whole story of violence against women due to the fact that they rarely talk about their conditions, on the other hand, as Taylor suggests, it is possible to rely on the fact that, in most cases, a woman's murder is associated with a previous situation of domestic violence (Taylor, 2009).

Immigrants as scapegoats: the tragic story of Sanaa

In the Italian context, this gap between reality and media treatment of violence against women has an additional element that distinguishes the media representation of violence. In recent years, media attention has focused on violence occurring in public spaces, producing an over-representation of rape, with particular emphasis on those cases in which an immigrant is held responsible. The insistence on the fact that we have to expect violence against women as coming from "somewhere outside," has produced a real "ethnicization" of rape and has given rise to a series of alarmist waves, associated

with phenomena of moral panic, that have influenced the perception of safety of women in public spaces in our country. This representation of facts has allowed for political manipulation which has produced a myriad of ordinances and regulations related to public safety, but with the real target of hitting immigrants, without giving any solution to the problem of violence against women. The overrepresentation of rape committed by immigrants not only reduces the problem of violence to one of the possible manifestations of men's behavior, but it is totally at odds with the findings of the 2007 Istat survey, which showed that the probability of undergoing a rape is the higher the closer the relationship is between the author and the victim. When an Italian man inflicts violence, the news about the rape or the murder is less visible than when the perpetrator is an immigrant. In the latter case the news appears on the front page, remaining there for several days, giving rise to all sorts of comments and reactions. As Giomi demonstrated in a recent study on national news, there is a profound disparity between the number of femicides committed by foreigners and the number of news items that these events produce (Giomi, 2010).

The media in this way help to reproduce a series of stereotypes that have always surrounded the issue of violence against women. By placing the problem in the dimension of alienation conveys the idea that only the "others" would pose a threat to women, and that sexual violence and women's safety in public space are problems linked to immigration.

In our research we analyzed the way in which both the press and the politicians commented on a case of femicide that occurred in September 2009, in a small town of a North East Italian province, an area where the immigrant population is very consistent. Sanaa, a young woman of Moroccan origin, who had been living in Italy for 6 years, was killed by her own father who did not accept his daughter's relationship with an Italian youth, with whom she had gone to live without her parents' knowledge. In particular, we analyzed the fact as it was represented by one of the major national newspapers, «la Repubblica», and by «il Gazzettino» a local newspaper from the area where the crime occurred.

The fact obviously received a great deal of media attention, occupying the front pages of all the newspapers for several days. The vital importance that was attributed to the episode was evident by the number of items (services, comments, news stories) published and the number of days that the news about the episode remained in the newspapers: «il Gazzettino» between 16 and 22 September, released 20 articles; «la Repubblica» between 16 and 21 September, released 11. But the focus was not only limited to the days after the crime: a pathological attention was ready to be reactivated as soon as anything happened involving Sanaa's family. One of the main factors keeping alive the readers' memory was the father's trial which took place one year after the murder. In 2010, «la Repubblica» published 3 other items, for a total of 14 articles; «il Gazzettino» 5 more, for a total of 25 articles. Greater attention was paid by the latter probably due to the territorial roots of the local newspaper. This was probably also the basis for the difference in placement of the article in the two papers: in «il Gazzettino» the story almost always ran on the front page with a big headline and followed on the

first inside pages; much less for «la Repubblica» where instead of appearing on the front page, the news could only be found in the inner pages with a medium or small headline. This location changed slightly on September 18, when a story appeared reporting an attack against Italian paratroopers of the "Folgore" military unit in Kabul that killed six soldiers. The event inevitably overshadowed the news about the murder of Sanaa, which disappeared from the front page of national commentary. It still appeared in «il Gazzettino» but moved to the last pages of the newspaper.

What the concomitance of these tragic facts produced was the rise of comments in which the girl's death was associated with the deaths of the Italian soldiers. From the beginning of Sanaa's case both the national and the local newspapers reminded their readers of other episodes in which young girls of foreign origin had been killed by their families, thus establishing a continuity between the events and placing Sanaa's killing in a broader context, suggesting the existence of a problem of relationships with "the foreigners." Some news reports also investigated in depth the history of Sanaa and her family, providing many elements of the context in which the crime took place, highlighting how the father was a violent man and how difficult the domestic situation for Sanaa and her female relatives (mother and sisters) was. The articles made explicit that there was a precise social and cultural origin of that violence, that there was a clear conflict of gender and even a generational conflict, i.e. the father's control over his daughter and his opposition to her self-determination. The headlines immediately defined this relationship as the act of the father and the expression of the will of the girl, so Sanaa became "the woman killed because she was in love with an Italian man."

The issue of male domination was thus explicitly or implicitly evoked by both newspapers. Terms such as "patriarchy," "father," "master," "patriarchal violence" appeared in the national newspaper thanks to the intervention of experts who contextualize the event within the gender and generational conflicts exacerbated by the problems of migration. The local newspaper, on the other hand, although showing these elements as a main frame, effected a modification, adding to the story a frame which was different from that of violence against women, thereby producing a sort of cultural bias. By showing a lot of data about the failure of mixed marriages between Muslims and Italians, «il Gazzettino» suggested that, behind everything, there was a problem of integration. The same point of view was clear in an interview with an expert, a Muslim writer, alluding to "the problem of violence" in Islamic culture, and reducing the problem of male violence to violence tout court of an entire culture. These frames were also recurrent in the statements of many politicians, representatives of the center-right government, as well as in the words of representatives of the local institutions belonging to the Northern League party that in the North East has its main reservoir of electoral support, characterized by a strong form of racism. The local newspaper, unlike the national issue, left plenty of room for these actors to speak, giving voice to all the instrumental readings that interpreted what happened.

There were three main frames within which the politicians' speeches were usually developed: the first was "integration," the second was "clash of civilizations" and the third "freedom for women." As was natural to expect, many politicians used the story as proof of the impossibility of integration of Muslim immigrants in our country and to reaffirm unbridgeable differences between the two cultures. The dominant frame was

the "clash of civilizations," in which words like "fundamentalist" or "war of religion" were recurrent, clearly evoking the idea of a threatening presence in our society. After the case of Sanaa's murder, the Minister for Equal Opportunities declared explicitly that "the episode is the result of an absurd war of religion carried right into our homes."[1].

The bombing in Kabul that killed six Italian soldiers lent itself to further arguments in favor of the "clash of civilizations" and the story of Sanaa was used to legitimize the presence of Italian troops in Afghanistan. A journalist of national repute, merged together the killing of the girl and the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London of 2004 and 2005. The mission that killed the Italian soldiers acquired a meaning for this journalist because the soldiers were engaged in a war to reduce the number of "slaughtered girls like Sanaa" and the terrorist attacks in our country. This association between Sanaa and the terrorist attacks around Europe also appeared in another column, then it gradually produced a semantic change such that an episode of extreme violence against women seemed to be linked to religious terrorism, and the presence of a dangerous enemy within was linked to phenomena that had nothing to do with gender violence.

The third frame –"women's freedom"– was evoked to discuss the status of women in Islam through the Western stereotyped imagination that considers Muslim women as the symbol of female subordination (Bruno, 2008). Violations of women's rights were denounced, as well as the normality of male violence within the Muslim culture that, quoting a politician, "is stuck to the times of the caravans and desert." The normality of violence against women is admitted within a different culture, linking it to forms of cultural backwardness, as if they were only "the others," "the different ones" who commit brutal acts against women. But politicians did not limit themselves to statements; some of them moved directly to action, such as the leader of the "Movement for Italy," who "in order to honor the death of Sanaa" immediately launched a demonstration against the burqa worn in those places where few days later the end of the Ramadan would have been celebrated. The provoking demonstration ended with some moments of tension in which Muslim women were greeted with boos and shouts from the protesters who also shouted "take away the veil." The most significant action symbolically shown at the trial of Sanaa's father was that three public institutions served as plaintiff, together with the Minister for Equal Opportunities in person, a public figure who, more than any other, has a crucial role in combating gender violence. The strong presence of institutions inevitably affected the progress of the trial, which ended with a life sentence for the man. A very strong verdict, not only because the man asked for a summary judgment (which usually allows for a reduction of one third of the sentence), but mainly because the maximum penalty is rarely inflicted for this kind of offense.

The general mobilization of politicians in defense of Sanaa and the rights of women was actually quite instrumental, aiming to pursue a stigmatizing discourse about immigrants and throwing attacks against Muslims. When these crimes are committed by

---

[1] «il Gazzettino», September 17, 2009.

Italian subjects we do not see such strong protests and denunciations of women's freedom. It's as if there were some cases of violence to which we must show our indignation and other cases that can pass in silence. The body of the murdered girl was used to raise and to further reinforce the symbolic boundaries against "the others." Nothing was said nor done to address violence and to prevent this from happening again. Although male violence is now considered unacceptable, and condemned by the whole society, in public arenas, misleading narratives by media and in political discourses continue to circulate. This shows great irresponsibility and the inability to adequately face the problem, which if dealt with properly would promote greater awareness and stimulate reflection on the conditions that allow the recurrence of violence within our culture and our society.

The distance between men and women. a lack of understanding as a political and social problem

The design of a place (the "city of stone") has a lot to do with the "social capital" that we carry as citizens, in terms of relationships and public participation (Bourdieu, 1980) and with the "care" we put into making up the "living city," which coincides with the "cities of difference," a dynamic category that on a daily basis puts citizens into relations, and through which the city learns and evolves (Crosta, 2010). But if the message is "keep out the others and only take care of your own garden," there is no way out: the problem remains unseen and "femicide" simply continues. As stated by Sweet and Ortiz Escalante (Sweet & Oritz, 2010). "The issue of women's safety in public spaces should be incorporated into the design of the cities and their parks, in recreation planning, in public transport systems, housing and health care facilities as well as in urban arrays." This means that there's no need for protective walls if what you shut out becomes a living hell, just as street lamps are not enough to secure the road, nor is the existence of an antiviolence center or an emergency phone number enough to make a good policy against violence.

The problem is that women's behavior in contemporary cities and public places is intolerable for most men. Women are rarely their colleagues, rarely at the head of public services or politicians as men are; we don't see them next to men in managing big companies. Women are more frequently bodies on billboards, legs and breasts in TV shows and advertisements; in most of the cases they are a sort of "living stereotypes" with whom it is hard to imagine having a relationship of equality. For the most part, in the men's world profound relational impairments are evident. The hand that strikes is a male hand. But people are still hesitant to assume this or simply to become aware of it. A lack of understanding is now making the real difference between men and women.

The policies that counteract gender violence in an urban space, even though initially "designed for women," work only when the whole community –men and women living in that place– can benefit from their effects. They work if the practices they are made from are able to create a network of responsibilities among people; rather than an excluding procedure, they should weave a net between public institutions and the private lives of individual citizens. It's a job of "putting things in common," of sharing an asset that generates a different narrative of men and women in the public space of the city.

MATERIALS

References

Adami, Cristina (2000). *Libertà femminile e violenza sulle donne: strumenti di lavoro per interventi con orientamenti di genere*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Adolfi, Laura, Giusti, Sara, Breveglieri, Agnese, Ottaviani, Elis, Karadole, Cristina, Venneri, Virginia & Verucci, Cinzia (2011). *Il costo di essere donna. Indagine sul femminicidio in Italia. I dati del 2010*. Bologna: Casa delle donne per non subire violenza.
(http://www.casadonne.it/cms/images/pdf/pubblicazioni/materiali/femminicidio_2010.pdf)

Bourdieu, Pierre (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1980). *Le sens pratique*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.

Bruno, Marco (2008). *L'Islam immaginato. Rappresentazioni e stereotipi nei media italiani*. Milano: Guerini Scientifica.

Bullock, Cathy Ferrand and Jason, Cubert (2002). "Coverage of Domestic Violence Fatalities by Newspapers in Washington State." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17, no. 5: 475-499.

Bullock, Cathy Ferrand (2007). Framing Domestic Violence Fatalities: Coverage by Utah Newspapers. *Women's Studies in Communication, 30* (1), 34-63.

Butler, Judith (1993). *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge.

Carlyle, Kellie E., Slater, Michael, D. & Chakroff, L. Jennifer (2008). Newspaper Coverage of Intimate Partner Violence: Skewing Representations of Risk. *Journal of Communication 58* (1), 168-186.

Ciofalo, Giovanni (2007). *Comunicazione e vita quotidiana: percorsi teorici e di ricerca*. Milano: Carocci.

Crespi, Franco (2005). *Sociologia del linguaggio*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Crosta, Pier Luigi (2010). *Pratiche. Il territorio "è l'uso che se ne fa."* Milano: Franco Angeli.

Del Re, Alisa (1997). Per una ridefinizione del concetto di cittadinanza. In: Franca Bimbi and Alisa Del Re (Eds.), *Genere e democrazia la cittadinanza delle donne a cinquant'anni dal voto* (pp.63-75). Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier.

Doria, Anna Rossi (2007). *Dare forma al silenzio: scritti di storia politica delle donne*. Roma: Viella.

Foucault, Michel (2001). *La volontà di sapere. Storia della sessualità.* Milano: Feltrinelli.

Giari S., Karadole Cristina, Pasinetti C. & Verucci Cinzia (2009). *Femmicidi nel 2009: un'indagine nella stampa italiana.* (http://www.casadonne.it)

Giomi, Elisa (2010). Neppure con un fiore? La violenza sulle donne nei media italiani. *Il Mulino, 452* (6), 1001-1009.

Ioriatti, Chiara & Crociati, Petra (2012). *Uomini che uccidono le donne. Indagine sul femmicidio in Italia. I dati del 2011*. Bologna: Casa delle donne per non subire violenza.

(http://www.casadonne.it/cms/images/pdf/pubblicazioni/materiali/uomini_che_uccidono_le_donne2012.pdf)

Istat (2007). *La violenza e i maltrattamenti contro le donne dentro e fuori la famiglia.*
(http://www.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/non_calendario/20070221_00/testointegrale.pdf)

Luraghi Silvia & Olita Anna (2006). *Linguaggio e genere: grammatica e usi*. Milano: Carocci.

Maneri, Marcello (2001). Il panico morale come dispositivo di trasformazione dell'insicurezza. *Rassegna italiana di sociologia,* 1, 5-40.

Marshall, Trevor & Bottomore, Tom (1987). *Citizenship and Social Class*. London-Concord, MA: Pluto Press.

Mazzara, M. Bruno (1997). *Stereotipi e pregiudizi*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

McManus, John & Dorfman, Lori (2003). Distracted by Drama: How California Newspapers Portray Intimate Partner Violence. *Berkeley Media Studies Group,* 13.

Melandri, Lea (2011). *Amore e violenza. Il fattore molesto della civiltà*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

Molfino, Francesca (2006). *Donne, politica e stereotipi: perché l'ovvio non cambia?* Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai.

Pateman, Carole (1997). *Il contratto sessuale*. Milano: Editori Riuniti.

Pitch, Tamar & Ventimiglia, Carmine (2001). *Che genere di sicurezza: donne e uomini in città*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

Rossanda, Rossana (1987). *Anche per me: donna, persona, memoria dal 1973 al 1986*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Sparti, Davide (2000). *Il riconoscimento dal volto umano*. In Donatella Della Porta, Monica Greco & Árpád Szakolczai (Eds.), *Identità, riconoscimento, scambio.* Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Sweet, Elizabeth L. & Ortiz, E. Sara (2010). Planning Responds to Gender Violence: Evidence from Spain, Mexico and the United States. *Urban Studies, 47* (10), pp.2129-2147.

Taylor, Catherine & Sorenson, Susan B. (2002). The Nature of Newspaper Coverage of Homicide. *Injury Prevention, 8* (2), 121-127.

Taylor, Rae (2009). Slain and Slandered A Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Femicide in Crime News. *Homicide Studies, 13* (1), 21-49.

Lorenza Perini is Research Fellow at the Department of Political and Juridical Sciences and International Studies at the University of Padua. her interests cover women's citizenship and gender policies' issues at European and national level from an historical point of view.

Miriam Verzola, Sociologist, she has been collaborating with the Gender Study Research Center of the University of Padua for years on gender violence issues and their representation through the media system.

MATERIALS