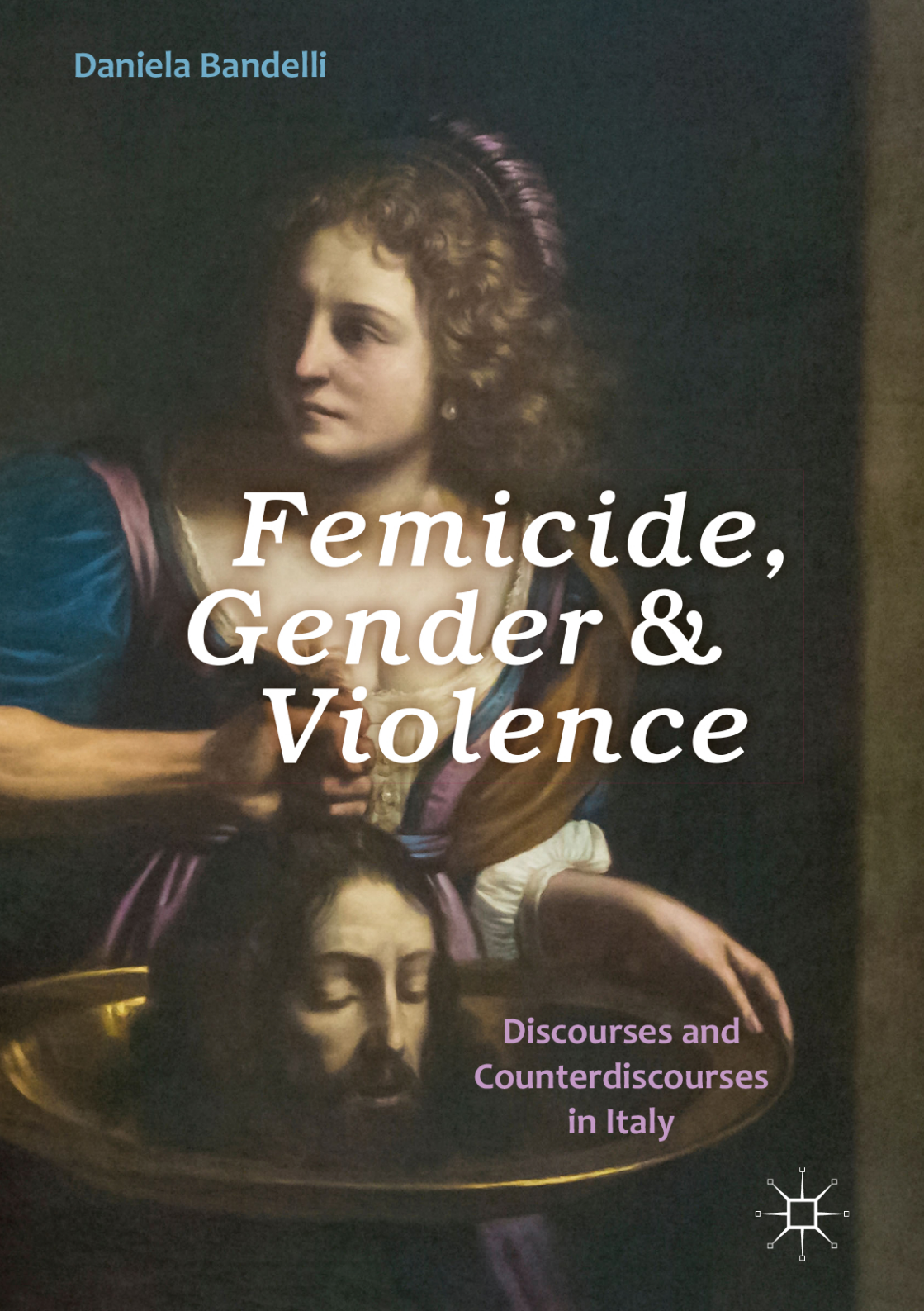
Daniela Bandelli



Femicide, Gender & Violence

Discourses and Counterdiscourses in Italy

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Daniela Bandelli

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Preface

This book questions the gender reading of violence by looking at how this paradigm has normalised in Italy since a new feminist term 'femminicidio' (feminicide) entered the mainstream media and the 2012 national electoral campaign, and by shedding light on discourses of contestation spoken by family activists, men's rights and divorced fathers groups. Two counter-discourses emerge. The first is what I call an 'ideology narrative' which pivots around the claim that discourses built around the conceptual category of 'gender' contribute to normalising certain simplistic representations of relationships between men and women. The second is a 'female violence discourse', a discourse that sheds light on under-represented aggressor-victim relations and modifies dominant representations of femininity and masculinity. Integrating these counter-discourses into public debates can help to reappropriate the complexity and biological dimensions of (violent) relationships between men and women, dimensions that have been overshadowed by gender/feminist discoursed and address neglected social issues that contribute to violence beyond gender.

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List of Abbreviations

BZgA	Federal Centre for Health Education
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CDS	Critical Discourse Studies
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women
CEI	Italian Episcopal Conference
CL	Comunione e Liberazione
DV	Domestic Violence
FNSI	National Federation of the Italian Press
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender
ISTAT	Italian National Institute of Statistics
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MFPG	Movimento Femminile per la Parità Genitoriale
OCSE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PD	Partito Democratico
SeL	Sinistra e Libertà
UNAR	National Office for Racial Anti-discriminations
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Violence Against Women (VAW) is a worldwide social problem, one that continues to be addressed by public institutions, international organisations, intellectuals, social movements, and the media. VAW is an established discourse internationally, a discourse originally circulated by feminist voices who can be credited with bringing the private suffering of millions of women to the public arena, politicising domestic and sexual violence in crucial ways. The feminist reading of VAW as a social problem builds upon an established critique of power in patriarchal society. Conceptually, VAW in public discourse is equated to gender-based violence (GBV), a category that has expanded over time and now encompasses multiple forms of abuse and injustice affecting individuals, predominantly women and sexual minorities. However, as soon as these acts are labelled as GBV, they are implicitly understood as abuses perpetrated because and against the 'gender' category that the victim belongs to.

This book is an attempt to question precisely this framework along two lines of critique: as a conceptual category that pretends to explain male VAW through a lens limited to power and gender, and as an hegemonic discourse that dominates media and politically correct representation of domestic violence (DV) and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Is all violence gendered? Heretic scholars in disparate disciplines have posed this crucial question in one way or another over time. However, this kind of critique is rare in studies of discourse and media representation and too often this intellectual position is erroneously received as an attack on

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feminism itself, as an attempt to restore the social legitimisation of female submission. This is in no way the intention of my book. Rather, I hope to demonstrate to readers that questioning the gender framework around VAW is particularly urgent precisely because, like any discourses that become institutionalised within hierarchies of power, could conceal fallacies and replicate social injustices if restricted from the purview of social critique and scholarly debate.

Although the focus of my work is on Italy, the scope of the critique of a gender paradigm in regards to violence is global. This is certainly not to say that the arguments advanced in these pages can be abruptly applied in any country. Such a claim would be pretentious, particularly if made by a scholar like myself who is working within a critical paradigm, whose fundamental analysis is of one of specificity and complexity of context. On the contrary, arguments need to be recontextualised in light of the particular ways cultures, religions, and sexual norms shape gender relationships, and in light of different degrees of gender mainstreaming and women's status. Also, one needs to acknowledge that political ideologies intersect with feminist discourses with different levels of hypocrisy and authenticity in different political contexts and at different moments in time; that gender-based discourses of emancipation and civil rights receive different emphasis in countries where the majority of the population have their basic needs addressed and in countries where daily survival is not taken for granted yet; that individualism and hedonism, chauvinism and victimism, progressivism and conservatorisms are all floating discourses or ideologies that vary widely across cultural contexts – these differences cannot be disregarded within a broader critique of gender.

I began this study in 2012 when a new term 'femminicidio', which we can just for the moment translate in English as femicide or feminicide,[1] was just introduced in the Italian media by feminist groups and gained momentum as a pressing social problem, exposed by the media as a major narrative of male insecurity (Osservatorio sulla Sicurezza 2013). Politicians and journalists described the phenomenon with terms such as women *slaughter, massacre, carnage*, and *epidemic*. Feminist groups used this term to draw public attention to VAW and partner homicides, and reframe it in feminist lexicon, as sexist crimes to be prevented through a cultural change, an institutional advancement of women's status in Italian society, and with judiciary reforms. Institutions were asked to take the problem of VAW and femicide seriously, as a priority. Countless

mobilisations were organised by activists and the cause found the alliance of journalists and political representatives.

Since 2012, this new term has been amplified by the media, quickly reaching political spaces and rapidly spreading as a new buzzword. It has successfully replaced problematic former descriptions of VAW such as 'crime of passion' which has been deemed less politically correct or 'homicide' which is deemed too clinical. Today, even a taxi driver can tell you exactly what 'femminicidio' is. The narrative of an alleged emergency of sexist violence and murders in Italy did not remain confined to the realm of media representations: it filtered into the political agendas of parties and politicians who pledged to eradicate the problem with new laws and policy proposals, it crossed institutional precincts as a topic of legislative reform.

The political context at the time was certainly conducive to the diffusion of this sensationalistic narrative. This was an opportunity in gender politics to mobilise the electorate and catalyse consensus, especially in view of the approaching national elections, which marked the first widespread redefinition of power assets after more than a decade of Silvio Berlusconi's leadership. Moreover, a particular feminist discourse revolved around sexism in politics and media representation of women's bodies had recently reignited and played a role in eroding the national and international consensus over Berlusconi (who resigned in November 2011). Certainly this viable feminist discourse around political sexism was influential to the development of a particular narrative around male violence, one pivoted around the neologism 'femminicidio' introduced into the public debate by fervent feminist activists.

'Femminicidio', from a Media Studies perspective, can be read as a feminist crusade that erupted into a moral panic. That is to say, the overexposure of a phenomenon that is typically constructed as a threat to social values with the introduction of a new label to indicate a pre-existing crime, with the establishment of fixed categories of victims and folk devils, and with the result that a silent consensus over social control policies is generated and that society's self-perception is reconfigured (Cohen 2011; Critcher 2003; Lumby and Funnell 2011; Watney 1989). Although 'femminicidio' is certainly a very particular case of moral crusade/panic, specifically focusing on intimate murders and tightly intertwined with the electoral agenda in Italy, it would be partial to read it as an isolated case. In fact, feminist crusades directed at gendering the debate on violence and expanding the category of VAW/GBV

to different forms of practices involving women's body (i.e. prostitution and pornography) are widely documented in international literature. Also, moral panics of VAW involving serial murders, trafficking, acid attacks, sexual harassment, and stalking are repeatedly at the centre of media hypes year after year.

When the crusade activates the interests of different stakeholders it has a higher possibility to develop into a panic, with the parallel participation of different actors, namely the media, civil society, and the State. Moral panics, or more simply media hypes, are important subjects of study, as they are crucial moments of the sedimentation and transformation of discourses which 'delimit the field of knowledge . . . lay down the rules for the ways in which the problem can be talked about' (Critcher 2003, p. 168). These phases of panic are interesting in so far as different claim-makers, social movements, and politicians concur in a battle over signification for changing and repositioning categories of social problems and beliefs (Cohen 2011; Hall et al. 1978).

It is in this spirit that this book brings 'femminicidio' into focus: to investigate how this narrative influences the dominant representation of VAW and more broadly DV and IPV. What new meanings are foreclosed upon in the public discourse, while others are sedimented, and constructed as new truths? This goal is pursued through analysis of the so-called mediatised political discourse, that is, political discourse reported in mainstream media (Fairclough 1995; Marlow 2002). I do not look at media discourse at large insofar as my interest is in understanding how feminist activists and politicians contributed to this narrative; hence the analysis focuses only on journalistic accounts of the politics of VAW that institutional and activist actors were engaging with during the 2012–2013 electoral campaign. Texts were selected through a keyword search performed through the database Dow Jones Factiva, the largest agglomerate of media, which is widely used in media content analysis, and enables keyword search, tag clouds, and graphs.

When I started working on these media texts, first I identified in which types of news the word 'femminicidio' appeared, the news subjects, the claim makers, the recurrent themes of 'femminicidio' coverage, and finally the meanings and recurrent themes associated with the term. This analysis was conducted on 389 media texts. Later, inspired by Norman Fairclough's representational strategy analysis, I analysed speeches by activists and political representatives by looking at causation, categorisation, nominalisation, metaphorisation, referentialisation, predications, and rhetorical tropes used

to represent 'femminicidio', the aggressors and the victims of violence and the designated rescuer (which appears to be the State) (Fairclough 1995, 2003). I also looked at argumentation strategies used to mobilise consensus over the need for the State's intervention in fighting against VAW (Richardson 2007; Wodak 2001a, 2011).

The acknowledgement of an existing sociological critique of the gender framework and gender mainstreaming encouraged me to question whether critiques are also viable at a level of counter-discourses in civil society, discourses that attempt to expose contradictions within this dominant framework and that can be interrogated to reach a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomenon in focus. This is why, I also turned to contestations of the narrative, its underlying assumptions and associated interpretive framework. How do these 'counter-discourses' help advance a critique of discourses based on a gender/feminist framework (so forth gender discourses, which is to say discourses pivoting around the artificial concept of gender)? My deconstruction of 'femminicidio' is based on a theoretical interrogation of the current feminist discourse, backed up by evidence (which I would also call arguments) from a variety of interest groups who contest the dominant narrative. Through the analysis of these voices I read gender discourse, which initially stemmed from emancipatory movements and has gradually colonised institutions and trickled down in popular culture, within a broader critique of social constructivism and overculturalisation of humanity (Melucci 1996; Pinker 2002; Vandermassen 2005).

These contestations are found in social movements that oppose the feminist discourse on violence and 'femminicidio' as well as the application of a gender paradigm in other discursive areas (such as civil rights). There are three social movements incorporated into this study through interviews and observation of online activism, conducted since 2012: feminist groups, shared parenting activists, and the anti-gender ideology movement (composed of traditional family and pro-life advocates opposing gay marriage and gender transformative educational programmes in schools). This journey has allowed me to explore a variety of discourses that coexist and compete with one of 'femminicidio': fatherhood, equal parenting, anti-feminism, double sexism, violence against men, biological and cultural sexual differences, political correctness, and ideology. All are recurrent themes that compose the multifaceted space of contestation against what I call 'gender discourses', which I use as an interpretative key to unlock, make sense of, and portray a complex social phenomenon.

As feminist discourse on VAW has a global scope, the discourses articulated by these counter-movements are also not exclusively Italian phenomena. On the contrary, feminists and anti-feminists, VAW and men's/divorced fathers rights groups occupy similar cultural battlegrounds in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Canada; all countries where feminism has made advanced inroads in institutions as well as profoundly changing the relationship between men and women. These discourses revolve around similar topics such as sexism against men, the cultural devaluation of the role of fathers, discrimination in divorce cases, where these instances are predominantly portrayed as hyper-conservative, sexist, or outright misogynist. Likewise, fights for recognition of gay marriage and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) rights with corresponding mobilisations in defence of heterosexual family values are not Italian specific phenomena. Let's for example consider that while in Italy the entire political debate on same-sex partnership and parenting has been stuck in Parliament for months, with protests from LGBT groups and anti-gender activists, and long negotiations between parties (the legal reform passed the vote of the Senate in March 2016), just the year before a referendum was called in neighbouring Slovenia that repealed a recently passed law legalising same-sex partnership/parenting. That said, gender is a conceptual category adopted and normalised internationally and battles of significations are played with argumentations and connections with political speeches that are highly context-specific.

With this in mind, my invitation to the reader throughout the following pages is to consider both the specificity of semantic/cultural struggles that are taking place in Italy, but also not to fall to the temptation of generalisation. It is a deliberate decision not to do any comparative or multi-country study: the result would be unbalanced in terms of richness of information, in so far as my ability to grasp the subtleties of meanings in the media across languages and social contexts. Observing power dynamics would be far less efficacious in any country other than Italy, where I can speak my mother tongue and am familiar with the cultural praxis. This is not to say that this study does not have a global scope: on the contrary discourses that I detected in Italy are also interpreted in light of international literature, which proves the internationality of feminist discourses and contestations of gender philosophy and scholarship.

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) usually focus on gender as a set of discourses that maintain normative identities and relations (Baxter 2003; Bloor and Bloor 2007; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007; Sunderland 2004). I am

doing something a bit different: I read gender through the lens of Foucault's theory of biopower, as a discourse that has gained momentum in modernity and expanded from the realm of social movements to ones of popular culture and institutions, a discourse that affects the intimate and relational spheres of individual life, as an external force that incites us to read different aspects of our existence through a cultural lens and redefines the way individuals perceive their nature as human beings, and their identity in relation to others. In the very spirit of CDS I analyse this discourse that to a certain extent can be seen as dominant, and in particular I look at how it is conveyed by media, political élites, and advocacy groups, with the aim to expose its partiality and hegemony (Fairclough 2010; Van Dijk 1993). I think it is time for CDS scholars to turn the gaze towards discursive formation and consequences in terms of social injustices and discriminations generated through the decades of debates on the 'gendered' dimension of individuals and society. At the same time, I address voices of counter-movements in order to account for the formation of new categories of victims through an investigation of their own narratives with the final aim to add some complexity to dominant representations and to contribute to a sociological critique. Therefore, in the spirit of CDS, shedding light on counter-discourses that receive less attention from the mainstream is a political task aimed at advancing social change through the inclusion and interrogation of different perspectives.

I will present two main counter-discourses emerging from the interviews that I conducted in these spaces of contestation. The first is what I call an ideology narrative, which pivots around the claim that 'femminicidio', feminism and gender discourse contribute to the normalisation of false and partial representations of complex relationships between men and women. The second is a discourse on female violence (or violent acts committed by women), a discourse that sheds light on under-represented aggressor-victim relations and modifies dominant representations of femininity in even acknowledging the possibility that women can be violent. This counter-discourse is particularly relevant for questioning the gender reading of violence, a reading that following the moral panic around femicide has been normalised in the public imaginary as well as consolidated in institutional responses to this social phenomenon. Counter-discourses show a certain complexity of relational dynamics and human identity that are overshadowed by the gender discourse which, as the analysis of the 'femminicidio' narrative suggests, convey the false perception that violence in heterosexual relationships is only

committed by men towards women for factors exclusively linked to sexist culture and gender inequality. I argue that psychological, emotional, relational, and, more broadly, biological aspects of human nature are completely neglected in the gender discourse and can be recuperated by interrogating other viable counter-discourses.

Note

1. The semantics of the term will be deeply explored in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 2

Discourse, Biopower, and Identity Politics Critique

1 Discourse Constructs Knowledge, Knowledge About Existing Reality

What does 'discourse' mean? Norman Fairclough defines discourse as 'ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the "mental world" of thoughts, feeling beliefs and so forth, and the social world' (2003, p. 124). Discourse 'is the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view' (Fairclough 1995, p. 56). For Stuart Hall, discourse has 'the effect of sustaining certain "closures", of establishing certain systems of equivalence between what could be assumed about the world and what could be said to be true' (1982, p. 75). Foucault's view of discourse describes it as a 'social/ideological practice':

> . . . forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices. They are systematic ways of making sense of the word by inscribing and shaping power relations within all texts, including spoken interactions. (Baxter 2003, p. 7)

Discourse in other words is a piece of knowledge that is not fully true and verifiable. It is what people in a certain context at a certain time believe is

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true or common sense, phrases that may simply be replicated uncritically out of a matter of convenience, in a person's effort to make sense of the world, connect with others, and to help facilitate everyday activities in society. I picture discourse as a river with water flowing through a precise fixed path, a riverbed with its bights and meanders, with tributaries and branches each with their own unique direction. Some of these branches intersect with other rivers and mingle. There are multiple rivers in society and we may choose to dive into the nearest one, the most accessible, or the most appealing to us. Once immersed we let the stream take us through its' meandering path and while in flux, we learn from what is felt during the navigation of the twists, turns, and rapids, and from what we see along the river banks, always viewing from a specific point of view, the point of view of that particular river, stream, or bend. A riverbed, although apparently still, is subjected to constant imperceptible changes, shaped by the movements of the ground, rocks, and of the water itself. Borrowing from Hall, I would say that investigating cultural representations of facts and phenomena by looking into texts means examining 'how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied' (2007, p. 6).

Discourse is a component of the social, is in a dialectic relationship with it, shaped by and transforming social structures and culture (Fairclough 2010; Wodak 2001a). Culture is the symbolic aspect of society, a malleable system of symbols and values through which individuals make sense of themselves, others, as well as groups within society and orientate their actions accordingly (Barthes 1966; Bourdieu and Thompson 1991; Swidler 2003). Discourse is one part of culture, which in turn is part of social practice, but it is neither culture nor social practice in and of itself (Fairclough 2010, p. 438). Discourse is a cultural product that also has the power to shape culture: it modifies symbols and values, and determines which acts and thoughts are culturally accepted and reproduced, and in so doing it provides the ground for social relations.

This interpretation of discourse as part and parcel to the social is particularly attuned with the argument that underlies this book, that is the need to ward against certain hyper-constructivist cultural streams of Gender Studies and associated discourses that posit subjects (men and women) as fully constructed by human discourse, that is to say non-existent prior discourse.

The possibility to conduct discourse studies focuses on postmodern problems and builds upon critical theory, as stated clearly by Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough:

> we do not accept postmodernist social theories that abandon the project of social struggle and change; further we do not agree with postmodern ontologies that conflate the social with discourse nor with epistemologies that advocate a 'must gaming' position for theoretical practice. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, p. 89)

The approach to discourse studies reclaimed by these authors enables us to avoid losing grip of the factuality of subjects and objects while maintaining a critical gaze on social praxis and projects of change. In other words it enables us to conduct Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) while maintaining a dialectic relation between theory and reality, avoiding relativism and acknowledging the limit, the imperfections of knowledge (Held 1980).

While Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) disassociate themselves from more dramatic views of postmodernism such as Lyotard's view of social change endeavours as futile, and the nihilistic attitude of Baudrillard, they associate with Foucault's work which on the contrary integrates the tradition of the critical school with a strong acknowledgement of differences and the complexity of power relations, enabling the theorisation of social change in a postmodern world.

In this regard, I find it important to clarify, with the help of Sara Mills' account of discourse studies, that studying discourse from a Foucauldian perspective does not necessarily mean denying the existence of the subject and the real. Foucault's innovation is that he shifted the focus of power theory from individuals and class to processes that constitute and determine the subject position, that is to say the subject as it is understood through categorisation in distinctive types. In Mills' words:

> Foucault is not denying that there is a reality which pre-exists humans, nor is he denying the materiality of events and experience, as some of his critics have alleged; it is simply that the only way we have to apprehend reality is through discourse and discursive structures. (2004, p. 49)

Even in Foucault's theory, subjects not only do not disappear, but they also play an active role in their relational position to the discourse: subjects

enable power to be exerted, they are not victims of any identified Other/ruler. Moreover, Foucault also admits the limits of human knowledge of the theorists themselves, knowledge that is determined and legitimised by discourses circulating at that particular time. Also, Foucault acknowledges that there are limits to 'scientific' knowledge and that these limits depend on the specific discourse circulating (Mills 2004, p. 29).

In summation, discourse analysts working within a post-structuralist framework and maintaining a critical position of social change do indeed have the ability to reclaim the existence of pre-discursive or biological reality, that reality that Alberto Melucci calls our 'inner planet', 'a part of our bodily experience which cannot be entirely culturalised, nucleus of resistance or opposition against external manipulation' (1996, p. 151). From this vantage point it is possible to look at cultural phenomena through texts while putting the individual and its human dimensions (such as emotions, instincts, and symbolic/cultural heritage) at the centre (Hochschild 2012).

2 Discourse: Formation, Contestation, and Biopolitics

Foucault maintains that discourse is created in local centres of power, that discourse is a device/mechanism (dispositif) of knowledge, as it creates concepts that explain and thus regulate certain aspects of individual and social life (Foucault 1986). Once these aspects of life are named, they are associated to specific meanings. Knowledge is produced and organised under categories that are reinforced and normalised by further accumulation of knowledge. In this way, theories, meta-narratives, and disciplines develop and consolidate (Foucault 1970, 1986; Lyotard 1984). Discourse transforms relativity in absolute common sense and once a statement has gained the status of common sense, the possibility to question it against emerging information from its specific social context becomes minimal, even a heretic or elitist endeavour. It is difficult to question 'common sense' because common sense is built upon 'assumptions and expectations [that] are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or exanimated or questioned'. These assumptions and expectations 'control both the actions of members of a society and their interpretation of the actions of others' (Fairclough 2001, p. 64).

In a nutshell, discourse is normative. It categorises social practices and subjects into labels of deviant and normal, and in a similar way social values are then divided into moral and amoral (Foucault 1977). Foucault (1970) theorised that knowledge formation revolves around a process of categorisation and classification that rests on inherent selection and exclusion. Dominant accepted knowledge is knowledge about the selected objects and constitutes a brick upon which another brick of knowledge is laid (Laclau and Mouffe, in Torfing 1999). However, objects that are excluded from knowledge do not necessarily remain individual bricks; on the contrary they can be selected and built upon within other discourses. Some of these constructions (discourses) acquire privileged exposure and recognition from power élites, they become official, they receive the status of truth, while other types of knowledge remain for short or long periods of time concealed from the public eye or otherwise categorised as false, inferior, or unreliable (Lyotard 1984). However, forms of knowledge that are legitimised in certain cultural contexts can be totally disregarded in others and vice versa. In Hall's words: 'in order for one meaning to be regularly produced, it had to win a kind of credibility, legitimacy or taken-for-grantedness for itself. That involved marginalising, down-grading or de-legitimating alternative constructions' (1982, p. 67).

Inherent exclusion of knowledge formation is the basis for contestation and competition between different discourses (Baxter 2003). These contestations around meaning are struggles for power, in so far as access to knowledge production shapes the way people think about themselves within an external world, it shapes culture, hence exercising power. In turn, according to Foucault, knowledge is the result of these power struggles. As an example, Mills pinpoints that our knowledge about women is more clearly articulated than knowledge about men, because there have been power struggles that are forced to articulate the meanings of 'being a woman' (2004, p. 19).

Contestations modify discourses and as an extension culture: at each stage in history there are boundaries that define taboos and the appropriate ways that a certain topic can be discussed. Yet these boundaries are constantly challenged by groups of people who feel that their thoughts, their identities, and their subcultures are not represented in forms of legitimised knowledge. In this respect, it is important that we do not picture local centres of power knowledge as necessarily belonging to the establishment: studies on identity politics of new social movements in fact show that subcultures also have their centres where they manufacture specific visions of social change, and

translate these into discourses that then are made available to the public (Melucci 2003; Melucci et al. 1989). The modification of individual and collective identity, or put a different way, the modification of cultural representations, is the soul of the politics of signification enacted by new social movements since 1960s (Castells 2012).

In this vein, public discourse can be represented as an imbrication of competing visions of social change, which means 'a change in the networking of social practices' (Fairclough 2010, p. 438), visions that are fabricated and materialised in linguistic forms by actors of different local centres of power knowledge. Social forces take part in the 'politics of signification' as a 'struggle to create collective social understandings on events and consent to be mobilised' (Hall 1982, p. 70); 'a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out' (Lazar 2005, p. 49). These politics of signification, also called cultural wars, play a relevant role in bringing about what Foucault (2002) refers to as epistemic breaks.

In such cultural wars, language is not only the site where groups compete to advance their discourses, but it is also the object of social struggle, in the sense that a groups' goal is to change language. Fairclough identifies the trigger of discursive production in social inequality:

> If one becomes aware that a particular aspect of common sense is sustaining power inequalities at one's own expense, it ceases to be common sense, and may cease to have the capacity to sustain power inequalities. (Fairclough 2001, p. 71)

In other words, questioning backgrounded common sense or naturalised codes of discourses is a core step in contestations over meanings aiming at social change. This means that discourses change position and status over time, they travel from the margins to the centre along with a parallel institutionalisation of the centres of power knowledge from which they speak. Therefore, in order to become dominant discourses need to colonise different genres of discourse (the media, State institutions, different social movements, academia), and are then applied to make sense of more than one phenomenon, in interaction with other discourses in a way that forms an inter-discursive network (Fairclough 1995, 2010; Meyer 2001; Mohanty 2003; Vaara 2014).

Colonisation entails a process of appropriation and recontextualisation. This process can also entail institutionalisation, that is, the adoption of a

certain discourse by established institutions (the State for example) or the creation of new ad-hoc institutions that serve to sustain that discourse (institutionalisation). When discourses are recontextualised often their assumptions, or underpinning statements, are not explicated but rather they constitute the assumptive brick upon which further discursive elaborations accumulate (Erjavec and Volčič 2007; Foucault 1970, 2002). This process renders certain implicit premises unquestionable and these premises are not necessarily factual truth or validated scientific theories. On the contrary these premises can be simple hypothesis or personal and political views of reality that gain discursive momentum.

How does discourse affect and control subjects in contemporary society? In other words, how does the power of the discourse reflect upon individual life, identities, and bodies? I will try to answer this question by engaging Foucault's theory of biopolitics. According to the French philosopher, since the Second World War and with the emergence of liberal-economic forms of government, politics has become more and more concerned with the regulation of biological traits of individuals, units who are understood by this form of power as bodies, bodies that form populations (Foucault et al. 2004; Lemke et al. 2010). Discourses on these biological traits have gained more and more centrality, bodies have been observed, surveilled, they have become known and governable. Government is no longer realised through proscriptions and prohibitions but rather with a discipline of the body realised with stimulus and incitements, discipline that can also be expressed with false prohibitions that stimulate desires and transgressions. Individuals internalise these stimuli and transform them into imperatives of conformity that people associate with. In this perspective, what Foucault calls docile bodies are persons that perceive themselves and act in ways decided by external forces or cultural models while erroneously thinking that they are autonomously determining their selves (Borgna 2005).

Sexuality is a central device of power in Foucault's theory of biopolitics in that sexuality at the same time enables control of either the individual and/or the population, the two dominant axes of this new complex form of power of life (Lemke et al. 2010). He argues that sexuality is a concept that has been actively produced since the eighteenth century through incitements to speak about sex more frequently in dedicated centres of power knowledge (like religious confession, psychotherapy, or in the investigation of crimes) (Foucault 1986). With a proliferation of sexuality discourses, breaking down the duality between licit and illicit, perversions

are implanted in a contemporary society where sex is an artificial unity that individuals need in order to explore their own identity (Bauman 1998; Putino 2011). It is thus clear that sex, through the construction of discourses around sexuality, is a dispositif to control individuals, 'a dense transfer point for relations of power', 'useful for the greatest number of maneuvers' (Foucault 1986, p. 103).

In Foucault's biopolitics theory, the government of society is realised through subtle manoeuvres upon the construction of identity. Actors of these manoeuvres are not only the bureaucracies but more generally voices that advance discourses of identity. In this regard, Turner notices that 'the political and cultural complexity of the modern notion of the body is . . . also a consequence of social movements such as feminism and environmentalism' (2007, p. 88). Also, in postmodern society individuals are more and more at the centre of discourses, encouraged to ceaselessly self-represent in order to exist (Bauman 2001; Giddens 1990, 1992; Goffman 2001). In this vein Attwood (2015) argues that we are beset by discourses of transformation for amelioration that concur to establish a culture of makeover, a culture where individuals transform their identity, for example as a member of a given age group through aesthetic, surgical, or digital modification of their body.

How does biopolitics relate to GBV discourses which is the focus of this book? At this moment, let me just briefly acknowledge that the 'femminicidio' narrative, and more precisely the gender discourse that it conveys, can be read as a device of biopolitics insofar as it besets individuals with messages that encourage a continuous reflection of self-identity and the possibility of self-transformation (bodily and sexually) in light of cultural imperatives embedded in the gender discourse itself (Bandelli and Porcelli 2016). I will soon show how the gender discourse informs the cultural dimension of human beings and social relations, whereas the biological basis of humankind and its behaviours is information that happens to be excluded from the knowledge constructed by the gender discourse. Heterosexual relations are talked about in terms of oppression, legitimised by social structures, while biological roots and anthropological development of sexual identities and relations are positioned as de-selected knowledge. This gender discourse is at the same time constructed and normalised, as well as contested: it is produced in feminist centres (of power knowledge), it travels to institutions and other orders of discourse and in doing so underlying assumptions receive validation.

3 Sex and Gender. The Constructivist Turn and the Cultural Being

The concept of 'gender' was originally associated with the concept of 'equality' in feminist and queer social movements and associated scholarship as emancipatory discourses of subcultures against a dominant patriarchal (gendered) discourse (Stormer 2006). However, the word gender has acquired different meanings in different fields and it is yet to be defined clearly (Vandermassen 2005). It is exemplificative that from a linguistic point of view, gender simply refers to a grammatical system of noun classification that organises knowledge about the outside world (De Saussure 1957). In anthropology and sociology, gender is regarded as a set of behaviours (roles) that a society prescribes to male and female within a specific cultural context (Donati 2006; Parsons and Bales 1955; Ruspini 2009). At the same time, from a social constructivism perspective, the use of the word gender implies that individual identity is culturally constructed. Also, at the level of public discourse, the word gender is charged with strong symbolic meanings emerging from the political demand for equality between the sexes and the identity politics of sexual minorities.

This new conceptualisation of gender was embraced by Second Wave feminists and intertwined with a critique of inequality between the sexes in patriarchal society (Vance 1984; Piccone Stella and Salmieri 2012). As a result, gender served feminist movements' core mission to show how culture positions women in subordinate roles. Gender within this feminist perspective is understood as a set of cultural rules and assumptions, constructed upon the ideology that sexual difference entails differentiation in the ways of being men and women, and that regiments individuals in fixed normative identities and roles (Lazar 2005). In this perspective, women are regarded as subjugated by a culture that frames identity and roles assigned to the female sex as less important, inferior and dependent to the male sex (Cavarero 1992; Firestone 1979). Further, from a feminist perspective, heterosexuality is regarded as one of many other possible relational modalities that have been dictated throughout centuries and transformed in the normative model of (patriarchal) society by that same ideological culture that 'constructs' human beings as different (Bernini 2013; Butler 1990; Rich 1981; Rubin 1975; Saraceno 2012; Sedgwick 1990). Heterosexuality is thus regarded as a cultural model of patriarchy imposed to maintain the subjugation of women in their inferior gender role (Braidotti 1995; De Lauretis 1994; Dworkin 1987; Haraway 1991;

Lonzi 1974; Manieri et al. 2011; Wittig 1992). In short, within this perspective, gender is positioned as an enemy of individual freedom and self-determination.

As long as we maintain that gender is the cultural representation of male and female sexes the definition is not as problematic (Scott 1986; Sunderland 2004). Indeed, this 'mild' version of gender theory builds on the binomial sex/gender, which to a certain extent recognises the existence of a sexed biologic body as well as a set of roles that are attached to each sex in a given culture and society (Paglia 1991). However, it becomes more complicated as soon as the existence of a biological body is rendered questionable and thus political, the point where the binomial sex/gender falls apart (Butler 1990; Wittig 1992). This particular philosophical preoccupation belongs to the radical constructivism stream and has spread throughout Cultural Studies and the Humanities in general, and also in some areas of sociology, as part of identity politics' inroads in academia, with the convergence of LGBT activism and Women's (now Gender) Studies as a keystone of contemporary feminist movements (Bawer 2012; Wetherell and Mohanty 2010; Warner 1999).

From a radical constructivist vantage point, there is no reality before language and the speech act itself (*parole*) is the generator of realty (Austin 1962). This conceptualisation is applied by some feminist and queer scholars as they contend that there is no such thing as woman and man; that a newborn baby becomes male or female at the precise moment that someone utters the sentence 'it is a boy' or 'it is a girl' (Piccone Stella and Saraceno 1996; Riley et al. 2008). In this perspective, gender is no more than a 'performance' which constructs (biological) sex as 'prediscursive' (Butler 1990, p. 7). Here, gender is viewed as a discourse that invents a sexual dichotomy, which, according to these theorists, does not exist before any linguistic symbolic construction of reality (Butler 1990). Radical outcomes of this stream of thought is that body is redefined as a malleable entity that human beings through technology can – and should – modify to free themselves from discursively imposed subjectivities (Braidotti 1995; Haraway 1991; Poidimani 2006).

Butler's theory of performativity marks the radical constructivist turn in the theory of gender and inaugurates the queer studies stream of thought. Butler argues that both sex and gender are prediscursive and that sex is constructed by the performance of gender.

> Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. [. . .] This production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by gender. In terms of the body itself she states that 'body is itself a construction'. (1990, p. 8)

As for a political or social application of this prediscursive ideology, Butler identifies with intersex activists in their 'work to rectify the erroneous assumption that every body has an inborn "truth" of sex' (2004, p. 2).

The concept of gender in this social constructivism vein was originally introduced as an alternative to the earlier dominant theory of sex roles, a theory which posits behavioural differences between men and women as shaped by nature (Hochschild 1973). This approach was then criticised for being too deterministic, essentialist and evoking a biological bias, relying on and reproducing what social constructivism rendered questionable: precisely the natural existence of two sexes that are different (Saco 1992; Connell 2005). In the view of gender theorists, the antecedent prism of sex roles reduces 'gender to an ahistorical static sex-role container into which all biological males and females are forced to fit' (Denski and Shall 1992, p. 46). Sunderland for example treats gender difference as 'probably the most frequently invoked "popular" discourse", "overarching" or "higher-order" discourse, "sheltering" a range of "subordinate" discourses which still "maintains essentialist thinking – that women just *are* like this, men just *are* like that" ' (2004, p. 53, 69). She argues that the salience/level of importance of sex difference, which she associates with 'a particular set of genitalia', is socially constructed and varies over time like skin colour (Sunderland 2004, p. 55).

With the affirmation of social constructionism, women and men have no longer been studied only in relation to their roles in society. In fact, the constructivist turn marks the establishment of an emergent research interest in how identity is constructed in a sexed way through discourses or representations built upon a combination of traits that are culturally associated to the sexes. In this stream, masculinity and femininity are not seen as 'opposite poles of the same axis' but rather as variable features 'in different, perpendicular dimensions' (Sedgwick 1995, p. 15). In this paradigm, where culture dominates nature, which in turn is redefined as

relative, human behaviours and conditions are studied by social scientists as the results of socialisation, closely influenced by culture (Remotti 2008). Identity politics move precisely within this paradigm insofar as discriminations of different kinds are framed and fought against through a cultural discourse that lacks a physical dimension (Corker and French 1999; Pinker 2002). It is clear that pretending that identity is merely a product of culture implies the negation of what psychological and biomedical sciences tell us about sexual difference, and precisely that sexual difference is not limited to genitalia only, but rather encompasses the whole system mind-body and the way individuals adapt and evolve (Brase et al. 2014; Ingalhalikar et al. 2014; Kuhle 2012). In this regard, evolutionary psychologist Griet Vandermassen argues that unless feminists overcome their 'biophobia', their gender discourse will be scientifically untenable (2005, p. 85).

The main problem with social constructivism resides in the very meaning of the word *construction*. In other words, what does it mean exactly when post-structuralist authors affirm that discourse constructs sex and gender? Sunderland notices that writers often do not clarify what they mean when they use 'construction' and that 'claims of construction (at least "beyond words") are often not supported empirically and thus remain rhetorical' (2004, p. 172). She wonders: 'How do we know that' and 'when' 'gender is being constructed?'; 'Does it make sense to talk about intentionality in construction?'; 'What is the role of discourse in construction?' The answer that could be given from a CDA perspective is that through discourse we 'construe' representations which become 'construals' of an existing social reality that in turn cyclically construe (influence) the representations (Fairclough 2003). Hence, it is the concept of representations that enables us to overcome the impasse and maintain the coexistence of two entities: the self as pre-existing reality and the signifiers, symbols, signs that represent the self (Hall 1980).

Although the constructivist perspective is at the moment dominant in discourse studies, other fields working today with gender topics do not necessarily embrace this same path. For example, relational sociology works with the concept of gender from a perspective that is different and critical of the one typically advanced within gender studies (Donati 2012). Pierpaolo Donati, founder of this stream in Italy, points out that the term gender is a category that enables sociologists to investigate cultural situations shaped by society originating in biological difference and that the growing constructivist tendency pretends that 'relations between the sexes

are variables of one's own liking' are an ideological position (Donati 2006, p. 84, my translation). Donati (2011) warns that such a position obfuscates the line that distinguishes human from non-human society, a line that in his view is indispensable in the study of society at large. In the same vein, Italian sociologist Elisabetta Ruspini maintains that gender can be a useful analytic device to investigate the relation and disparity between men and women and between micro- and macrosocial, an endeavour that is doable so long as it acknowledges the interdependence between sex and gender, between biology and societal environment in the development of individual identity (2009, pp. 9–17).

In this stream, roles and expectations attached to male and female biological sex are analysed as indispensable factors in the development of an individual's identity as a social being who belongs to a given cultural community (Crespi 2003; Scabini and CIgoli 2013). In other words, this approach departs from the constructivist view of human beings as *tabula rasa* forged by cultural entities and on the contrary entails recognition of the biological nature of human beings, which in relation to their culture and with their interactions with others, shapes sociality in important ways. Persistent features of masculinity and femininity are not seen as imposed from above but rather as a result of endogenous cultural development of a human community, a necessary component for the development of any relational society.

Let me return for a moment to Foucault's explanation of the formation of sexuality as a new category and discourse and connect this explanation to the concept of gender. Likewise sexuality, the category of gender has proliferated discourses and this kind of reproduction confirms the existence of the category itself. As sexuality discourse exposes and generates licit and illicit sexual behaviours, so does gender discourse that continuously drives the attention of the public imaginary to the differentiations and sameness between individuals, and in doing so these categories acquire centrality in individual processes of identity making. In other words, gender has become a prominent component of self-definition and self-perception.

In this regard Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci (1996) observes that special emphasis is given to the differences between men and women within new cultural inquiries brought about by the women's emancipation movement. These differences are no longer taken for granted; they are discussed in abundance and further examined in everyday life. Melucci also warns that socially constructed identity is always exposed to redefinition,

with this discourse rendering the relationships and life goals of both men and women more unstable: 'we are overcultural beings facing the necessity to decide on our own nature' (Melucci 1996, p. 153).

Melucci (Melucci et al. 1989) posits that such overculturalisation is a product of the identity discourses circulated in recent decades by social movement organisations and various interest groups and pinpoints how these discourses schizophrenically play with the duality of nature and culture. The appeal to nature intersects with social constructionism, which coexists with an appeal to the spontaneity of natural needs or desires. Here individuals are encouraged not to accept their nature, which on the contrary should be modifiable by human action 'the body, desire, biological identity, and sexuality are all cultural – in the sense of socially generated' (Melucci et al. 1989, p. 120). This invitation coexists with a rhetoric of freedom that incites the release of natural instincts, a rhetoric that operates within a more general overexposure of the body, which 'is invading the social sphere' and is reconceptualised as a privileged instrument of human communication and identity definition (Melucci et al. 1989, p. 122). Melucci thinks that the promise of liberation through the centrality of the body as a site of impulses and desires is illusory in that new dependences are created as well as new systems of external delegation on the management and knowledge of the body (i.e. medical-scientific interpretation of the subject, medicalisation of health, of sexuality, and of reproduction/birth).

Like Foucault, Melucci's discussion of the power of identity discourse also deals with the topic of sexuality, as a crossroads of human biology and society, one deeply redefined by contemporary discourses, particularly around a new culture of women (Melucci 1996; Melucci et al. 1989). Melucci, in line with the biopolitics theory, sees reproduction and the biological dimension of humankind as new fields of action and manipulation. Through contraception and artificial fertilisation, the separation of sexuality from reproduction has become a 'mass phenomenon and a definitive cultural acquisition' where 'human sexuality becomes a field of experience open to every possibility' (Melucci et al. 1989, pp. 150–151). He questions 'what will be the consequence of an eros released from the chains of reproduction, free from limitations, threats, but also from responsibilities of its "natural" function? How and where can we make room for the erotic "creation" that replaces procreation?' (Melucci et al. 1989,

p. 152). Melucci urges that 'any body politics aimed at emancipation must inevitably . . . facilitate a return to the body of needs and impulses, but it must also help individuals locate themselves within the constraints of their social existence' (Melucci et al. 1989, p. 125).

Similar observation on the ongoing overculturalisation is offered by Donati:

> An irruption of the inhuman into the social, one that progressively displaces what is still human (. . .) The epochal change that we are witnessing represents an emerging society characterised by the fact that the 'social' is no longer seen, heard, or acted upon as something immediately human. (Donati 2009, p. 21)

For Donati (2009) the human dimension is the relational dimension, part and parcel to society as the social dimension is part and parcel of the human. There cannot be humanity without a relational dimension of being. What I refer to throughout this book as gender discourse originates from what Vandermassen calls 'biophobic' feminist discourse, and likewise moves in the same direction as the cultural trends identified by Melucci and Donati.

4 Critiques of Social Movements Making Discourses and Identities

Social movements are not only actors of liberation but also voices that imbricate the self and influence the way individuals define their identity. Social movements are at the same time forces of resistance that ward off what Habermas's calls the 'lifeworld', a sphere of individual communication that is colonised more and more by external imperatives dictated by bureaucracies (Habermas 1985); they are actors of 'life politics' that 'seek to further the possibilities of a fulfilling and satisfying life for all' (Giddens 1990, p. 156). However, life politics are rendered possible by an accentuated self-reflexivity and centralisation of the concepts of identity and the body, that are understood in this new paradigm of late modernity as modifiable, sequestrated away from nature (Giddens 1990, 1992). Put simply, emancipatory and 'lifestyle' identity discourses are not exempt from exerting power on individuals and invade the 'lifeworld'. It goes without saying that the need for such acknowledgement becomes paramount in a communication society where all sorts of identities benefit from

the possibility of increasing public exposure (Castells 2012). If we fail to analyse the power exerted by discourses of emancipation and identity we might also fail to see new categories of marginalisation, whose narratives are to be investigated in order to contribute to a sociological critique of present social injustices.

Helpful in this endeavour are critiques of the identity politics of social movements offered by two main debates. The first, a political critique of cultural Marxism, Left politics, and the parallel growth of post-structuralist studies, a critique that mainly focuses on the perceived side effects of identity politics inaugurated with the civil rights movement in the United States and replicated with new social movements advocating issues around sex, gender, and race. The second is the debate surrounding political correctness as a response to the overextension of cultural Marxism in everyday life. Let me conclude this section with a review of these two debates.

The core critique against identity politics is one that claims that the victim status of certain categories of people is exhausted over time by replicating forms of victimhood to ascribe to multiple sub-identities. When a certain path of social as well as cultural empowerment has been achieved, identity politics is then criticised for exasperating the proliferation of sub-identities and related theorisations of differences, resulting in a certain Balkanisation of society, and with it, a Balkanisation of knowledge (Bawer 2012; Finkelstein 2000; Schlesinger 1992; Stone 2006). In Gitlin's words 'the cultivation of difference is nothing new, but the sheer profusion of identities that claim separate political standing today is unprecedented' (1995, p. 165). These critiques link to a more comprehensive critique of postmodernism and post-structuralism: intellectual streams that dominate Social Sciences and Humanities in today's academe and politicise the organisation of research fields along identity categories deployed in the realm of activism while diluting knowledge with studies focusing on multiple particularities and differentiations while simultaneously rejecting any possibility for 'grand' theorisation based on classical knowledge (Barsky 2007; Bloom 1987; Pinker 2015).[1]

The logic of the vindication of difference underlying identity politics was borne of a specific social and intellectual context characterised by hegemony of universalistic ideas, and cultural, as well as judiciary, legitimisation of structural discriminations based on sex, gender, and race. Following those cultural wars and emancipation movements, important achievements have been accomplished in terms of recognition, representation, participation,

and judiciary protection of specific groups. Values in society have changed throughout emancipation movements (Bumiller 1988; Kimball 2001). This is not to say that today societies are freed from social injustice, this is to say that discourses and institutions have been created from those original discriminatory situations and therefore culture, and cultural representation of identities, has been modified by those discourses. Today, in Western societies, although old and new structural discriminations are still in place and are also glorified within certain specific cultures (such as racist, misogynist contexts), there are well-established discourses that enable condemnation of these discriminations. For example, the rhetoric of equality and egalitarianism and later the rhetoric of difference: both have lost their revolutionary stance in so far as these discourses are no longer the prerogative of groups at the margins, but have now become fundamental principles (at least on paper) of national states and bureaucracies of the democratic world (Bertone and Gusmano 2013; Bumiller 2009; Della Porta 2003; Fabricant 2012). Likewise, difference is not only a central moral principle of contemporary politics, but it is also the fundamental element of the entire philosophical paradigm of postmodernity (Lyotard 1984; Newman 2007).

Nevertheless, identity politics, as well as identity studies conducted along the lines of sex, gender, and race continue to be predominantly carried out with the same extemporaneous logic of vindication of difference and assumed victimisation (Badinter 2006; Young 1999). This approach fails to reposition the status of advocated identity in the current web of power: identity continues to be politicised as if that identity was still prohibited or simply unknown in public spaces. It has neglected any possibility of agency while maintaining a lack of acknowledgement that through past and ongoing political transitions that same identity has been institutionalised in ad-hoc spaces, has colonised mainstream spaces and has been ascribed the possibility of agency. This tendency to view discriminated identities as fixed in time goes hand in hand with a sort of obsession with oppression and victimisation, which in post-structuralism scholarship seems to be equated to any immanent barrier to limitless freedom. One and all, the body is a favoured site of post-structuralist oppression, the body itself is theorised as a barrier (Attwood 2015; Haraway 1991; Le Breton 1999). This belongs to an intellectual attitude that rests on a gnostic vision of an omnipotential human being with the omni-comprehensive right of self-determination in sheer independence of any physical characteristics (Chasseguet-Smirgel 2005).

In this vein, identity politics needs to self-perpetuate along an outdated rhetoric of oppression and victimisation, which is then applied to sub-identities of the same categories of identities and pursues the recognition of more individualised rights and radical social visions. Likewise, one of the widely debated side effects of identity politics is one that revolves around the perversion of affirmative actions, in so far as they are constitutive of fixed categories of needy victims, a status that is assigned in the name of the identity marker that was earlier theorised as discriminated (Bumiller 1988; Deslippe 2012; Fraser 1995). For example, 'being black', 'being a woman' instead of evaluating on a case-by-case basis whether individuals carrying those identity markers are or are not indeed hold a disadvantaged position in their social context. In other words, affirmative actions become, at the same time, an opportunity holding privileged status and exceptions, while potentially operating as a device of new discriminations against subjects that are excluded by any existing 'special' category, intended or unintended.

Finally, another effect of identity politics often criticised is the creation of categories of untouchable victims (Felson 1991; Finkelstein 2000; Stone 2006; Stringer 2014). On a group level, all members of a category that suffer discrimination or violence are bestowed with a sort of a priori innocence that renders immoral any attempt to search for causality between the behaviour, attitude, or culture of the victims and theirs condition of discriminated / abused (although analysisng causes does not necessarily imply blame) (Arendt 2003; Felson 1991). On an individual level, victims' behaviour in discriminatory and violent dynamics becomes taboo with an implicit erasure of the actions of the victim.

This topic bridges with the second stream of the critique of identity politics, namely the critique of political correctness (Williams 2002). Political correctness is a politically driven form of taboo and linguistic censoring used to seek a specific project of cultural change that may develop in a sort of naturalised linguistic etiquette to conceal meanings that are considered offensive (Allan and Burridge 2006; Goldsmith 1996). Fairclough defines political correctness as a language-based intervention in culture which stems from social constructionism and that usually entails a selective process of appropriate signifiers chosen for underlying 'positive' representation of a fact of social life (2010, p. 444).

Although the term 'political correctness' usually refers specifically to discursive operations of Left politics, if one looks at political correctness simply as the ideologisation and moralisation of discourse associated to specific political projects of hegemonic consent it would conclude that this is a bipartisan strategy (Derber and Magrass 2008). Political correctness

deploys a set of double standard moral rules that regulate the way of speaking on certain topics, topics that through identity politics have been overloaded with symbolic meanings and values. As a result of this process of change certain topics become sensitive, in the sense that some angles of the topic begin to be seen as disrespectful and unspeakable (Derber and Magrass 2008).

Once one understands political correctness in a bipartisan way, the result would complement more classical theories of ideology, initially elaborated within Marxist tradition. In this regard, consider for example Marcuse's view of ideology as a discourse realised through Orwellian language, such as the use of abbreviations and acronyms intended to 'repress undesired questions', 'hypnotic formulas; immunity against contradiction; identification of the thing (and of the person) with its function', 'falsifications which . . . serve to transform falsehood into truth', and linguistic tendencies blocking conceptual development, while pushing for uncritical acceptance of meanings concealed by an immediate and visual type of language (1964, p. 94, 96, 98). And now consider the following definition of political correctness: a linguistic process deployed to 'veil uncomfortable truths, to oversimplify and to favour subjective relation over objective reason in a process where the distinction between true and false is increasingly replaced by one between what is perceived as good or bad' (Mathiesen 2000, p. 111).

The outcome of political correctness is a fabrication of new terms that modify entire concepts and lead to the disappearance of certain meanings from public knowledge. Another important element of political correctness is the deliberate silencing of dissent through derision, delegitimisation, vilification, and undeclared censorship of those who express a different opinion or even those who present scientific facts disputing the 'imposed' discourse (Mathiesen 2000). These mechanisms are not only deployed in the political arena but have also invaded university campuses where critiques of political correctness lament an erosion of classical knowledge, the disappearance of historical facts and discouragement of critical attitudes of intellectual enquiry (Donnelly 2007).

5 Conclusions. Changing Vantage Point on Gender Within Critical Discourse Studies

In this chapter I attempted to navigate the crossroads of cultural studies and sociology to review existing knowledge on gender discourses. I problematised the notion of gender within a broader discussion on social

constructivism and with the help of some of the main critiques of the concept of gender itself, viewed as an identity-based social movement discourse of emancipation, one which has travelled from the margins to the mainstream. What interests me the most at this point is to further develop the argument that a similar critical gaze towards gender is yet to be taken on board by CDS, which on the contrary works within the category of gender but neglects the discursive implications of the category itself. This trajectory of research requires the commitment to exposing social injustices, typical of critical theory, that merges with a post-structuralist sensitivity. This would enable a departure from the binary systems inherent of many social movements and the implicit assumption that social research's interest should be directed towards power realised through discourses of classical categories of power holders.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) agenda for CDS in postmodernity includes the study of movements of discourses from one social practice to another, from the system to the lifeworld, and the study of the possibility of decolonisation. In this stream of study important foci include the normalisation and hegemony of discourses and struggles for hegemony. My point is that we must also look at mechanisms of appropriation and colonisation from the lifeworld to the system, and as researchers we need to be innovative enough to direct the gaze towards nomadic discourses as well: discourses that are changing power positions, are gaining consensus, are distorted and repurposed, and so on.

The social world changes rapidly and social researchers need to be ready to detect Foucault's epistemic breaks or Kuhn's (1996) paradigm change: there are 'discontinuous developments in discursive structures' that happen 'at certain moments in a culture' (Mills 2004, p. 52). In other words, the mission of CDS to 'contribute to addressing the social wrong of the day' (Fairclough 2010, p. 231) by looking at how these injustices are validated in texts can be applied to all discourses, including those discourses that self-identify as belonging to marginal or subcultures and are at the same time being institutionalised or mainstreamed. In this same spirit, critical researchers need to be careful not to miss seeds of discrimination that are concealed in discourses of emancipation and identity.

The aim shared by CDS is to understand the content and practice of different representations of reality (discourses) and how one of these different possible articulations of meaning become dominant while others remain at the margins or are even prohibited (Hall 1982, 2007; Fairclough 2010; Van Dijk 2008). The ultimate goal of CDS is to contribute to social

critiques of power through a critique of the discourse itself, understood as a mediating space between texts and society, and constitutive of a field of knowledge and social identities (Fairclough 2001, 2003; Foucault 1970; Wodak and Weiss 2005).

In this sense, text is studied in its 'dialectic' relation with the social context, as a document that is an expression of the culture in which the authors are immersed, a document in which social researchers can find meanings and lines of thought that are injected in society and reproduced. This means in practice that discourse analysts need to bring into the study a detailed knowledge of the social and historical context of their area of study (Diaz-Bone et al. 2007).

This dialectic approach provides critical discourse analysts with an anchor from which to navigate discourses, preventing the risk of embracing a radical constructivist path according to which there is no reality outside the text (Wetherell 1998). Indeed, as discussed earlier, in the CDS perspective discourses are not constructive of non-existent objects and subjects but rather representations (or construals) of a social reality that in turn influence representations (Fairclough 2003; Sunderland 2004). In other words, within CDS it is possible to pursue an analysis of discourses as corpus constructed by human beings through speech and practices, while at the same time maintaining the existence of a pre-discursive truth which is in fact questioned by post-structuralist approaches to discourse (Baxter 2003; Corker and French 1999).

The social critique pursued through CDS is marked by a vision of social justice. This political aim is rendered explicit by scholars in this stream, who are 'interested in theory formation and critical analysis of the discursive reproduction of power abuse and social inequality' (domination through manipulation, indoctrination, and disinformation) (Van Dijk 2008, p. 1), 'pressures from above and possibilities of resistance to unequal power relationships [. . .]' (Wodak 2001b, p. 3). The aim is to identify not only powerful narratives but also emarginated discourses that try to contest the hegemonic status quo and potentially influence social practices to bring about social change (Talja 1999; Van Dijk 2000). Therefore, an 'advocatory role for groups who suffer from social discrimination' is the typifying feature that distinguishes CDS from other linguistic approaches to discourse (Meyer 2001, p. 3).

The spirit of CDS fits perfectly with the aim of this study: to contribute to a better understanding of different social relations between men and women by analysing dominant discourses conveyed in mainstream media

and illuminating unauthorised discourses that are spoken by voices outside the institutional, political, and media debate on VAW, DV, and IPV. Investigation outside of the mainstream is conducted with the aim to drag these unspeakable discourses from the margins to the centre and through this process, attempt to advance a critique of the gender paradigm that underpins the dominant discourse. This twofold interest is reflected in the methodology I have applied to explore these discourses: first I analysed media texts with the aim to advance a critique of the mainstream discourse on VAW, DV, and IPV; later, with the aim to shed light on discourses emerging from spaces of contestation and to use these discourses to further advance the critique of the mainstream, I conducted 66 interviews with key actors in social movements engaging with the topic of gender.

Having explained how CDS is helpful to address qualitative researchers' interest in revealing how ideologies are conveyed in public life through texts and speeches by a plethora of different voices, let me now connect back to the discussion on biopower and clarify my argument in this regard. We saw that self-perception and construction of one's own identity is forged by external discourses, which are nothing but mechanisms of individual and social control. We also saw that postmodern times are characterised by a proliferation of discourses that pivot around the individual, understood only partially, reduced to only one part of its entirety: its' body. Gender form my perspective is one of these discourses that constructs the individual as a body, a body governed by desires that apparently are inner desires and instead depend on and stem from that precise representation of the self that is manufactured outside any possible process of self-reflection. Gender has mainstreamed and made information available to the public about gendered psychology, behaviours, styles, etiquettes, and so forth. Exposed to these discourses, individuals learn to read different aspects of their existence (e.g. love, subjugations and limitations, opportunities) through a gender lens. People are encouraged to interrogate and challenge the obvious sexual difference, which gender discourse frames as not obvious but determinable; people have also learnt their new right to determine their sex and gender in order to belong to the gender cultural group that most appeal to them and exist as free and liberated citizens.

In summary, I suggest looking at gender as a specific representation of individual identities and relations, a representation that has become dominant in the public understanding of individuals to the extent that in several contexts it seems almost impossible to talk about subjectivities in society

without taking into consideration their so-called gendered identities. In this perspective, gender creates subjects, phenomena, and knowledge that are always gendered and cultural, while biology is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the characterisation and comprehension of individuals and the general population. What consequences in terms of new legitimised visions of social change does such an understanding of humanity hold? It is urgent that critical discourse analysts answer these questions, in the same spirit they analyse narratives that maintain social inequality as well as encourage unsustainable civilisation, and ecological destruction (Stibbe 2013).

In my view, this vantage point is necessary in light of the prominence that gender has gained in the last decades either as interdisciplinary area of study internationally or as an emancipatory discourse connected to mainstreamed policies (gender discrimination, gender stereotypes, gender violence, and so forth) that have reached a fair level of exposure and normalisation in popular culture and institutional politics. Furthermore, these discourses and sites of gender power-knowledge have also embedded themselves within the discourses of ruling élites. In other words, by following Foucault I maintain that along with the accumulation and recontextualisation of gender discourses, voices and structures of these emancipatory discourses have also gained power and have reached a level of 'common sense'. The more exposed and the more validated a discourse, the more power and more possibility to generate corresponding injustices. For this reason, there is a particular urgency to detect the subtle conceptual knots embedded in these discourses that are modifying legitimised knowledge.

How does this gender power-knowledge dictate new normative ways of seeing the world, new ways of being and perceiving ourselves? How does gender affect other discourses that are floating around in society, discourses that have not gone through a similar process of institutionalisation and cooptation so far? How does gender modify the culture and in doing so operate new subjugations and exclusions in society? These are some of broader questions guiding this book. Of course these questions alone cannot address the full scope of gender and the entirety of discourses built upon the notion of gender. In this sense, my analysis is not focused specifically on how gender has been mainstreamed through discourses around homosexuality, gay rights, same-sex marriage, abortion, and artificial procreation, all discourses that entail and advance a constructivist view of society. Rather, I will deal with a specific area of knowledge that has been colonised by a gender prism: the case of DV and IPV in Italy. In the following chapter I will show that although different theories are used to

make sense of this social phenomena the gender framework is dominant. Therefore, these guiding questions on the topic of gender will be modified as my argument unfolds with a more precise focus on the topic of violence.

Note

1. In this regard I find interesting the critique advanced by Noam Chomsky on the infiltration of identity politics in academia and the consequent postmodernist turn resulting into a proliferation of sectorial and biased studies on different types of identities disconnected from general theories. Chomsky develops this thesis in the following videoclip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzrHwDOlTt8

CHAPTER 3

Gender: Hegemonic Lens for Making Sense of Violence Against Women and Partner Violence

This chapter will demonstrate how the concept of gender is applied to the feminist discourse of VAW, Domestic Violence (DV), and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) with the establishment of a new special category of violence, one of GBV, and how political elites and the media appropriate these topics in different ways. I argue that with the mainstreaming of the categories of VAW and GBV a feminist/gendered view of human relations has entered the public imaginary of violence: one that emphasises specific victim–aggressor relations, specifically acts perpetrated by men and experienced by women. In this particular view violent incidences are explained with a cultural frame, where the origins of violence are ascribed to gender inequality and sexism, while other elements of violence, like those related to the relational dynamics, emotional status of subjects involved, as well as their personal histories, are sidelined.

To unpack this core argument I will delineate the complex theoretical frameworks of violence, in which feminist theory is only one of many different academic interpretations. My aim is to put gender-centric theories of violence into perspective and connect them to the political and social context from which they developed. Although in public discourse of DV, IPV, and VAW gender has attained a certain level of cultural hegemony, there is the risk of discarding all of the longstanding contributions from the wider social sciences to knowledge about the origins, representation, and experience of violence (Segal and Demos 2013). To put it another way, it would be intellectually irresponsible to pretend that other existing theories of violence, nevertheless

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their limits and partiality, are suddenly made irrelevant once the aggressor is determined to be male and the victim is female. By dipping into the fields of Sociology and Social Psychology, I will discuss the partiality of different theories of violence and suggest that violence is a complex human phenomenon that can be better understood only through an interdisciplinary approach, and certainly not through simplified discourses.

This endeavour is not meant to deny the relevance of gendered power relations in all cases of VAW, DV, and IPV; rather, the point is to show that a multidimensional phenomenon such as violence cannot be explained only with allusions to patriarchal and sexist culture and that other viable explanations need to be addressed. The scope of this theoretical task is far different from providing any new sociological or psychological explanation of violence; in other words, my goal is not to argue about why men or women commit violent acts. My aim is to show that although at a level of public discourse, interpersonal violence is simplified with the notion of GBV, the complexity of violent dynamics can be recuperated by looking at interdisciplinary knowledge that is already available.

1 Violence: A Reflection on Complexity and Partiality of Theories

Violence is one of most debated concepts, whose copious definitions and categorisations differ in so far as how violence is assimilated or related to force, power, intentionality, harmful consequences, violation, coercion/imposition, and abuse (Audi 1971; Bufacchi 2005; DeFrancisco 1997; Kilby 2013; Nielsen 1981; Sarat et al. 2011). Perhaps a less problematic understanding of violence is one that vaguely defines it as intentional and physically harmful acts (World Health Organization 2014).[1] However, this approach is blind to existing reflections on the concept at large as well as reflections developed along the trajectories of psychological, cultural, structural, symbolic, and political violence (Arendt 1970; Galtung 1990; Bourdieu and Thompson 1991; Žižek 2009).

For example, one could draw from Plato's understanding of violence as an action that renders a person 'less perfect, where this means disrupting the inner harmony of the soul which enables one to function effectively as a rational being' (Holmes 1971, p. 112); Gandhi reads violence as an imposition of will on others (Gandhi and Mukherjee 1993); Potter as 'a violation of a character's physical or emotional well being' (Potter 1999, p. 80);

Galtung believes that there is violence whenever 'human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations' and theorises on violence acted by 'aspects of culture [. . .] that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence' (1990, p. 291); Nussbaum defines violence as a possible consequence of objectification, which is to say the negation of one's humanity (subjectivity and autonomy), a situation when 'the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into' (1995, p. 257); Zoja believes that 'violence is inherent to the human being, an archetype, an expression of the drives for life and death at the same time' (2009, p. 7, my translation). The list could be endless.

In light of this complexity, I suggest a consideration of violence as a multifaceted phenomenon with several possibilities of expression which embody some sort of destructiveness, not necessarily physical, but expanding to the detriment of one's integrity and capacity to realise his/her potential.

From different fields of knowledge multiple efforts have been made to explain why people commit violence; several theses have been developed mainly by looking at violence within or across specific categories or groups (e.g. race, gender, age), by stressing some of the different phenomena of violence (institutional, structural, interpersonal), and by looking at violent behaviour either as innate in human nature or as exceptionally deviant (DeKeseredy and Perry 2006). As a result, individuality of the violent subjects and situational analysis can be overshadowed in theories that emphasise the role of social structure and culture. Can the social environment alone determine whether an individual will kill? Certainly not. In this stream there is the classical sociology of deviance theorised by Emile Durkheim (1963), Robert K. Merton (1978), Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1969), who looked at the role of the social prescriptions, institutional (dis)organisation, and value systems, as factors of criminal behaviour. For them, violence is a by-product of poverty, social inequality, and deteriorated environments, where social norms and moral regulations are lacking. A similar stream is one of sociocultural theories, which emphasise the influence of cultural codes and practices in the expression of violent behaviour (Bandura 1978; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). In this perspective, individuals learn violence as a normal way of behaving, which is then accepted, tolerated, or even encouraged in one's the social group.

On the contrary, if violence were explained only by looking at interpersonal behaviours in a perspective of stimulus-response, at impulses,

instincts and body constitution, the social and cultural dimension of humankind would be wrongly ignored. This caveat may occur in psychoanalytic, biological, and behavioural approaches as long as the external context is not taken into account. For example, it would be incomplete to affirm that violence is a mere psychological or neurological act that occurs as a reaction to frustration and actions of other subjects and the victim (Dollard 1939; Steiner 2009). It is also partial to maintain that aggression is instrumental only if it occurs after an evaluation of rewards and costs (Archer 2007). Partial also can be psychoanalytic theories that explain violence with pathologies and personality disorders (e.g. narcissism) that originate in childhood (Cheliotis 2011; Yakeley and Meloy 2012).

Therefore, violence is a phenomenon that requires explanations with an intellectual approach that accounts for the interdisciplinary and multidimensional nature of violence, one that acknowledges the coexistence and interconnection of physical/biological, social, cultural, psychological, and situational dimensions of violence and looks at the specificity of certain types of violence (e.g. DV, violence against the elderly, war and terrorism, etc.) while maintaining a comprehensive gaze towards the comprehensive phenomenon of violence (Collins 2009, 2013; Daly and Wilson 1988; Kilby 2013; Walby 2013).

The same problem of partiality permeates those theories that have attempted to explain sexual and IPV against women, by including these types of violence in a specific subgroup, which is either VAW or GBV. In other words, theories that treat violence experienced by female victims as a specific ad-hoc type of violence are to be treated and understood in a different way than other forms of violence (Felson 2002). From this vantage point, VAW is explained as a pillar and product of a patriarchal society and sexist culture, more precisely as a phenomenon originating in and functioning to maintain the normative relationship between men and women, characterised by inequality and fixed paths of socialisation (Dobash and Dobash 1998). It is argued that men and women learn and accept throughout their life normative gendered identities and roles that are culturally and socially imposed or encouraged: women establish their femininity as submissive whereas men are encouraged to be assertive and use physical force to produce action (Danna 2007; Messerschmidt 1993; Ventimiglia 2006). Therefore it is suggested that VAW could decrease along with more balanced gender roles, that is to say, with an enhanced status of women that male violence increases in reaction to

shifting gender power relations and women's assertion of a better social status and more independence (Gartner et al. 1990; Pitch 2008).

It is important to acknowledge that gender theories of VAW entrench a feminist view of society, a perspective that reads social facts in relation to the gendered organisation of society with the assumption that women are the disadvantaged gender in terms of power and freedom. The aspect that renders this vantage point different from other viable theories of interpersonal violence is that certain types of violent acts, precisely acts experienced by women (as well as identities who are challenging heterosexual normativity such as homosexual, queer, and transgendered communities), are explained with an interpellation of the conceptual category of gender; where the biological and cultural sex of victim and aggressor is considered a cause of violence.

Dutton and Nicholls clearly summarise the argument advanced by theories on VAW when they state:

> This theory views all social relations through the prism of gender relations and holds, in its neo-Marxist view, that men (the bourgeoisie) hold power advantages over women (the proletariat) in patriarchal societies and that all domestic violence is either male physical abuse to maintain that power advantage or female defensive violence, used for self protection. The feminist paradigm supports the notion that domestic violence is primarily a culturally supported male enterprise and that female violence is always defensive and reactive. (2005, pp. 683–684)

These theories are problematic and raise several critiques mainly revolving around their specialty, partiality, and ideological origin. In this regard, I find paramount the work of American Professor of Criminology and Sociology Richard Felson. His main point is that VAW should be understood as violence first, rather than sexism. He argues that

> the [gender] perspective fails to recognise that the control motive plays a role in other types of violence as well. It fails to recognise that men assault women for a variety of reasons, often for the same reasons they attack men. Social relationships produce conflict regardless of gender, and that conflict sometimes results in violence. One should not assume that a special explanation is required when men hit women. The study of violence against women belongs under the study of violence, not gender. (2002, p. 4)

Felson also questions the axiom of power underpinning feminist theories of violence according to which violence is acted because of an inequality in power between genders, and therefore acted by the powerful subject against the powerless. Felson on the contrary says that

> Power is a characteristic of the relationships between people, rather than a characteristic of individuals. As a result, power in one sphere of life does not necessarily transfer into other spheres. (2002, p. 52)

Felson warns that we cannot apply the same reasoning to power that we do with race and socioeconomic status and suggests looking at gender relationships in terms of interdependence rather than power in so far as

> Women tend to be more economically dependent, but men may have as much emotional dependence and greater sexual dependence. Men need women at least as much as women need men, and much of what men do is to attract women. Men's and women's dependence on each other and their attempts to impress each other are not characteristic of other group relations. (2002, p. 52)

Another important contribution to the current critique of gender theory of violence comes from Italian sociologist Consuelo Corradi. Her position is more moderate than the one of Felson. Corradi indeed maintains that VAW should be studied as a particular form of gendered violence, but at the same time she argues that gender and power are not sufficient categories to make sense of the horrifying inhumanity of violence (Corradi 2009, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). She disagrees with classical sociology that reads the violent individual as a rational subject acting in order to obtain a precise goal. She, on the contrary, offers an explanation that links individual action (determined by thoughts and emotions) with cultural influences of collectivity (Corradi 2009).

She also questions the pertinence of patriarchy in the theory of GBV, which in her opinion, is presented by feminist theories as an immutable model rather than a model that can be eventually overcome (Corradi 2011). Corradi wonders whether Italian society can still be considered broadly patriarchal and thus whether one can still explain VAW as a product of male power. In light of progress and improved status for women, as well as with the radical cultural change achieved by the feminist movement, why is VAW still in place and is even more prevalent in

countries with a smaller gender gap (Stamatel 2014)? Corradi suggests that the equation of power/violence is no longer plausible in Italy today in so far as it fails to grasp important changes in women's status and masculine identity over the last 40 years. Maintaining that men as a social class indulge in violence to defend their power advantage over women is, according to Corradi, a theoretical position that does not offer any kind of heuristic vantage (Corradi 2011). Let us clarify that Corradi does not claim that in Italy patriarchal culture is fully uprooted; she argues that patriarchy is not the dominant relational model and therefore it would be anachronistic to continue to interpret contemporary violence, with a theoretical lens that developed in a very different and specific social context in the past (Corradi 2009).

Corradi offers an alternative to the patriarchal explanation of VAW: she suggests looking at today's forms of violence through the triple lens of power, identity, and modernity. She speculates that violence is 'a fight for symbolic resources of identity' a response to the need for restructuring identity in an historical time characterised by the weakening of traditional forms of identity such as the National State, social classes, and sexual differences (Corradi 2009, p. 33 my translation). She suggests that committing violence offers individuals the possibility of belonging to an ideological community.

Finally, another interesting vantage point to see the breaches of a feminist theory of violence is to look at IPV in couples where gender roles are far from normative and the coincidence of biological sex and gender is displaced through alternative sexual practices. In this regard, the literature on violence in same-sex couples reveals that the prevalence and modality of violence is similar to heterosexual couples (Ristock 2002; Stiles-Shields and Caroll 2014; Burke and Follingstad 1999).

In conclusion, I maintain that although gender theories offer a critical point that positions power and the cultural representation of men and women as encouraging and normalising violent behaviour, these theories alone are not enough. Gender is almost never the only causative factor of violence and there are indeed cases of VAW where gender is not pertinent. On the contrary, as suggested by sociological and psychological literature on violence, variegate factors should be looked at in any attempt to define violent phenomena, not excluding VAW: factors like relational dynamics, stress (frustration), emotions, psychological disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, family history, social pressure, cultural conditioning, values and traditions, and so on (Bates et al. 2014; Collins 2009; Costa et al. 2015; Kimmel 2002; Salerno and Giuliano 2012; Straus 2008).

Notwithstanding many critical points, gender theories of violence stemming from feminist theorisations of power and control have infused a 'new social work ideology' which rejects other behavioural theories that, according to feminist voices, risk blaming the female victim (Bumiller 2009, p. 67). Feminist views have also become mainstreamed in public debates and institutional policies at national and supranational levels as well as several areas of academia, resulting in the assumption of VAW as a specific ad-hoc type of violence with a gender origin, an assumption taken as given in many sectors of society (Bates et al. 2014; Bumiller 2009; Comas d'Argemir 2015; Corradi 2014a; Kaladelfos and Featherstone 2014; Zalewski and Runyan 2013). The feminist movement, which is a pioneer and now hegemonic voice in the field of VAW, has certainly contributed to the normalisation of violence in the public imaginary that men and women occupy opposite gendered positions: men are the active aggressors and women are the passive victims (Haaken 2008).

2 Accumulation of Knowledge on VAW from a Feminist Perspective

As discussed in the previous chapter, knowledge is formed in local centres of power where texts and practices are produced, texts and practices in which concepts are defined, reiterated, and adapted across different discourses; this process entails the institutionalisation of meanings under new disciplines (Foucault 1970, 1986). Here I will examine where knowledge about GBV comes from and how it has been established and has accumulated over time.

Internationally, feminist movements have been the predominant producers of knowledge on women's suffering and have contributed significantly to creating and broadening the meaning of VAW, by challenging the dominant view of the time. For instance, in the twentieth century – when the general belief inherited from Freud was that sexual abuse is often a fantasy and does not cause trauma – instances of rape were understood narrowly as the physical penetration of male genitals into a female body, and social issues like prostitution were regarded as a moral issues rather than a violation of human integrity (for instance, women at the time campaigned against forced vaginal inspections of suspected prostitutes, framing the practice as a form of sexual violence) (Harrington 2010). Later, with the motto 'the personal is political', second wave feminists since the 1950s have exposed the pervasiveness of DV in people's everyday lives and made it worthy of academic investigations (Maynard 1998).

Since the 1970s, feminist advocates enabled discussions of rape to emerge from a culture of silence and redefined sexual violence as a cross-cultural practice of the reassertion of male power over women (Brownmiller 1975). The same logic that was applied to rape, viewing it as a sexist practice driven by male power, was later applied to explain other acts, including sexual harassment, prostitution, pornography, etc. (Jeffreys 2009; Kaye 2005). Undoubtedly this feminist public denouncement of the silent abuses suffered by women has heavily contributed to the cultural changes and social condemnation of male domination and violence (Connell 2005; Virgilio 2010; Willson 2010).

In Italy too, women's movements have been key in the establishment and definition of the discourses of VAW, framing DV and sexual violence as social problems to be eradicated by challenging patriarchal culture and the wider social acceptance of male domination of women (Creazzo 2008). This process first entailed challenging previous biological theories of crimes, a redefinition of VAW from an issue of morality (that women could avoid or repair) to an issue of crime and the parallel transformation of women from accused to victim (Simone 2010). Since the 1975 'Circeo massacre', where two young women were raped and tortured by three higher class descendants (in which one of the two women died), feminists strengthened their mobilisation against VAW, and especially focused on assisting women with legal advice during court trials, which were used as strategic symbolic milieus for social change (Creazzo 2008). In this first phase of mobilisation, feminists constructed sexual violence as a political issue and established it as a cause for public opinion. Rape at that time received more media attention that transformed into a national debate.

Soon after, different women's groups, including the communist Unione Donne Italiane (UDI), still one of the best known feminist organisations today, began work on a draft law to redefine rape as a crime against the individual, which until that point was considered a crime against morality; the draft provided that sexual violence in a domestic setting would also be considered a crime (Willson 2010). The feminist reform was rejected several times and only in 1996 did Italy have its first national law on sexual violence. However, the status of women was gradually improving and VAW was slowly socially (and legally) condemned in smaller ways. For instance, in 1981 cultural norms that considered honour an acceptable factor for a milder punishment of homicide, as well as things like the encouragement of a 'shotgun wedding' in instances of sexual assault, were abrogated.

In the 1980s feminist groups were the first to establish domestic abuse helplines (such as TelefonoRosa, which today is a nationally known NGO for women working in synergy with public institutions) and anti-violence centres (with more than a hundred across the country today) to provide abused women with legal and psychological counselling as well as temporary shelters. These power-knowledge centres have been key contributors to the discursive transformation of DV and partner abuse into an issue of gender violence. Likewise, anti-violence centres have been crucial hubs for policy making within the feminist movement, which in the 1990s redirected its strategy from earlier repressive approaches in court trials to a strategy based on lobbying in order to encourage the State's legislative action and financial support to tackle the problem (Creazzo 2008). Today these centres remain the principal source of information for media, institutions, and public opinion on the phenomenon of VAW in Italy. In fact, no systematic collection of data on DV and VAW is carried out at an institutional level and the information collected at a local level by judiciary institutions has yet to be systematised in any comprehensive database (Virgilio 2010).

The first large-scale attempt to quantify and describe the phenomenon of VAW at large dates back to 2006, when the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), founded by the Ministry of Equal Opportunity, conducted the first extensive telephonic survey fully dedicated to different forms of VAW, including psychological, physical, and sexual abuses (ISTAT 2008). The survey was conducted in collaboration with feminist anti-violence centres and reached 25,000 female respondents. The study concludes that, according to projections based on the data, nearly 7 million women in Italy have experienced physical or sexual abuse from men at least once in their lifetime. This result is alarming, and this figure is often reported again and again in the media. Yet important questions have been raised regarding the study's methodology that arrived at this number.[2] Fabio Nestola, director of research in the Italian federation for shared-parenting Fenbi, noticed that most of the questions in the survey revolved around psychological violence. For instance, negative comments about the woman's physical appearance, or her quality of cooking, comments that were not necessarily always derogatory or insulting, have been coded as acts of violence, even though respondents were not asked if they themselves would have considered those acts as violent. Other questions included acts with shockingly different levels of severity. For example, questions about experiences of physical and sexual violence ranged from the threat of being hit to attempted strangulation; from experiencing a

lack of sexual desire with a partner to rape. These were all coded as similar forms of violence within the studies final figure of 7 million women.

In conclusion, the available information on GBV is incomplete due to several factors. There has not been any systematic or continuous data collection by institutions and the methodology of current studies can be influenced by the ideological views of different interest groups conducting the research. That said, it is worth noting that both victims and researchers may interpret violence differently, particularly acts that researchers may identify as potential microaggressions, but the women themselves may not personally experience as problematic. Women are reluctant to report violence to the police due to the fear of not being believed, or of being blamed, along with a lack of confidence in the judiciary system and institutional capability to protect them after their report. As a result, the final representation of the phenomenon itself appears distorted.

Before turning attention to the theoretical fundamentals of GBV discourse, let me at this point digress and provide you with an historical snapshot of feminist movement in Italy, as well as a picture of contemporary feminist discourses that preceded and intertwines with the more recent 'femminicidio' narrative. This discussion will also help to contextualise the discourse on GBV in the specificity of Italian cultural and political environment.

3 Feminism in Italy

Literature on the history of feminism in Italy and internationally usually organises the movement around three stages, called 'waves' (Restaino and Cavarero 1999). 'First wave' feminism (1848–1918) was an emancipatory political movement mainly concerned with the concrete recognition that universal rights must be granted to women on the same basis as men. Feminist fights revolved around legal equality, paternity research and dignity for unmarried mothers, equal wage, safety around prostitution, and resistance against puritan morality on sexual topics (Galeotti 2009). Liberal feminists focused specifically on the right to vote, whereas social feminism focused on equality in the division of labour. A prominent stream was the so-called 'practical feminism' with a core interest in the recognition of maternal roles as socially valuable. Catholic feminism also emerged in opposition to universal suffrage and instead proposed the concept of a family vote (Willson 2010).

During the Fascist regime, Italian women were mainly mobilised in propaganda activities and social care, activities carried out through female fascist groups controlled by a male hierarchy. Liberal feminism, which was devalued as 'bourgeois' by communists, was annihilated. Only after the Second World War did female grass-roots groups emerge and redirect their concern from the right to vote (which was granted in 1946) to the status of women in family and society. Women's groups mainly belonged to the political Left: while the Communist party continued to frame the 'female question' as an issue of economic equality, the Socialist party engaged in acts like the abolishment of prostitution and divorce law. In 1944 UDI was established as an anti-fascist organisation by the Communist party and was used as a tool to spread the party's ideology among women (Willson 2010). UDI initially focused on discriminatory issues, the promotion of public childcare and the right to equal wage. After 1956 the bond with the Party eased and the organisation gained the highest visibility in 1975–1977 with mass mobilisation for liberalisation of abortion, reform of family law, and protests against the Catholic-promoted referendum for the abolishment of the divorce law introduced only in 1970 (Della Porta 2003).

The 'second wave' (1968–1980) brought the debate on the redefinition of gender roles, which evolved from the popularity of Simone de Beauvoir's seminal 1949 book *Le Deuxième Sexe* amongst middle-class European and US women, and was cemented in social movements that adopted women's sexual liberation as their core objective. de Beauvoir denounced the unique condition of women: universally submissive to men and at the same time bound together with their oppressor as two indispensable and complementary elements of their differences composing a fundamental social unity – the couple (De Beauvoir 1993). In this time period, the topic of VAW and sexual violence gained interest amongst Italian feminists who advocated for the State's protection of women adopting the popular motto 'the personal is political'.

According to Willson (2010), in this 'second wave' Italian feminists moved past the cautious approach of their predecessors and were more inclined to embrace radical ideas against all forms of male power. Urbanisation, increased female education, and significant changes in the private sphere were, according to Willson, major factors at the origins of the movement. Also, the publication of the seminal books by Anglophone feminists such as Betty Friedan *The Feminine Mystique* in 1965 and Australian feminist Germaine Greer *The Female Eunuch* in 1970 as well

as media attention on the American feminist mobilisation contributed to the popularisation of feminist ideas in Italy. However, very few Italian feminists (among these Carla Lonzi and UDI) overtly associated with the American idea that sexual difference is the root of women's subordination in that it traps women in patriarchal families that impede their personal realisations (Friedan 1965). In this view, women's liberation is to be realised first and foremost through the displacement of sexual activity from reproduction. On the other hand, the majority of Italian feminist groups were inspired by French thinkers who rejected the concept of equality and advocated for the recognition of differences (difference feminism) and the valorisation of the specificity of being female (Cavarero 1999; Gelli 2010; Muraro 2011; Richardson 1998).

A philosophy of difference was initiated by the French philosopher Luce Irigaray who urged society to overcome the 'phallogocentrism': a social order constructed around a public discourse that is not neutral but male and underpinned by the symbolic representation of women as a cavity (empty, lacking) (Irigaray 1985). Philosophy of difference stems from the observation that women and men are biologically different and that value is attributed to such difference: positive for the male pole and negative for the female. From there, the engagement of Italian feminism in the celebration of difference between sexes, by shedding light on positive characteristics that are ascribed to (all) women by nature: good mother, peaceful character, inclined to caring (Curti 1998; Cavarero 1992; Muraro 2006). Such operation, which, if taken to the extremes, becomes eco-feminism: a stream of thought that tends to idealise women as bearers of natural balance and men as prone to violence and authority (Echols 1984).

During the second wave major feminist milestones were achieved in Italy. In 1970, divorce was legalised followed by contraceptives in 1971. In 1975 equal rights for women and men were recognised by the marriage law, which also provided that the head of the household is not automatically a man. In the same year family planning clinics (*consultori* in Italian) were established by law, and in 1977 wage discrimination based on gender was abolished. After the divorce law was introduced in 1970 a feminist campaign for the legalisation of abortion began. However, some feminists disassociated from the campaign in that they thought that abortion would have encouraged a genital vision of sexuality in which male superiority would have been reaffirmed (Willson 2010). Finally, the legalisation of abortion was passed in 1978.

Around the end of the 1970s feminism began a transformation from a political and grass-roots movement to the form it takes today: as diffused groups engaged in publications, education, cultural awareness, as well as social services provision, groups organised in various networks around specific campaigns. The interests of feminist activities in this new phase were twofold: some focused on equal rights and positive incentives, others engaged in gender culture and subjectivities. This new phase is also referred to as the 'long wave' and is characterised by a progressive institutionalisation of women's groups, which interact with public bureaucracy, and the judiciary especially, and are involved in providing services for women (Della Porta 2003). Groups have evolved in resource centres, cooperatives, cultural centres, welfare services, anti-violence centres, NGOs, and charities, what I discussed in previous chapters as important centres of power-knowledge.

The State in this phase is no longer the enemy or the target of feminist groups but rather it has become its sponsor. Della Porta (2003) underlines that given that the relational modality with the state and access to public funds in Italy is typically based on a 'clientela' (clientele) and 'parentela' (family) modality, with the end of the Christian Democratic Party and the entrance of Left wing parties into the government, feminist groups could access public funds more easily and women's movement continued to 'depend' on their original ideological family (which was the Left). A parallel factor to the institutionalisation of feminism, according to della Porta, is the decentralisation of public administration since the mid-1980s with both conservative and liberal governments outsourcing welfare service to NGOs. Feminism entered the State in the 1990s with the establishment of Equal Opportunity Committee.

Since the 1990s feminism has increasingly diversified with the emergence of so-called 'third wave' streams, which are influenced by the post-structuralist approach to body identity, queer theory, postcolonial feminism, cybernetics, and media studies. Also, since the 1990s and precisely with the Gay Pride in 1994, lesbian participation became more visible in the feminist debate. These neo-feminist groups share the idea that categories of subject identity are socially constructed and can be broken down, starting from sex/gender displacement and refusing tout-court any reference to any natural order (essentialism). However, the 'gender' philosophy advocated by these groups has only recently gained validation in Italian academia, which instead has remained for a long time attached to the study of sexual difference as a source of power.

These new streams do not replace the previous approaches, which continue to float around in public discourse: on the contrary Italian feminism is heavily influenced by prominent voices of the 1970s and tensions between old and new generations, between libertarian and moralist attitudes, have always been a typifying marker of the movement. For example, in recent years there has emerged an affirmation of a moralist censorship attitude within a new critique on the sexist representation of women's bodies in the media, a discourse very similar to radical feminism in the United States during the 1980s anti-pornography war (Ottonelli 2011). At the same time we are also experiencing an unprecedented exposure of queer and gender transformative discourses, an important platform for which is that children should be introduced to a self-reflection on their own sexual orientation and gender at an early age (Amato 2013). While the chapter dedicated to the anti-gender discourse will focus on the latter gender discourse, let me at this point focus on the moral discourse of feminist discourse on media and women, which is tightly intertwined with the political context that forged the affirmation of the 'femminicidio' moral panic.

The feminist critique of the objectification of women in media and political culture emerged during a time of public disillusionment with Berlusconi's political ideology. A disillusionment that began earlier in 2007 when his wife Veronica Lario expressed in the newspaper *La Repubblica* her humiliation over her husband's flattering comments addressed to model Mara Carfagna (later Carfagna was appointed Ministry for Equal Opportunity). In 2009, when showgirls where presented as candidates for the European Union Parliament, Lario requested a divorce and depicted the political incidents as 'virgins offered to the dragon in exchange for success and notoriety... and because of an odd alchemy, the country allows his emperor to have anything' (Cepernich 2010).[3] In the following years more sexual scandals fuelled the national and international press and while a court of businessmen, TV entrepreneurs, and dancers travelled by tax-payer funded flights to attend orgiastic parties at Berlusconi's villas, Italy was being hit by a rampant economic crisis and a loss of international credibility (Colaprico 2011; Dei 2011).

In 2009 marketing consultant Lorella Zanardo launched a documentary and book titled *Il Corpo delle Donne* (The women's body), which was then popularised by SNOQ – *Se Non Ora Quando* (If Not Now, When?): a new feminist network of bourgeois women mainly composed of middle

class, intellectual, and leftist activists (Zanardo 2010). A landmark moment was the public call launched by Concita De Gregorio, Editor of *L'Unità*, the Democratic Party's newspaper. She urged good, upright, working women and mothers to stand up and determine the final deceit of the man responsible for the cultural degradation that reduced Italy to a brothel.[4] Soon after, on 13 February 2011, SNOQ debuted with 1 million women protesting against a sexist culture widely accepted in political institutions whose most notorious face was Berlusconi.

In my view, the very name of the group 'if-not-now-when' seems to mean 'if we don't get rid of him now, then when?' with SNOQ's discourse calling Berlusconi out as public enemy number one, as the representative of a chauvinist culture that discriminates against women. In such a system, gender power relations are constructed upon the exchange of male power signified by money/political positions with female power embodied by beauty/the body. This dynamic was certainly not invented by Berlusconi, but was normalised throughout his era in what journalist Guzzanti (2010) calls *Berlusconi's Mignottocrazia* ('Slut-ocracy'): an ideology, establishing that female sex appeal has political value with public jobs assigned according to sexual criteria.

At the time of SNOQ's debut, Ruby-gate (also known as the 'bunga bunga' scandal) was gaining traction in the national and international press. In short, Berlusconi was accused of organising orgiastic parties at his villas where one of participants was underage. Her name is Karima El Mahroug, better known in the press as 'Ruby the Heart Stealer'. Ruby was arrested for theft and Berlusconi ordered police to have her released, claiming that the girl was related to then President of Egypt, Mubarak. Only recently, in June 2013, was Berlusconi found guilty of abuse of office, along with paying for sex with underage girls, and condemned to 7 years in jail and banned from public office for life. However, the decision was appealed in July 2014 and Berlusconi was absolved. The absolution was confirmed by the Court of Cassation in 2015. However, more recently Berlusconi has been charged with paying bunga bunga girls to lie during their testimonies in the previous trial.

Berlusconi gradually lost consensus within his coalition and stepped down in November 2011, not because of sex scandals (officially) but because of the international economic crisis. At the time Italy was facing public debt at its highest with the risk of sovereign default, several firms were shutting down, and unemployment was rapidly increasing (11%). Berlusconi was asked to step down and allow Italy to be run by a leader who was respected and renowned at an international level. A temporary Government of technocrats led by the

economist Mario Monti took over. Monti was asked to put public finances back in order, tackle a rampant social crisis, and re-establish Italy's credibility abroad. The country was asked to wash away its former leader's shames by taking the route of discipline and righteousness. Italy found itself suddenly at the extreme opposite end of a political spectrum where one side was defined by sex parties and opulence and on the other end, an economic crisis and consequent fiscal and welfare crackdowns.

It is during this bridging time, while parties and civil movements were preparing for the upcoming elections in February 2013, that the discourse on VAW transformed into a national emergency of femicide. In 2011 a coalition of NGOs launched a national report on the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) where the topic of 'femminicidio' was brought to the attention of institutions. Mobilisations asking for the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating VAW and DV (the Istanbul Convention) were organised and 'technocrats' served as better interlocutors for feminist demands than the previous Berlusconi government.[5]

As observed by philosopher Valeria Ottonelli, SNOQ's discourse framed these events in a moralist way. The focus was on Berlusconi and his mistresses 'private' sexual conduct, rather than on the public relevance of his conduct: public security forces were used for the Prime Minister's private entertainment and his sex obsession developed into an employee selection mechanism based on personal favours rather than on skills and capabilities (Ottonelli 2011). SNOQ's discourse is moralist because it reworks the old virgin/whore dichotomy, appealing to 'true' Italian women, who are mothers, hard workers, 'good' women, to stand up against 'bad' women, like those who use their body to get favours from Berlusconi. For its moralist and divisive discourse affirming superiority of the victimised female gender, SNOQ discourse was heavily criticised by many other sectors of the feminist movement.

4 Gender-Based Violence. A Very Flexible Category

One of the main problems with the discourse on VAW/GBV is that the category has expanded dramatically over time to the extent that precise boundaries between what is violence and what is not, what is gendered and what is agendered violence, are hardly definable. In fact, through civil mobilisations, the production of copious literature of Women/Gender Studies and the establishment of social services for women and children as well as national and international gender institutions, different deviant

acts such as rape and non-consensual sex, psychological domination, harassment, domestic battering, intimate homicides, serial murders, and even prostitution and pornography have all converged under the umbrella terms of VAW and GBV (Dutton and Nicholls 2005; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2010; Jenkins 1992). Whereas VAW's meaning was, until the 1980s, limited to 'men's violence against their partners in the form of rape, assault and murder', in the 1990s it gradually intersected with a frame of gender discrimination and has expanded to include a variety of human rights violations including harmful traditional cultural practices (e.g. female genital mutilation/cutting), abuses by public officers, prostitution, sexual harassment, violation of reproductive rights, honour killings, female feticide, and infanticide (Merry 2005, p. 21).

The underlying argument of feminist positions on VAW is that all male violence originates in the unequal distribution of power among genders, which is prescribed in patriarchal society and maintained by its institutions, social organisations (including family), and culture (including symbols) through normative rigid hetero-normative identities, roles, and relations (Berns 2001; Dutton and Nicholls 2005; Magaraggia and Cherubini 2013). In other words, it maintains that the structural discrimination of women in patriarchal society provides the basis, individually and socially, for male violence. Some of many possible declinations of such a central thought are the following: men perpetrate violence to mark their power, or as a consequence of their loss of power; battering of women as well as rape and sexual exploitation originate in an antiquated function of marriage of 'buying' or 'owning' a wife and is normalised by a sexist culture that encourages men to feel entitled to dispose the female body for their pleasure and to reaffirm their (violent and sex-driven) masculinity; a women's body represents to men a battle ground to be conquered and invaded; men worldwide kill women because of misogynist culture; women internalise their inferior status and their destiny as victims where the internalisation of male thought has reached the point where men are convinced that they themselves enjoy violence (Jeffreys 2009; McClintock 1993; Pitch 2008; Radford and Russell 1992).

Furthermore, this thought has been stretched to the extent that any gender norm or sexed identity attached to the subject and to the relational modality between the subjects is read as a form of discrimination, thus violence. In other words, violence based on sexism is seen as normative in a patriarchal and heterosexual society. In Rich's words, the imposition of gender identity is at the basis of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1981).

Similarly, Wittig (1992) theorises that sexual identity is just a marker imposed on the human body to justify male domination; in this vein, she sees the imposition of being 'straight' as a form of violence originating in social structures (Crowder 2007). Butler (1990) reads heterosexuality as the device that normalises patriarchy. It follows that violence is embedded in the very structure of society, which constructs women and men with dominant femininity and masculinity, which in turn entails heterosexuality.

According to French philosopher Irigaray, the main inspiration for the Italian feminism of difference, the very origin of sexism (thus violence) resides in the 'phallogocentric' social order underpinned by a symbolic representation of women as a lacking cavity (Irigaray 1985). Similarly, radical American feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon go further with maintaining that heterosexual intercourse itself is violence, its paradigm is rape and its representation is pornography (Dworkin 1981, 1987; MacKinnon 1989a; 1989b). They theorise pornography as a visual representation of heterosexual intercourse, which in their view is the situ where the inferior status of women originates, a male invasion/colonisation of women's body (Dworkin 1987; MacKinnon 1989a; 1989b).

A similar view equating heterosexuality with violence is shared by the Italian feminist Carla Lonzi who theorised the vaginal orgasm as a cultural imposition on women for the pleasure of the patriarchy (Lonzi 1974). In the early 1970s she argued that heterosexuality is a pillar of patriarchy, is functional to the sexual pleasure of men only, while a feminist (the liberated woman who is empowered with the awareness of her clitoral orgasm) does not need a man and can stand up against the systematic colonisation of her body by the penis (Lonzi 1974, pp. 72, 84, 90).

This semantic expansion of VAW upholds a radical constructivist paradigm, which emphasises the cultural dimension of human identity, oversimplifies gender roles as mere cultural impositions, and denies the intertwined role of anatomy and culture in constructing human identity (Ruspini 2009). From this vantage point, it is possible to maintain that any meaning characterised by the gendered representation of women is a patriarchal construction of women as lacking, inferior, and hetero-normative (Cameron and Frazer 1987; Echols 1984). Therefore, representation itself is discrimination. Therefore, it is violence. As a result, all acts within the broad signifier GBV are by-products of male construction of human knowledge and femicide – which implies physical destruction of female beings – is placed under the same umbrella with pornography and sexist representation of female bodies.

This paradigmatic relation between the real and the symbolic orders is the theoretical rationale of feminist crusade for reforming sexist language, erasing gender stereotypes in media and regulating the visual representation of women's bodies (Eggins and Iedema 1997; Dworkin 1981; Macharia et al. 2011). In this vein, markers of sexed identity and role difference are not understood as a product of the anthropological process of development of humankind in which culture and biology are interlocked (Echols 1984; Garfinkel 1967; Greer 1999). On the contrary, markers of sexed identity are understood in terms of inequality and discrimination, are regarded as fruits of the biological ideology and as gender stereotypes that should be erased in order to free the individual from the natural constraint of sexual differentiated bodies and personalities (Crowder 2007; Poidimani 2006).

To sum up, a certain GBV discourse, influenced by social constructivism and radical feminism, assumes that the very nature of women/men relationships in patriarchal society are violent, in that they reproduce dominance of one sex over the other, of one dominant masculinity or femininity on the others. It infers that violence, whenever it is perpetrated by men against women, is committed because of male will of control and should be approached separately from other kinds of aggressions in virtue of the victim/aggressor's gender (Bates et al. 2014). With Bumiller's words, the GBV discourse affirms 'the notion that all acts of violence against women should primarily be seen as an assault on their gender identity' (2009, p. 21).

Although there are different variations amongst feminist views on possible motives of male violence, common denominators of feminist elaborations on violence are mainly two. First, there is a focus on VAW, as a specific phenomenon analysed as a different type from other forms of violence: as soon as the perpetrator is male and the victim is female, the act of violence is understood with ad-hoc explanations which build on feminist critique of (male) power. The second point is that the GBV discourse highlights social and cultural factors of violence while the violent subject and his relational dynamics with the victim subject fall outside the focus. This angle enables the relocation of acts of violence committed by men and received by women out of the realm of individual psychological and behavioural dynamics to the cultural/political domain (Haaken 2008). Or, better said, violent behaviour (of men) is read in light of structural gender inequality, oppression of women and sexist culture. The GBV discourse affirms that men are violent towards women intentionally for

the sake of controlling and re-establishing male superiority against women's violation of patriarchal gender norms, and that this behaviour is culturally encouraged or accepted.

5 The Discourse of VAW Spoken by the State and the Media

Discourse travels and is appropriated by different actors, who in their own production of knowledge reinterpret and modify contents according to their interests. Let me briefly discuss in this section how discourse of VAW is circulated by political élites and in the media, and finally how feminist discourse criticises media representations of VAW.

Across the globe political élites have contributed to the discourse on VAW to mobilise consensus on a variety of domestic and international political manoeuvres, such as the fight against prostitution and trafficking, limitation of freedom of speech, security and ethnic policies, anti-immigration and trafficking policies, wars, and so forth (Cuklanz and Moorti 2009; Isgro et al. 2013; Nayak and Suchland 2006; Weitzer 2007). Feminist claims are not reproduced in public discourse purely in their original version but rather they intersect with political ideologies such as nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, neo-liberalism, and development. Similarly, the social problem of violence suffered by women is distorted in its dimensions, phenomenology, and causes through exaggeration and sensationalist tones as well as through an entanglement with discourses on ethnicity, national identity, democracy, security, and human rights (Baden and Goetz 1997; Hooks 1984, 2000; Eisentein 1997; Enloe 2000, 2007; Volčič and Erjavec 2013).

In this vein, Kristin Bumiller (2009) highlights how the feminist discourse on sexual violence has been institutionalised in the United States since 1970 and become an important part of the rhetoric and organisation of the therapeutic state. She reads the affirmation and marketisation of the discourse of VAW and its apparatus as a result of different agendas that have merged: a feminist agenda on changing common assumptions about rape and blaming the victim with a state agenda of control of criminality and biocontrol (Bumiller 2009, p. 19). The mingling of feminist discourse and institutional agendas is also the focus of Carol Harrington's (2010) work on the politicisation of sexual violence. She uncovers how the feminist discourse of GBV and VAW has been used in international (and domestic) politics to pursue interests of power. In particular she analyses how rape as

a societal problem has been redefined by feminist voices and international organisations since the Second World War. Like Bumiller, Harrington also underscores the cross-contamination of discourse on VAW with a liberalism and civil/human rights framework. Collection edited by Riley et al. (2008) shows how feminist discourse on VAW has been used to pursue political projects whose priorities are different than liberating women from suffering and how feminist discourse is used to support the cause of war with the rhetoric of the need to protect women's rights in foreign countries. Collected essays foreground 'the complicities of some US feminisms and the politics of "rescue" in US wars' and 'the camouflaging of women's rights by imperial states to provide alibis for war and for torture' (Riley et al. 2008, p. 11).

In Italy the topic of VAW often mingles with discourses on immigration and security, and is used by political parties to gather consensus rather than organically support women's genuine participation in public life (Creazzo 2008; Giomi 2010; Pitch 2010; Simone 2010). A case in point is the moral panic surrounding reports of foreign men raping Italian women, a panic which started in 2007 when Giovanna Reggiani was raped and murdered by a Romani man. Giomi and Tonello (2013), through a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of television 2006 coverage showed that the public discourse of VAW was typified by an externalisation of violence along race/ethnic lines which dovetailed with an anti-immigration rhetoric that functioned to enforce public security measures and to create consensus around Right-xenophobic politics. Indeed, the crime itself and the subsequent racist attacks against Romani settlements were widely reported in the media and framed with an antiquated portrayal of women as 'sexually vulnerable objects in need of (white) masculine protection' (Woodcock 2010, p. 470). This particular discourse surrounding the incident served to strengthen the power of Ministry of Interior to expel foreign citizens from the country and to raise consensus around unrelated national security policies presented along ethnic lines by the right-wing coalition during the 2008 elections campaign (Woodcock 2010).

The role of media in the amplification of one specific event with many possible representations of the same social issue, where representations reflecting the discourse of one or another interest groups, cannot be disregarded (Hall 1981; Gusfield 1963). For example, feminists groups and scholars working in the field of 'Women and Media' internationally lament that the media lacks an integration of feminist principles in their

representation of women in society, and urge for the adoption of gender-sensitive reporting (Gallagher 2001; Macharia et al. 2011; Murgia 2011). In the specific domain of VAW media coverage, feminists presents two main arguments: firstly that the media fails in exposing the structural/cultural nature of GBV and secondly that VAW coverage and certain representations are detrimental for women's overall image, as female subjects are either victimised or blamed (Makombe 2009; Thornham 2007). On the other hand, other interest groups such as men's rights movements, lament that media places too much emphasis on VAW with the result that the phenomenon of DV is only partially illuminated where men are repeatedly criminalised and women are depicted as holy victims.

Gender and media studies concur that media heavily distorts the phenomenon of VAW, and more broadly, the phenomenon of violence in society. Distortions seem to be realised mainly through narratives that underpin a combination of exceptionality and dualism (Carter and Weaver 2003). First of all, it needs to be noted that everyday violence does not make news, nor do all those acts that can be called violence if we apply the broad definition of violence suggested earlier (that includes psychological and cultural forms of violence and intimidations). Violence is more likely to make the news when it is statistically extraordinary, it is a crime which is reported to the police, it is physical and cruel and/or it results in a death, it embeds some tragedy, it is about sex, or when the victim is a woman and the perpetrator is a man (Carll 2003; Carter 1998; Meyers 1997).

Secondly, because of the perceived newsworthiness of exceptional events, while men are those more likely to be murdered (generally by other men), media tend to emphasise cases where victims are women and aggressors are men, where the picture we get from media is that women are the most vulnerable (Stanko 1990). Emphasis is also given to acts of violence committed by strangers, such as rape and homicide, which are less frequent than DV and IPV. DV is generally perceived as 'misdemeanour', thus not as newsworthy as the type of crime perpetrated by a stranger (Carll 2003, p. 1604; Carter 1998; Meyers 1997). As a consequence, women are induced to fear for their security more in public spaces than in their home (Schlesinger, P. 1992; Stanko 1990; Stewart 2002). Exceptionality is not only a parameter of news values but also a recurrent attribute in reporting on violence. This is observed, for example, in the portrayal of men who use violent traits of masculinity in a socially unjustifiable fashion as non-humans, deviants, or monsters (Consalvo 2003).

In general, male perpetrators and female victims are represented by stereotyped opposites. This emerges clearly in sexual violence coverage, where the two possible relations are a man who uses the socially ascribed violent traits of masculinity in a socially unjustifiable fashion and thus becomes a deviant or monster, while the victim is a pure, innocent woman, representing the imaginary of a 'madonna'. The second possible relation sees a masculine, lustful, naturally sex-driven man who assaults a provocative, sexy, beautiful woman who fit in the imaginary of 'whore', fulfilling the madonna/whore archetype (Benedict 1992; Consalvo 2003). In physical partner violence, usually narrated as a crime of passion, the perpetrator is typically a jealous man whose pride has been wounded by a rebellious woman, a woman who does not comply enough with the social expectations of a submissive spouse, and is thus punished (Carll 2003).

Going back to previously discussed feminist critiques of media portrayal of VAW, feminists advocate to stop talking about VAW as an exceptional fact, a raptus, a crime of passion, and start adopting the feminist frame: VAW as a worldwide social problem rooted in patriarchy, an expression of male power, to be condemned not because it is violence per se but because it is a specific form of violence, which is systematically perpetrated against half of the population, as a tool of oppression. The second feminist critique against media coverage of VAW revolves around the role of victim and includes two main demands: women are not to be victimised yet there is a need to expose the pervasiveness of male VAW, and women are always innocent victims who must not be blamed (for a discussion on the difference between blaming and understanding causes; see Felson 1991). Literature on gender and media underscores that women worldwide are more likely than men to be portrayed as victims and this is a situation that women's empowerment advocates urge to overcome through a more varied representation of women's roles and identities. On the other hand, although Eisentein argues that feminism is held 'hostage by the mass media's packaging' and the victimisation of women is not 'a chosen politics' (1997, p. 40), it is undeniable that feminism itself is also responsible for representations of the victimisation of women (Robson 2011; Talbot 2005).

In regard to the feminist demand for the eradication of the media's habitual blaming of victims, theorists and activists have put much effort towards advancing the public's perception of women victims and abused children, who in the past were blamed for provoking the violence they

suffered (Benedict 1992; Berns 2001; Maier 2012; Romito 2008; Ryan 1976). In my view, such an endeavour to eradicate blaming the victim has taken a pernicious path with more recent discussions on date rape, whereby to overcome the impossibility to draw precise boundaries between what is consensual and not consensual sex, female sexuality is framed as passive, in need of being protected against woman's own contradictory wills and irresponsible conduct (e.g. if women decide to take large amounts of drugs and alcohol) by phlegmatic men, who will be punished by law whenever they yield to women's flirtations (Franke 2001).

Although in Italian popular and judiciary culture, the tendency to blame female victims is still present, especially in cases of sexual crimes, it seems to me that the feminist demand for political correctness is transforming victims into inscrutable subjects: her history, her behaviours, must be covered under a veil protected from public scrutiny. In so doing, polarised gendered stereotypes discussed earlier are confirmed: in the public imaginary violence remains a male characteristic.

I suggest overcoming this impasse by questioning the reasoning at the basis of the 'tabooisation' of victim blaming, which works by articulating victim's responsibility with merited punishment (merited according to moral prescriptions). Instead, by following Hannah Arendt (2003) and Richard Felson (1991), we can honestly look at how victim's behaviour may contribute to cause a violent response (e.g. problematic assessment of risks, abuse of drugs and alcohol) while at the same time condemning violent acts. By dismantling the responsibility/punishment articulation, we can encourage education on both risk assessment and self-defence, without the need to raise fear. Fear being a powerful device of social control and an obstacle for (women) empowerment.

As noted by Felson the problem with the 'blaming the victim' argument rests on the very formulation of the gender theory of VAW discussed earlier, according to which men use violence as a 'means to an end' to control women (2002, p. 28). This view of instrumental violence does not take into consideration behavioural theories that show that aggression is often a reaction to frustration or a poor coping mechanism for strong emotions (Betsos et al. 2010). Interestingly, feminist discourse on DV/IPV emphasises this possibility only in cases of women who kill their abusive partners because of emotional and physical stress endured in previous traumas (Belknap et al. 2012; Lehrner and Allen 2008; Walker 2009).

6 Conclusions

In this chapter I tried to show how a new category of GBV has been foregrounded through the accumulation of knowledge produced from a feminist perspective. More precisely, I explained how the concept of gender, which far from being commonly defined remains controversial and instable, has been mainstreamed in feminist and institutional readings of IPV/DV and VAW. While the gender framework highlights the typical power position of (male) aggressors and (female) victims, other viable knowledge on the broader phenomenon of violence is deselected in the process of discourse making. Let us for example consider the deselection of emotional, behavioural, situational and social status, modalities of violence, and instances where the victims of IPV/DV are male and aggressors are female. All of these neglected elements are characteristics of interpersonal violence that are in fact studied by sociology, criminology, and psychology. This topic will unfold in following chapters, and particularly in the final chapter, which is dedicated to the emerging discourse of violence by women. In the next chapter, let me first turn the gaze to the Italian case to demonstrate how the 'femminicidio' moral panic has played a role in normalising the gender framework.

Notes

1. The WHO definition of violence, restricted to interpersonal violence, is: 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation' (p. 2).
2. For a methodological critique of surveys on VAW undertaken in other countries I would suggest the following readings: Elisabeth Badinter (2006); Christina Hoff Sommers (1994); McElroy (2016).
3. Cresto-Dina, D. (2009, 3 May). Veronica, addio a Berlusconi. 'Ho deciso, chiedo il divorzio'. *La Repubblica Online*. Retrieved from http://www.repubblica.it/2009/04/sezioni/politica/elezioni-2009-2/veronica-divorzio/veronica-divorzio.html (accessed 30 September 2015).
4. De Gregorio, C. (2011, 19 January). Esistono altre donne. *L'Unità online*. Retrieved from http://www.unita.it/donne/dove-siete-donne-diciamo-ora-basta-firma-br-oltre-37mila-firme-perina-costa-dante-forte-1.266963 (accessed 21 January 2016).

5. The three winning political parties out of the national election of February 2013 were the Centre-left coalition Democratic Party PD led by Pierluigi Bersani, the Centre-Right coalition People of Freedom led by Berlusconi, and the civil movement *Cinque Stelle* (Five Stars) led by the former comedian Beppe Grillo. Since no political party won an outright majority in the Senate, a grand coalition government was established. Enrico Letta (PD) was appointed Prime Minister and he was replaced 1 year later by Matteo Renzi (PD).

CHAPTER 4

Femminicidio Narrative: A Gender Discourse of Partner Violence Across Feminist Crusades and Electoral Speeches

This chapter is dedicated to understanding how the 'femminicidio' narrative shapes and defines the public imaginary of DV and IPV. I read this narrative as a moral crusade initiated by feminist groups to bring attention to VAW and gender issues, a discourse later appropriated by political élites and recontextualised into an electoral domain. In discussing this argument, I will focus on the particular linguistic strategies used by activists and political representatives to construct 'femminicidio' as a national emergency. Moreover, I will specifically address how this so-called emergency intertwines with a political discourse of progress, one that argues the necessity for State action thus mobilising consensus for those political candidates pledging to fight against VAW. Next, I will illuminate the gender discourse embedded in the 'femminicidio' narrative and more precisely how femicide and VAW is framed as phenomena rooted in patriarchal culture through associated linguistic and visual representations. But first of all, let me begin by tracing a semantic picture of the term 'femminicidio' itself.

1 'Femminicidio': Feminist Origin, Complex Semantics, and 'Femminicidio' Made in Italy

'Femminicidio' in English can be generally translated as 'femicide' and 'feminicide'. The first term femicide conveys two different connotations according to whether it is used as a neutral or political term. In the first

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case, femicide simply means homicide of a female, it does not imply any syndication of causes, modalities, or context of the murder, it simply exposes the sex of the murdered subject while the crime can be perpetrated by either males or females. For example, one can have an intimate femicide when it occurs between partners, a suicide-femicide, when the killer commits suicide, or a female femicide when the crime is perpetrated by a female murderer (Dixon et al. 2008; Glass et al. 2004; Muftić and Baumann 2012; Richards et al. 2014; Sela-Shayovitz 2010).

The political meaning of femicide is different in that it implies that the murder is committed for motivations ascribable to the victim's gender. In this sense femicide is defined by the United Nations as 'the killing of women and girls because of their gender' (International Council of Women 2013). The political use of femicide can be dated back as early as 1976, in a speech by feminist social psychologist Diana Russell at the first International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels (Radford and Russell 1992; Russell and Van De Ven 1976). Her intention was to reveal the 'sexual politics of murder' of women in particular: 'from the burning of witches in the past, to the more recent widespread custom of female infanticide in many societies, to the killing of women for "honour"' (Russell and Van De Ven 1976, p. 104). In other words, femicide is discussed as the murder of women simply because they are women: as murders committed because of the inferior position of women in patriarchal society.

In Italy, femicide has been translated approximately since the 1990s with the two different but similar terms 'femicidio' and 'femmicidio'. These two terms have been used in Italian feminist circles and specific academic publications to stress the gendered dimension of crimes against women that, in the public and legal discourse, were named as uxoricide and homicides (Casa delle Donne di Bologna 2013). However, these previous terms never erupted in the public and media discourse with the same frequency and fervour as the newer neologism 'femminicidio' has. Indeed, through a keyword search in Factiva (2005–2013) I found only 23 and 27 media items mentioning the earlier terms and 5,975 items reporting the latter.

Also in the 1990s, Latin American activists popularised the term 'femicide' with the Spanish translation of 'feminicidio' (in English feminicide). These activists sought to bring national and international attention to the 'mass murders' of hundreds of working women in the border town Ciudad Juarez (Mexico), a 'peculiar VAW, a violence wherein organised crime and Juarez's political and economic powers converge' (González

2012, p. 73).[1] In this case, women were harassed while working in factories, abducted in the street, kidnapped, tortured, raped, and/or killed, with their bodies disappearing altogether or occasionally found in the isolated Mexican desert (Corona and Domínguez 2010; Kozma 2003). These misogynist homicides occurred in a very specific social context marked by the power of narcotraffic and institutional impunity, internal migration of workers encouraged by neo-liberalist trade agreements and a sexist culture in which financially emancipated women are considered dirty (Connell 2013; González 2012; Jeffries 2013b). This is a context that is strikingly different than the Italian social context.

This semantic picture is further complicated by the existence of a second interpretation of the Spanish term in the Latin American debate, which has also been endorsed by feminist scholars outside the region including Italy (Spinelli 2008, 2013; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2003). In fact, according to Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde, 'feminicidio' encompasses not only murders but also different forms of structural and systemic discrimination against women in society, not necessarily ending with physical death. 'Femminicidio' in Italian public discourse is the direct translation of the Spanish interpretation of the neologism used by Latin American activists, a term that was originally interpreted according to the extensive framework theorised by Lagarde. In fact, it has been adopted in Italian media and political discourse with the meaning popularised by Ciudad Juarez's activists – the misogynistic murders of women by men.

However, contrary to the Ciudad Juarez case where these atrocities are linked to contexts of intricate criminal networks, my analysis shows that 'femminicidio-made-in-Italy' is constructed as an issue of intimate and family violence. Indeed family appears to be the typical setting of the crime, which is described for instance as '*a conclusive action of a spiral of daily domestic violence*'[2] while the identities of actors of femicide are nominalised in their relation with the victims as fiancées, lovers, husbands, and relatives. For example, let us consider the following speech by theatre director Serena Dandini, at the forefront of 'femminicidio' mobilisation in her theatre piece Wounded to Death:

> Monologues of Wounded to Death speak of foreseeable crimes, of homicides of women by their men, who should have loved and protected them. It is not a coincidence that culprits are often husbands, fiancés and exes, a family carnage ... Behind close curtains of Italian houses a silent suffering is hidden.[3]

Additionally, 'femminicidio' in Italy has been advocated as a word that could shed light on the deep cultural dimensions of homicides of women, also described as a patriarchal backlash, a phenomenon that erupted because men are incapable of accepting women's assertion of freedom.[4] Therefore, far from solely identifying the gender of the victim, as a pure linguistic perspective would suggest, 'femminicidio' also connotes that the murder of women occurs as the product of a sexist patriarchal culture where VAW is normalised. In other words, whenever we use 'femminicidio' we automatically signify that a woman was killed because men in Italian culture are entitled to exert power upon women, who in turn are subtly considered killable.

2 Interest Groups and Popularisation of the Term in Italy

Although 'femminicidio' has appeared in Italy as a literary term as early as the nineteenth century, the political connotation associated with the current engagement of 'femminicidio' did not appear until 2006 and did not transform into the media epidemic until 2012. In a very short time, the term became such an influential buzzword in media jargon that it has even been used to enhance the visibility of classic cultural productions, particularly classic theatre pieces like Othello and Carmen, providing a new frame of meaning to make these pieces more contemporary and relevant to audiences.[5] In Factiva searches, the first media item reporting the term 'femminicidio' appeared in 2006. Since then the term has been mentioned in 5,975 news items, of which more than 5,500 were published in 2012 and 2013, and the Factiva searches was conducted at the end of 2013. The sheer number of mentions in such a short amount of time shows that although the term 'femminicidio' was engaged earlier in 2006 it developed into a media epidemic only in 2012 (when it was mentioned in 751 news items in 2012 alone).

Considering this drastic increase in use of the term in 2012, one must ask: what was the social and political context during the short timeframe in which 'femminicidio' became a media epidemic? As we saw in the introduction of this book, in 2012 Italy was ruled by a temporary technocratic government appointed with the goal to solve the many financial and social problems resulting from Berlusconi's problematic era of governance. The temporary government also sought to manage

the transition from Berlusconi's government in preparation for the following national elections held in February 2013. For this reason, 2012 marks a crucial shift for political parties and civil society to advance their visions of the future and participate in a new distribution of political power. This shift provokes a few important questions to consider. Firstly, is it possible to argue that 'femminicidio' discourse intersects with the discourses advanced by these new actors engaging in parallel political struggles? Did 'femminicidio' intersect with other discourses in this new political context? Moreover, did the 'femminicidio' narrative develop from the viable feminist critique on the representation of female bodies, one that underpins feminist groups like SNOQ's mobilisation against Berlusconi's misogynist political culture? Could we also read 'femminicidio' as a neologism that was crafted initially by feminist social movements to more effectively convey their crusade against VAW and later transformed into a discursive device to mobilise political consensus?

Since the outset the nature of 'femminicidio' media coverage has been largely political. Indeed, news discourse of 'femminicidio' is not relegated to crime reporting. Instead, it is primarily generated by feminist advocacy initiatives and political commentaries on 'femminicidio' as a social problem. Here I will briefly describe the coverage of 'femminicidio' during three timeframes – 15 days before and 15 days after three selected media events. I chose these media events in that they are salient in the larger feminist mobilisation against VAW and political debate. Please notice that the focus of my analysis is not on the representation of each of these three events but rather these timeframes merely serve as sample criteria for media coverage of 'femminicidio'.

The first event is the SNOQ's debut on 13 February 2011. At that time murders of women by men were not a core theme in feminist mobilisation, indeed only four news items mentioning the word 'femminicidio' were identified. Although comparatively backgrounded, 'femminicidio' was not completely absent: a banner reading 'STOP TELEFEMMINICIDIO' was displayed at the event by historical feminist group UDI.[6] This slogan links SNOQ's initial core argument – a critique of media representation of women – to a more traditional feminist agenda of VAW. The banner acquires an additional meaning if we look at the context where it was displayed: a public rally against the degradation of women's image and status in Berlusconi's era. In this banner we can detect the seeds of a discourse that, as I will demonstrate later, will gain traction and visibility as the

'femminicidio' narrative spreads in the electoral campaign: Berlusconi and his cultural milieu would be held responsible for violence suffered by women.

The second timeframe revolves around the appeal of the convention No More that requested a meeting with the ad-interim Premier Mario Monti on 2 November 2012. This event marks an important step forward in urging political and social institutions to demonstrate concrete actions against VAW.

The most visible criminal case during this timeframe was the murder of Carmela Petrucci, a 17-year-old girl killed by her sister's ex-boyfriend. The case sparked several public commemorations held by local feminist groups alongside media commentary by local politicians on the need to tackle urgently the VAW emergency with a full ratification of the Istanbul Convention on VAW/DV and new national laws. Amongst various feminist initiatives that took place in this timeframe all across the country, the convention No More was certainly leading the national media coverage. The term 'femminicidio' also appeared in the announcements of several cultural and media productions such as the stage show *Ferite a Morte*, (Wounded to Death) which is part of the No More campaign, and the new winter season of an existing TV series *Amore Criminale* (Criminal Love) dedicated to intimate partner violence.

The third timeframe revolved around participation in Eve Ensler's international Flash Mob against VAW on 14 February 2013 across the country and broadcasted on RAI TV. This event was the most visible mobilisation against 'femminicidio' and it happened just before the national elections. During this timeframe 30 January–1 March 2013, the term appears in news items reporting on different crimes against women, including rape, stalking, and attempted murder. Similar to the second timeframe, these news items are not merely crime reports but include feminists' and politicians' reactions to the crimes. Two international cases are also reported as 'femminicidio' cases in Italian media: athlete Oscar Pistorius' murder of his girlfriend, model Reeva Steenkamp in South Africa; and the murder and rape of three little sisters 6, 9, and 11 years old in Maharashtra, India. The feminist mobilisation that certainly appeared most in news coverage was the Flash Mob. A copious amount of coverage was also dedicated to comedian Luciana Littizzetto's monologue that she performed on the stage of the National Music Contest *Festival della Canzone Italiana di San Remo* as an explicit response to the SNOQ appeal.

February appeared to be a very active period for politicians invested in securing as many votes as possible in the final weeks before the national

elections were held at the end of the month: parties held thematic conferences and candidates attended or publicly endorsed feminist mobilisation initiatives and discussed 'femminicidio' at their rallies. Like the media coverage in the previous timeframe, in this third timeframe 'femminicidio' was also associated with various media and cultural productions. A few examples: the movie *Italy amore mio*, Cristina Comencini's documentary *Comizi di Fatica*, the installation *Zapatos rojos* created in Ciudad Juarez and replicated in Italian cities, activist singer Adriano Celentano's videoclip, and a series of debates on the noir literary genres organised by University la Sapienza.

This initial account of 'femminicidio' media coverage shows that 'femminicidio' narrative is a political media narrative that revolves around:

- Feminist mobilisation national campaigns and mobilisations sparked from specific cases of femicides
- Discourse production by individual political candidates and parties
- Cultural and media products dedicated specifically to 'femminicidio' as well as to the broader topic of VAW in heterosexual relationships, which is re-contextualised in the 'femminicidio' discourse

It also emerges that the main claim-makers of the 'femminicidio' narrative are feminist groups, politicians, and the media. In light of these preliminary findings, it is realistic to read 'femminicidio' as a media narrative device of a cultural crusade in which different claim-makers and their different political interests converge (Gusfield 1963; Jenkins 1992; Weitzer 2007).

In the following section I will show how these three discourse agents, namely feminist movement, the media, and politicians, contributed to the diffusion of the term 'femminicidio' and the construction of its associated narrative. Although a partial account, which includes only nationwide initiatives and does not capture the multitude of local rallies, exhibitions spread across the national territory, endorsements by political representatives of local municipalities, and local media, I hope it can nevertheless convey the magnitude of this mobilisation.

2.1 The Discursive Contribution of the Feminist Movement

From the previous sections it is clear that the origin of the term 'femminicidio', whether associated with the earlier theorisation of Diana Russel or to the more recent mobilisation in Ciudad Juarez, can be clearly placed within the larger International feminist movement. I will now very briefly

demonstrate how the Italian feminist movement has imported and popularised this term in a different localised context. The following discussion is organised diachronically around some of defining moments of the process of diffusion of the term in the Italian public debate.

In 2008, feminist lawyer Barbara Spinelli published the book *Femminicidio. Dalla denuncia sociale al riconoscimento giuridico internazionale* that discusses theories underlying the advocacy effort conducted by Latin American feminists to politicise different crimes and forms of discrimination against women, including the Ciudad Juarez murders (Spinelli 2008). In the same year UDI launched a symbolic rally to say 'Stop femminicidio'; in 2009 the neologism appeared in the dictionary Devoto Oli. In 2011 the term reached key decision makers through the launch of CEDAW shadow report elaborated by Spinelli and a coalition of NGOs. They stated that every year 127 women are murdered solely because they are women and, in the large majority of cases, their murderers are family members (Signoretti and Lanzoni 2011);

In 2012 women network SNOQ launched *Mai più complici* campaign (Never again complicit) asking men to stop being complicit in 'femminicidio'. At the same time, a feminist coalition led by UDI launched the campaign *No More* urging Prime Minister Mario Monti to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Again in 2012 a theatre piece titled *Ferite a morte* (Wounded to Death) written by the director Serena Dandini was staged in Milan, Florence, Rome, and Turin. Soon after, a book was published with the stories told in the theatre piece with additional performances in an international tour supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

On 14 February 2013, countless women's groups across the country participated in Eve Ensler's international Flash Mob on VAW. Intellectuals and politicians also participated to public events.

2.2 The Discursive Contribution of the Media and Intellectuals

Media plays a crucial role in the transformation of social movement causes into narratives of fear, and in the convergence of a variety of interests from different groups into the same narrative (Cohen 2011; Hall et al. 1978; Jeffries 2013a; Vasterman 2005). Daily news on minor incidents relating to the same political cause (e.g. daily repetition of crimes committed by immigrants alongside calls for immigration restrictions) concurs to validate the existence of a politicised social problem. Likewise, media outlets associate themselves publicly with specific causes through intensive coverage of

political mobilisation campaigns, with individual journalists putting their signatures on calls to action, editorialists, and public intellectuals taking stances on causes by writing position articles, and personal participation in media events (Franklin and Carlson 2011; Groseclose and Milyo 2005). All of these mechanisms were at work in Italian media during the rise of the 'femminicidio' narrative. The following section will highlight specific examples of media contributions to this narrative. Please note that these examples are representative of a larger randomised selection of media events and are limited to Italian nationwide press.

Daily *La Repubblica*, the second largest mainstream newspaper with a Centre-left political orientation, had already played a prominent role in conveying feminist critique against institutional sexism during the late stages of Berlusconi Government, and was singled out for its role in the debate on 'femminicidio' and VAW. *La Repubblica* deliberately decided to adopt the neologism and support mobilisation efforts against VAW, after discussions in newsroom meetings.[7] Also a special online page titled 'Femminicidio' was created and a long-form investigative report titled 'Men Who Hate Women' was published.[8]

Il Corriere della Sera, a major national daily renowned for its balanced political approach with a slight orientation to the Centre-Right, also conveyed the term 'femminicidio' and provided space to address the cause of VAW. Il *Corriere della Sera* manages the blog *La Ventisettesima ora*, which was originally intended to address women struggling to combine a career with family duties and more generally to contribute to the debate on equal opportunity. In 2013 La *Ventisettesima ora*'s bloggers published a series of personal stories detailing experiences of rape and abuse collected in the book titled *Questo non è Amore* (This is not love).

This is not the only book published on VAW in that period; in fact 'femminicidio' has become a stream in and of itself within the editorial market. A few landmark publications include: journalist Riccardo Iacona's publication of a collection of stories titled *Uomini Che Uccidono le Donne* (Men Who Kill Women) to which the television program *Presa Diretta* conducted by Iacona himself dedicated an entire episode to these stories; prominent writer Dacia Maraini's publication in 2012 titled *L'Amore Rubato* (Stolen Love) and in 2013 feminist blogger Loredana Lipperini with philosopher Michela Murgia published '*L'ho Uccisa Perché l'Amavo'. Falso!* ('I Killed Because I Loved Her.' False!).

'Femminicidio' as a social cause was also endorsed by il *Fatto Quotidiano*, the first independent newspaper launched in 2009 by a group of journalists

notorious for their role in revealing the pervasive corruption and privilege within Berlusconi's political caste along with Berlusconi's personal criminal connections (Demir 2012). *Fatto Quotidiano* is the third most read online daily after il *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblic*a. The newspaper's online blog *Donne Di Fatto* played a prominent role through its dedication to covering Women's issues and aggregate newsroom articles as well as showcasing editorial writings by intellectuals and activists.

Prominent editorialists such as Adriano Sofri, former leader of a revolutionary communist group and convicted for the politically motivated murder of a police officer in 1972, writes on *La Repubblica*'s front page defining 'femminicidio' as 'nothing else than an adaptation of language and law to a millenarian cultural foolishness'.[9] Likewise, reporter Roberto Saviano, internationally renowned for his courageous investigation of the Mafia, posted on his Facebook page on 29 April 2012: 'Slaughter: since the start of the year 54 women have been killed by husbands, lovers, boyfriends and exes . . . It is now the time to call this massacre with a precise name: femminicidio'.

The term is also adopted by the National Federation of the Italian Press (FNSI), which adheres to the mobilisation Campaign *Posto Occupato*, which on International Women's Day (8th March) occupies a seat in different theatres across the country as a symbolic reminder of the absence of murdered women.

From interviews that I conducted with journalists, it is clear that although the neologism was uncritically adopted by media outlets across the whole political spectrum, the narrative has a clear connotation in the politically leftist cultural arena and its associated press. Furthermore, although a scattered scepticism on the semantics of the term has emerged from different political arenas, nevertheless we can identify a more intense critique coming from the Centre-Right and Catholic oriented media, where 'femminicidio' is framed as a device of political correctness.[10] In this vein, Luigi Amicone, Editor of the online Catholic magazine *Tempi*, claims that 'femminicidio' is nothing but an ideological word, part of an Orwellian language which the feminist movement uses to dramatise social issues and on this basis, advocate for political actions like gender quotas and special provisional laws.[11]

2.3 The Discursive Contribution of Political Institutions and Representatives

As discussed in previous chapters, discourses travel across different orders of discourse while narratives originally circulated by social movements are

adopted and recontextualised by political representatives and the State who appropriate a rhetoric of social change to accommodate their own agenda and maintain or achieve power (Bennett 2013; Fabricant 2012; Peeples 2011; Wodak 2007). In light of this literature, I read 'femminicidio' as a viable narrative that was gaining traction at a time when politicians were interested in increasing their visibility and gathering consensus in the anticipation of approaching elections during a pivotal political climate. In other words, I suggest that, by jumping on the 'femminicidio' bandwagon, political candidates took the opportunity to position themselves as protectors of female victims of violence and discrimination amidst feminist criticism of Berlusconi's government. This point will be further unpacked later. First, I will focus on the main actions taken by political actors to fall in line with the already established 'femminicidio' narrative.

Although politicians from the whole political spectrum endorsed the 'femminicidio' cause and participated in rallies and public events, a stronger engagement was clearly coming from the Centre-Left. Indeed, Centre-Left parties linked the fight against 'femminicidio' with a commitment to encourage female participation in politics: the *Partito Democratico* (PD) (Democratic Party) reserved 40% of total candidates to women and the *Sinistra e Libertà* (SeL) (Left and Freedom Party) nominated an almost equal number of female and male candidates. The newly elected Parliament was indeed that with the highest female presence in Italian history. One draft law was proposed by Senator Anna Serafini (Centre-Left) that introduced 'femminicidio' as a new crime to be treated with more severity than a simple homicide. However, not limited to the Left, another draft law was presented by former Minister of Equal Opportunity Mara Carfagna and lawyer Giulia Bongiorno (Centre-Right), who proposed that male murderers of female victims should be imprisoned for life.

Has the political commitment to the fight against VAW persisted and solidified after elections? In fact, some concrete actions have indeed been institutionalised. First of all, an inter-ministerial task force on VAW has been established along with the nomination of a Special Advisor for policies against gender violence and femicide within the Ministry of Interior. The new appointed Government ratified the Istanbul Convention on VAW/DV, previously signed by the interim Government. In the spirit of the convention's prescriptions, the new Government during the very first weeks of its mandate in April 2013 licensed a Decree Law titled 'urgent measures on security and gender violence'. This Decree Law was licensed

on 20 August 2013, during the summer break when almost all institutional activities were suspended, where members of Italian Parliament were called to resume duty in Rome. The Presidency of Chamber of Deputies and feminist icon Laura Boldrini requested the exceptional opening of the Parliament House specifically to convert the Decree into Law.

Along all stages of the legislative process from the formulation of the Decree Law by the Government to discussions and amendments of the Decree Law in Parliament, this law sparked profound concerns amongst political parties, legal experts, as well as in vast segments of civil society. This included concerns within the very same feminist movement that urged the State to tackle what was presented as an epidemic social plague. Interestingly, the Sel party, which is the party to which Laura Boldrini belongs, and which during the electoral campaign was at the forefront in the fight against 'femminicidio', did not participate in the Parliamentarian vote. Another interesting result of the kind of controversy inspired by this law is that it marked SNOQ's split into two different movements due to internal disagreement over whether to applaud or disapprove of the Government's actions. Criticism of the law revolved around the security/emergency spirit of the law, the insufficient funds in the budget for prevention projects and shelters run by women's groups, and the paternalistic victimisation of women as weak subjects. Lawyers of the Union of Penal Chambers also warned against a possible clash with the principles ratified in the Italian Constitution, in so far as the law introduced the preventive imprisonment of in-flagrante stalkers, anonymous breaches, and a double standard for crimes committed within domestic settings compared to crimes in other contexts.[12] Under the new Government led by Premier Matteo Renzi, which in February 2014 replaced the former Premier Enrico Letta, male murders of women are no longer at the top of the political agenda. Nevertheless, a gendered rhetoric is still very much present, for example in Renzi's decision to assign half of his Cabinet to female Ministries. A gendered agenda continues to be carried out by political groups in association with civil society movements on topics other than VAW, such as homophobia, gay marriage, and the reform of patronymic surnames.

To sum up, this initial analysis clearly shows that 'femminicidio' political discourse rapidly increased in 2012 with political parties and candidates heavily contributing to the construction of the narrative. Secondly, I can also confirm that 'femminicidio' can be regarded as a neologism that originated in international feminist circles and was later adopted by Italian politicians through analysis of media texts and personal interviews with

social actors. For example a feminist spokesperson, in response to my question on whether or not 'femminicidio' was a media wave, answered in the following terms:

> Yes it was a media wave because we pissed them off so much . . . The alliance with female journalists and the Convention NOMORE enabled us to breach the wall.[13]

So far I have shed light on the actors and specific initiatives that constructed the narrative. However, it is yet to be fully understood how this narrative serves to mobilise the political consensus pursued by activists and politicians. Also, it is important to consider the contents of this narrative and its interdiscursivity with other major political discourses of the time. In the next section I will explore how, linguistically, 'femminicidio' was transformed into an emergency that served to mobilise consensus around specific types of political actions. I will also explore how an emergency of VAW was urgently deployed to emancipate the whole country from a recent cultural past that was presented as barbaric and misogynistic.

3 It Is an Emergency and the State Must Intervene! The Urgency of Progress

The literature on the politics of fear and moral panics argues that discourses of social issues are constructed with the labelling of a new category of deviance or crime that functions to assign a connotation of speciality and novelty, and in so doing, attracts attention to that particular issue (Cohen 2011; Hall et al. 1978; Thompson 1998). The 'new' social issue is then distorted and amplified through a variety of rhetorical strategies. I will explore how the introduction of the new label 'femminicidio' enabled the magnification of an existing social issue, precisely male homicides of women, and more broadly male VAW.

'Femminicidio' qualifies as a specific phenomenon that needs to be differentiated from other similar categories of violence, as a crime that

> 'is *not only* homicide, it is femminicidio'[14]; 'it is not a matter of deviance'.[15]

One of SNOQ's pioneers in an interview explains that

> at a certain point we asked ourselves whether a neutral term such as homicide could reveal the *cultural* dimension [of male homicides of women]. And we answered no, it doesn't.[16]

This magnification of the threat of VAW has been realised through what Stuart Hall called 'convergence': the process of 'listing a whole series of social problems and speaking of them as "part of a deeper, underlying problem" – the "tip of an iceberg", especially when such a link is also forged on the basis of implied common denominators' (Hall et al. 1978, p. 223). Through convergence, different forms of abuses such as rape, DV, sexual exploitation, and psychological violence have been equated in feminist discourse as acts under a broader umbrella of gender violence (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2010; Weitzer 2007). In this analysis, convergence is realised within texts that focus on 'femminicidio' and at the same time mention different forms of minor abuses (such as stalking). For example, take the following statement by Senator Anna Finocchiaro: 'Today more than in the past women die as victims of violence . . . "femminicidio" and stalking are crimes against the individual and the approach of the State to tackle these crimes needs to be different . . . Often the first attempt is one of conciliation, as if this phenomenon [Which one? Stalking or femicide?] is just a form of violence against female "weakness"'.[17]

Convergence is also realised with the metonymical use of statistics: data referring to a broader phenomenon is cited to prove the diffusion of one of its parts. This strategy is typical of feminist discourse on GBV (Badinter 2006; Farrell et al. 2008; Sommers 1994). This is realised for example by linking 'femminicidio' advocacy in Italy with the international mobilisation 'One billion rising', a title that refers to the 1 billion female victims of all forms of violence (not only lethal and physical but also psychological, sexual, emotional, etc.) in the world (not only in Italy). This double convergence enables the suggestion that 'femminicidio', which is the cruellest part of the broader global phenomenon of VAW, is indeed an emergency in Italy.

Rhetorical tropes are also at work to establish the existence of a unique social plague. For instance 'femminicidio' is represented with hyperboles such as

> 'plague',[18] 'war bulletin'[19] 'epidemic of possession',[20] and 'carnage'.[21]

The threat is made unquestionable through two strategies. The first is argumentum ad populum as seen in the following expression:

> a spiral of violence which is realised daily under our eyes.[22]

The second is tautology realised with the topoi of reality and the topoi of numbers, which enable the portrayal of single incidences and statistics as evidence of the rise of the totality of the crime itself:

> One hundred victims in 2012, one woman killed every two days. Figures, alarming, come from statistics and are almost daily confirmed by the news. The latest victim was in Palermo: a 17 year old girl stabbed to death in the hallway of her home.[23]

Was the emergency actually occurring and increasing rapidly in the country's social spaces or only in its media and political discourse? 'Femminicidio' is really a 'tragic primate' of Italy?[24] In considering these questions, it is crucial to acknowledge that the rapid increase of media coverage of the issue since 2012 occurred while female homicide rates remained nearly stable (Corradi 2014b).[25] Moreso Italy, according to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is one of the safest places for women in the world with 0.5 homicides of women per 100,000 people, less than other countries along Italy's border such as Switzerland, France, and Austria, and far less than the United States (UNODC 2013).

Building an argument based on the quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon 'femminicidio' is purposely fallacious due to the vague meaning of the word 'femminicidio' within political and social discourse, which serves to infer a gendered motivation for committing the crime. An important question arises: how is it decided whether the victim is murdered because she is a woman or because of other identity traits (for instance being a drug abuser, a wife, a person with financial capacity, or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time)? In other words, although data on the number of homicides disaggregated by the sex of the victim is collected we cannot determine if the female victim has been killed because of her gender or other factors relating to her life. It goes without saying that any attempt to quantify a phenomenon which remains undefined would lead to unreliable data. Let me clarify that it is not my intention to deny the existence of femicide as a social problem or to

disregard analytical attempts to understand specificities of male homicides of women as a different phenomenon than male and female homicides of men or than female homicides of women. In fact it is certainly relevant that in the total number of homicides male victims make up 64.7% of deaths (year 2013), that men are the most victimised in homicides committed between 2000 and 2013 in organised and common crime (80–87%), and that in the same timeframe 63.3% of homicides committed in family and intimate relationships the victims are women. Also, whereas since 1990 male victims of homicide have decreased, female victims of homicide have progressively increased. These figures suggest that there does exist a gender dimension of homicides which is linked to different social contexts; however, we still do not know how many women are killed for reasons ascribable to patriarchy, sexism, and gender power relations. That said, although public policies have been successful in changing conditions in which male murders occur, it is also clear that these interventions to reduce IPV and DV have failed.

The existence of the threat itself provides the premise for arguing the necessity of political and social action (Erjavec 2003; Kappeler and Potter 2006; Wodak 2011). So far I have found that 'femminicidio' was deployed in public debate through the participation of feminist activists, politicians, the media, and opinion leaders to construct an emergency focused discourse of social problems and in the process pursuing political interests. The next step is to understand which political actors were asked to intervene and what kinds of solutions were envisioned through this participatory narrative of fear.

Not surprisingly, given the origin of the term and the political context of elections in which the narrative developed, the patriarchal State is pointed to as the principal candidate to 'rescue' vulnerable women. This reflects the spirit of the term's original mobilisation in Latin America, which underscored the responsibility of institutions in enabling the abuse of women through impunity, discriminatory practices, and normalisation of sexist (and criminal) culture. Also, it is in line with the longstanding accusation advanced by the Italian feminist movement against the patriarchal State, which is viewed as not supporting women's emancipation, along with the parallel demand that institutions must acknowledge VAW and commit to eradicate it.

Interpellation of the Sate to carry out a fight against VAW appears to be tightly interwoven with a specific discourse of Italian progress and civilisation which portrays the oppression of women as a marker of barbarism from which countries can be liberated of through a process of modernity

(Ardizzoni 2004; Cloud 2004). The State is blamed for legitimising a chauvinist culture of discrimination that is depicted as *anachronistic, conservative, and reactionary.*[26] *Femminicidio* is nominalised as a *modern barbarism*,[27] it is framed as a symptom of backwardness of the country, as traces of the past that persist in the present, 'massacre that cannot anymore exist in a civilised country',[28] as a by-product of the male-dominated political history, which is embodied by Berlusconi, and has kept Italy stagnant in an uncivilised past where women's rights and dignity are denied. This culture is depicted as persisting in the present and expressing itself with men's affirmation of their power over women in both public and private spaces. Consider the following extract for example:

> 102 women killed by their male master, a country devastated by femicides and by 20 years of pornographic dictatorship.[29]

It is suggested that VAW must be eliminated to elevate the country so it exists in the same realm as other civilised nations. To do so, the guilty State is required to update national laws in accordance with international laws such as the Istanbul Convention, improving judiciary systems up to the standards of efficacy that will guarantee women adequate protection in cases of abuse.[30] The State is also blamed for a lack of generosity towards women's groups in the past, like groups who run shelters for victims of abuse, and is now invited to strengthen financial support as a form of reparation and redemption.[31] Also, institutions are asked to commit to cultural change (e.g. by funding gender educational programmes in schools) and endorsing the fight for the eradication of sexism in language and media.[32]

In all, 'femminicidio' narratives established VAW as a threat to modern civilisation and supported the conclusive claim for the need of the 'guilty' State to initiate a fight against VAW. In doing so the common expectation was established that the State is responsible for protecting women (Young 1997).

Further action envisioned to eliminate VAW is one of realising equal opportunity in political participation. As mentioned previously, such a resolution was also advanced by Left-wing parties which pledged to reserve a quota of seats for women in Parliament, an action they explicitly linked to their commitment to fight 'femminicidio' and restore civilisation. For instance, Pierluigi Bersani, leader of the Democratic Party, stated during the 14 February SNOQ Flash Mob:

> we will make Parliament 40% women and I am sure that their presence will give us valuable extra hands in continuing and strengthening such a battle for civilisation.[33]

Similarly, Nichi Vendola, leader of Sel, stated that:

> half of Sel's MPs will be women. This can be a good and different start from a past of vulgarity and burlesque that we want to leave behind us forever.[34]

These extracts show that women are represented as the rescuers of the whole country, a country that needs to be emancipated from its backward male-centred political past (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015; Noonan 1995). Interestingly, this representation reproduces feminist narratives of social change and populist leftist rhetoric of women engagement in politics on rights (Donati 2006; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015). It drastically departs from the symbolism of other political narratives of progress where women are associated to the traditional past and men to modernity (Boulding 2000; Echols 1984; Yuval-Davis 1997). In this regard, McClintock argues that in nationalistic discourses women are the 'bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency', which remains a prerogative for men as agents of progress (1993, p. 62). The 'femminicidio' narrative contributes to a shift in this gender dichotomy by depicting men as the embodiment of a past uncivilised culture to be overtaken through the help of women. However, this transformation is only partial. In fact, speeches delivered by male politicians represent the female gender not as an independent subject of change but rather as an ancillary to men. Men remain the subjects who

> 'will bring women' into politics and who need to be 'convinced' (through their candidature) 'that they will not any longer be mortified'.[35]

Women appear as active subjects mostly in speeches by female politicians and activists who report their own mobilising and legislative initiatives:

> I, as a President of Regione Lazio, as a union activist and most of all as a woman, I have always endorsed all manifestations.[36]

In conclusion, the traditional gender dichotomy of male as an active subject and female as a passive object is to a certain extent reconfirmed and at the same time transformed by the 'femminicidio' discourse.

4 A Gender Discourse

I showed in the previous discussion of semantics around the term 'femminicidio' that whenever one chooses this word to speak about a homicide of a woman it automatically implies a gendered reading of the factors leading to the crime. More precisely, 'femminicidio' deploys a social interpretation of these actions, which rests on the feminist critique of inequality in a patriarchal society. As I have extensively explored in the previous chapter, this theory maintains that men kill women because of the same motivations that induce them to rape, abuse, and humiliate them: authorisation from the dominant culture to express power and control over women, even by violent means. From a feminist vantage point, VAW needs to remain distinct from other forms of violence and must be considered instead as a form of GBV, theorised as a pillar and product of a patriarchal society and sexist culture, more precisely as a phenomenon originating in and functioning to maintain the normative relationship between men and women, characterised by inequality and fixed paths of socialisation (Dobash and Dobash 1998; Romito 2008). In the next few paragraphs I will show how the 'femminicidio' narrative reproduces the feminist framework of GBV.

Let us begin with the following extracts which describe 'femminicidio' as a cultural product against 'being a woman':

> 'Femminicidio' is when there is an 'intention of punishing women for their outrage against men's honour, and violation of social, religious and cultural norms'[37];
>
> they are 'killed because they are women'[38]

Popular arguments amongst 'femminicidio' advocates supporting the thesis of VAW as patriarchal GBV is that in Italy gender equality has yet to be achieved and that the country is seriously lagging behind in terms of the emancipation of women. Following are a few examples to demonstrate the discourse surrounding this particular argument:

> Angela Finocchiaro, politician, PD: 'femminicidio' is a 'symptom of a *culture* still deeply chauvinist, to be changed, a culture that take too *few women in places of power* and allow disparity in income as well as in rights'.[39]
>
> Maria Grazia Ruggerini, of the intellectual feminist group Le Nove: What it is happening today, women who are murdered, derives from *cultural models* widely assimilated even in modernity; these are patriarchal models, which reveal the fragility, the dependence of men and their incapability to come to terms with the *autonomy and freedom* of women, which can for example be the choice of a path that is different than a relationship with them.[40]

Another similar argument frequently engaged is that men are feeling that they are losing power and therefore react violently towards the women in their lives. This thesis is pictorially expressed by a feminist writer:

> The body of women is an issue of the *patriarchy*... On this thing a global battle is ongoing. In Italy it manifests as 'femminicidio'. When an animal is dying it can be very dangerous. Against female autonomy *atavic abysses* manifest.[41]

Similarly, a feminist leader says:

> In *post-patriarchal* society men find themselves having to cope with new gender roles. This causes significant *cultural shock*. And then a series of heavy mechanisms start.[42]

Another crucial node of a feminist theory of violence is deployed through the 'femminicidio' narrative: the critique of sexism in the symbolic order, thus the correspondence between gender stereotypes (or sexual difference), gender inequality, discrimination, and violence. It would be helpful for the sake of our reasoning if we briefly recall the philosophy underpinning the link between sexist representation and VAW, which I have already discussed in previous chapters. The roots of this philosophy lie in a constructivist view of the speech act (*parole*) as a generator of reality. This assumption was further developed by feminist thinkers to advance the interpretation of gender, as well as sex, as symbolic and mutable, that there is no 'such a thing like woman' and gender is nothing more than a 'performance' which constructs (biological) sex as 'prediscursive' (Butler 1990, p. 7; Wetherell and Mohanty 2010). Also, given that according to this philosophy the entirety of human knowledge has been constructed from a male perspective, it is therefore

maintained that any meaning characterised by the gendered representation of women is a patriarchal construction of women as lacking, inferior, and hetero-normative (Irigaray 1985). Therefore, representation itself is discrimination. Therefore, it is violence.

This philosophy has influenced a certain gender feminist discourse of equality, which is criticised by the specific stream of difference feminism, in so far as it depicts any marker of sexed identity in terms of inequality and discrimination, rather than as marker of authenticity of femininity. In this gender feminist discourse, feminine characteristics such as nurturing and caring are loaded with negative meaning of oppression while a departure from these 'cultural clichés' represents a desirable liberation of women (Bawer 2012; Galeotti 2009; Paglia 1991). The same concept underpins a broader feminist critique of gender stereotypes in the media, one which understands any representation of women that is rooted in these traditions as discriminatory, such as for instance, preparing meals for her family or engaging in areas such as nursing or teaching, which have been traditionally spaces of female ghettoisation (Capecchi 2006; Gallagher 2001; Pinker 2008).

I argue that the 'femminicidio' narrative rendered the link between stereotyped representations of gender roles and violence a popular 'interpretive repertoire', which is a 'culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, commonplaces and tropes' (Wetherell 1998, p. 400). Indeed, it is pertinent to reiterate that the 'femminicidio' narrative arises from and intersects with a feminist critique of the representation of women in public space, sexual stereotypes and the objectification of women's bodies in television, a point which has been popularised through SNOQ's protests against Berlusconi's political and media culture. This discourse in a nutshell contributes to establishing a paradigmatic and a causal link between certain types of representations of women in the media and the material violence between human beings. These 'dangerous' representations mainly encompass three interconnected forms: the eroticisation of women's bodies, the passivity of women, and their traditional gender roles, and are held accountable for keeping women trapped in stereotyped identities that authorise male violence.

The same repertoire is detectable in several comments from social actors as well as in initiatives aimed at eradicating sexist stereotypes in language and images, offered as strategies to ameliorate the status of

women in society and free them from male violence. Let me present a few examples.

> Nichi Vendola, during an electoral rally, said: 'VAW *originates in language*: in recent years we have witnessed "femminicidio" and a continuous aggression against the image of women . . . This barbarisation is the poisonous fruit of Berlusconi's culture which resulted in a true "commercial – *pornographic regime*".'[43]

Another case in point is a speech by President of Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini, made at a Conference on VAW convened by the General Confederation of Labour in Milan. After applauding the Parliament's decision that the beauty pageant Miss Italia would not be broadcast on Italian Public Television RAI, she said:

> We need to reason with the objectified-woman model that is repeatedly conveyed by the Tv screen. Through this reasoning we can teach them [men] the respect for their [female] peers and prevent them from becoming violent adults. Because *once a woman is objectified* violence is just around the corner.[44]

The following statement from feminist journalist Luisa Betti, who engaged in the debate on the role of media to implement the Istanbul Convention, is as follows:

> Not even the most attentive eye realises the discrimination against women is constant from the first day when a female is born. A discrimination that is already a form of violence, that discrimination is in itself violence: an object to be conquered, possessed, controlled.[45]

The repertoire also appears to be validated at an institutional level. Indeed, it is telling that one of the roles of the inter-ministerial task force on VAW established by the Letta Government in 2013 was the negotiation with companies for self-discipline in advertising practices to improve women's representation in commercial advertisements. Finally, to conclude this discussion, let us turn attention towards a case that in many ways exemplifies how the rhetoric of stereotypes and traditional gender roles is deployed in the 'femminicidio' narrative.

During an institutional event on the role of media in achieving the objectives envisioned by the Istanbul Convention, President of Chamber

of Deputy Laura Boldrini publicly expressed a hope for a reflection on the role of media in 'raising social awareness on the intolerable seriousness of violence against women' could eventually begin in Italy. As an example of the role of media in the cultural normalisation of VAW she talks about the stereotypes conveyed by TV-advertisements where 'dads and kids are sitting around the table while mum stands and serves everyone'.[46]

A few days later, Guido Barilla, chairman of the historic Italian pasta company, singled out for its long-lasting marketing strategy based on traditional Mediterranean family values, made remarks during a radio interview that sparked righteous indignation from feminists and leftist intellectuals as well as a global boycott promoted by the international LGBT community. He said:

> Laura Boldrini does not understand the role of women in advertising well: she is mother, grand-mother, lover, she takes care of the house, she takes care of her beloveds and performs different actions and activities that honour her role.[47]

Journalist Sabatini in a well-respected publication commented on Barilla's remarks in the following terms: 'this is inconceivably serious because it happens at a time characterised by ferociously sexist drives that cause daily femicides . . . Women are killed because they are women: because men have expectations based on her role that she disregards. He feels authorised to perpetrate violence because he thinks that she is not abiding by a series of obligations . . . A man regards a woman as a supplier of services and as soon as she stops supplying, violence springs up as a form of punishment'.[48]

5 Implications of the 'Femminicidio' Narrative

CDA reveals how language shapes knowledge by authorising certain ways of seeing the world and excluding others (Fairclough 2010; Jäger 2001). Femminicidio, in as short of a time period as three years, is a neologism that entered the public debate and soon after diffused quickly across mainstream media and political jargon. Today it seems the term has entrenched itself as a common word and is regularly used in the media to highlight cases of male murders of women, especially if the murderer and victim are in an intimate relationship.

The very term 'femminicidio', which in its popular version means the male murder of a woman because she is a woman, appears to be a device

through which the gender discourse of violence is normalised as explanation of an heterogeneous typologies of DV and IPV with different victim-offender relationship (Corradi 2014b). Also, similar simplification is rendered to the understanding of femicide itself. Not only are typologies of VAW confused and assimilated from one to the other under the umbrella of GBV, but different typologies and dynamics of femicides are also overshadowed by the dominant representation of femicide as intimate partner homicide driven by the male will to overpower women, a dynamic argued to be supported by culturally normalised masculine violence. This explanation is only a partial account of femicide and pretending that gender alone could make sense of the complex phenomena of heterosexual violence would be ideological and incomplete (Corradi 2014a, 2014b).

A critique of the categorising effect of the word 'femminicidio' is put forth by Valentina Morana, an investigative psychologist and spokesperson for the child-rights advocacy group La Nostra Campagna (Our Campaign):

> People are not all the same. There are men who are unable to tolerate the end of relationships and as a result they kill. There are women who do not realise that their provocative approach might take the other person to the edge of patience that leads to an explosion. Then, there are also those, men and women, who kill to free themselves from the burden of alimony for children and ex-wives. In order to really help people one cannot work with a logic of categories, because each person is different. Categorisation is a fundamental element of propaganda.[49]

As literature on DV and IPV shows, a wide range of factors (psychological, emotional, situational, social, and cultural) can lead to femicide and to intimate partner violence more generally (Collins 2013; Corradi and Stöckl 2014; Dutton and Nicholls 2005). Whereas the 'femminicidio' narrative seems to envision a monolithic reading of femicide and VAW as a matter of gender inequality and power alone, readings that are built on a feminist view of society and human relations, other sociological, psychological, and behavioural theories of violence and femicide remain at the margins of the public debate. This preoccupation with gender could discourage a more nuanced understanding of the social and psychological issues that contribute to violence based on scientific and interdisciplinary knowledge of the human and the social.

Can the gender framework deployed through the 'femminicidio' narrative provide answers to the following questions? Is a man who kills his

wife and his child committing 'femminicidio'? Or would it be more apt to talk about 'family-cide'? How can we determine whether a man who kills his partner after she decided to leave him is killing her because she is a women or rather because of her relational role of partner, or his own mental illness? In other words, in reverse cases, when she kills him, is gender still foregrounded? Would we define that homicide as 'mal-icide' or 'masculin-icide'? What about violence in same-sex couples? What about if a similar escalation dynamic occur between two males or two females? Furthermore, should infanticides be defined according to the sex of the child? When a man kills his partner in the context of an escalating quarrel, can it really be understood as a gendered-crime only because she is a female and he is a male? Can the gender analysis be taken into consideration only when the sex of the victim is different from the sex of the perpetrator? What if femicide is committed by male thieves who planned to rob a shop run by women, because they consider it easier to confront women rather than men?

Clearly these provocative questions point at the multiplicity and complexity of violent dynamics that cannot be generalised under an overarching label such as 'femminicidio'. Such complexity can instead be explained by integrating the gender reading within other sociological and psychological variables such as level of a couple's satisfaction and dysfunction, personality, psychological pathologies, alcohol/drug consumption, family history of violence, sociocultural status, loss of self-control, and provocation are all factors leading to violence between men and women (Anderson 1997; Salerno 2012).

In light of the analytical feebleness of the term and its specific origins in the feminist view of society, I would like to recommend that 'femminicidio' does not cross over from the realm of media and that at a scientific/academic level, different multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks continue to be deployed in the still young effort to understand interpersonal violence in general and VAW in particular (Corradi 2009; Walby 2013). Frameworks that enable the integration of a broad array of factors, individual and situational, and at the same time shed light on the influence of culture on human behaviour are preferable if scholars want to enrich the current understanding of femicide.

It is also necessary to point out that the scientific approach to violence is not only overshadowed by the domination of the gender discourse of 'femminicidio' but is deliberately rendered politically incorrect by some 'femminicidio' advocates. It is telling that in a code of conduct on VAW

reporting drafted by a national network of women media practitioners provides that 'journalists must avoid exemplification of VAW with the theory of the cycle of violence'.[50] Indeed, this position reflects a more general adversity amongst feminist movements against VAW towards Leonore Walker's theory of the cycle of violence, charged for invoking victim-blaming explanations and downplaying the intentionality of men's strategies for controlling women (Haaken 2008). Likewise, women's groups and institutional representatives maintain that the neologism should replace more colloquial expressions such as 'crime of passion' and 'loss of control' in any journalistic reporting of men killing women.[51] A recurrent rationale that interviewees give for this intervention in language is that in their view these intolerable expressions imply a diminishment of the action, a compassionate comprehension of men who commit violence because they are blinded by love, a sort of implicit justification. Although expressions such as 'crime of passion' and 'loss of control' can be inadequate to capture the essence of particular criminal acts such as intimate partner femicide and are popularly used to lessen the cruelty of male crimes against women, I point out that these signifiers link to existing 'signifieds'. Indeed, loss of control, rage, and cyclical patterns of abuse/honeymoon are all relevant elements in homicidal dynamics and intimate violence (Collins 2009).

The deployment of a merely cultural understanding of violence along with the deliberate prohibition of linguistic expressions that relate to psychological dimension of violence obscures relational dynamics that are in fact important elements to be considered in order to prevent sudden or gradual expression of aggression. A victim has different degrees of agency at different stages of violent dynamics (Kimmel 2002; Pizzey 1998; Steinmetz and Straus 1974). Yet, this is a sensitive topic, one of the taboos of the feminist discourse of VAW where the word 'provocation' has become unspeakable due to the cultural legacy of blaming women for being abused, an area that has been, for long time, a crucial battleground for feminist movements which to some extent have succeeded in advancing public perception of victims, although in Italian popular and judiciary culture, the tendency to blame female victims has not been completely removed. Instead, another reiteration of political correctness has gradually emerged in the portrayal of women who experience violence: their history and behaviours are removed altogether, and they must be covered under a veil protected from public scrutiny. Any reference to an active role of victim can be erroneously charged with

victim blaming, and this prejudice results in discouraging comprehensions of violence as a relational dynamic (Felson 1991).

To sum up, a purely cultural understanding of human relations and identity is encouraged by the deployment of 'femminicidio' narrative. At the same time, any reference to psychology and emotions, in other words any reference to the 'humanity' of beings (humanity which is at the same time biological and cultural), is rendered politically incorrect by this gender discourse. This is not surprising if one considers that a crucial contribution of feminism in changing the public imaginary of DV has been precisely that of reframing violence from 'a natural expression of the emotional relationship between husband and wife', to a 'by-product of the ownership and [patriarchal] oppression of women and of the cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity' (Stewart 2002, pp. 8–9). Hence, feminist analysis of heterosexual relations is fundamentally an analysis of power that fails to elaborate on the category of intimate feelings and emotional dimensions of bonds between men and women (Crittenden 1999; hooks 1984, 2003).

With the deployment of a gender cultural framework of femicide, an erroneous understanding of culture as a separate entity detached from any biological fact seems to be validated (Donati 2009; Paglia 1991; Ruspini 2009). This departure from an understanding of humans as relational and social beings is also detectable in the envisioned erasure of gender stereotypes in the media, which are carried out at an institutional level within a broader intervention against VAW. I showed that in fact the rationale behind these projects is underpinned by a conception of humans as gendered-by-language. What consequences can this radical constructivist discourse potentially have as soon as its underlying narrative plot travels across different orders of discourse outside the VAW discourse, for example in an expanding discourse of civil rights and biotechnology?

Further, important implications of the narrative need to be explored by looking at the specific DV/IPV collocation of the femminicidio-made-in-Italy. Indeed, 'femminicidio' marked a dramatic shift of discourse of VAW, which prior to 2012 was predominately framed as a matter of exceptional threat in public spaces. As stated earlier, previous moral panics on VAW in Italy played across ethnic lines, pointing to the immigrant as the principal threat to women's security (Giomi and Tonello 2013). 'Femminicidio' on the contrary transfers the narrative of fear public spaces to the inside of private homes and represents VAW as a daily structural problem of the family. Although an enhanced public awareness on

domestic conflict dynamics is certainly desirable, a redefinition of women's main enemy as an ordinary heterosexual (white) man realised with sensationalistic tones might deploy fear and suspicion amongst heterosexual partners. Also, a primary concern of 'femminicidio' advocates is to redefine the public imaginary around male violence from the realm of deviance to one of 'normality': it is the normal man who commits violence against women, not the monster, nor the mentally ill person. Although aggression is certainly a trait embedded in human nature and one does not need to have any psychological disorder to commit violence, it is misleading and unfair to suggest that being a man means being violent.

Furthermore, 'femminicidio' not only redefines the discourse of VAW by dragging violence into domestic settings but also impacts DV discourse that appears to be colonised by a feminist critique of patriarchal power and control theory of interpersonal violence (Bates et al. 2014; Bumiller 2009). These theories and discourses make sense of exclusively one-way violence, precisely that acted by men and suffered by women, but are not applicable in understanding the reciprocity of violence and heterogeneity of aggressor-victim relations such as female partner abuse of husbands, cross-generational violence, and violence within same-sex relationships (Anderson 1997, 2005; Gelles and Straus 1979; Kimmel 2002; Steinmetz 1978).

The 'femminicidio' narrative exposes and emphasises only one possible type of violence existing in heterosexual relationships, and only one possible explanation of femicide, while other forms of partner violence as well as other readings of femicide remain outside public purview and State policies. In this line, violence is represented as the exclusive prerogative of men. This portrayal of violence reinforces the gendered binarism of male aggressor /female victim with the effect of reconfirming the traditional gender dichotomy of male as active subject and female as passive object. In this discourse men are the subjects of action verbs, such as *he kills* and *he punishes committing violence*, do not *protect*, and do not *love*, while women are the victims who *suffer* of actions performed or not performed by men. While the male active pole is criminalised, the female passive pole is represented as a martyr of women's liberation from the patriarchy. She dared to free herself from him and for that she is punished to death. In other words, paradoxically, 'femminicidio' both maintains and transforms the stereotypical representation of genders that feminist theories of VAW posit as the cause of femicide.

However, a possibility for women to achieve their emancipation from a passive role is also considered in some 'femminicidio' narratives: this possibility occurs in political spaces. Outside the family, in a space where women

are not asked to serve pasta, and their bodies are banned from sexualisation by public eyes, they can finally transform themselves into agents of progress: through their active participation in politics, encouraged by current male-dominated parties because they are women, they have the possibility to exercise a fight against violent men, who are represented as obstacles hindering an envisaged civilised social and political order built on ideas of gender equality and feminist principles.

In this final section we discussed four main interconnected implications of the 'femminicidio' narrative, as it has developed in the mainstream media and political discourse:

- The oversimplification of the causes, dynamics, and typologies of violence occurring amongst partners and in domestic settings with a parallel oversimplification of domestic violence discourse which is erroneously equated to male VAW
- The simplistic depiction of human beings as cultural gendered beings with no reference to the relationship between culture and biology and to the relational dimension of beings
- The reproduction of fixed polarised gendered representations of human identity and roles in context of heterosexual relationship, including violent situations
- The depiction of ordinary heterosexual (white) male partner as women's main enemies

Are these implications somehow contrasted and contested in any other discourses outside the mainstream? This particular question guides the discussion explored in the following chapters, turning attention towards discourses of civil society groups, which engages personal interviews with social actors in these spaces.

Notes

1. The murders in Mexico received international attention and were even given the Hollywood treatment by the movie *Bordertown* (2006) starring Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas.
2. Elezioni: Sel manifesterà giovedì contro violenza a donne. (2013, 12 February). *Agi* [Factiva].
3. Teatro: Le donne della Dandini di nuovo in scena con 'Ferite a morte'. (2013, 20 February). Adnkronos [Factiva].

4. Convenzione contro la Violenza sulle donne No More. Retrieved from http://nomoreviolenza.altervista.org/convenzione/ (accessed 21 December 2015); Brambilla, TK (2014, 7 December) Oltre i luoghi comuni sulle donne vittime di violenza. Retrieved from http://www.libreriadelledonne.it/oltre-i-luoghi-comuni-sulle-donne-vittime-di-violenza/ (accessed 21 December 2015).
5. Costantini, E. (2012, 30 October). Quirino Massimo Dapporto protagonista della tragedia di Shakespeare. *Corriere della Sera* [Factiva]; Cappelletto, S. (2012, 13 November). Carmen, regina che arriva dalla spazzatura. *La Stampa* [Factiva].
6. Zagaria, C. (2011, 13 February). Donne e uomini con la sciarpa bianca. *La Repubblica di Napoli*. [Factiva].
7. Personal interview, 5 May 2014, Rome.
8. The report is available at: http://inchieste.repubblica.it/it/repubblica/rep-it/2012/11/25/news/femminicidio-47174085/ (accessed 22 December 2015).
9. Sofri, A. (2012, 27 March). L'uomo in casa diventa assassino. *La Repubblica*. Retrieved from http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/03/27/news/l_uomo_in_casa_diventa_assassino_una_donna_uccisa_ogni_due_giorni-32260263/ (accessed 22 December 2015).
10. Feltri, V. (2013, 23 November). Femminicidio? Ma se la vittima è un nonno nessuno ci bada. *Il Giornale*. Retrieved from http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/femminicidio-se-vittima-nonno-nessuno-ci-bada-970108.html (accessed 22 December 2015).
11. Personal interview, 22 May 2014, telephone.
12. Adviced law amendments are available at http://www.camerepenali.it/public/file/Leggi%20e%20progetti%20di%20legge/C%201540%20Osservazioni%20e%20proposte%20emendative%20UCPI.pdf (accessed 22 December 2015).
13. Personal interview, 5 May 2014, Rome.
14. Violenza su donne: Boldrini (Sel), politica deve affrontare il problema. (2013, 14 February). *Adnkronos* [Factiva].
15. Violenza donne: Bersani, coltivare cultura rispetto a parità sessi. (2012, 17 Novembre). *Asca* [Factiva].
16. Personal interview, 26 May 2014, telephone.
17. Violenza donne: Finocchiaro, istituzioni intervengano. (2012, 8 November). Ansa [Factiva].
18. Elezioni: Bersani da Pd impegno concreto per democrazia paritaria. (2013, 19 February). *Adnkronos* [Factiva].
19. Violenza donne: Ghizzoni, prevenzione parte dalla scuola. (2013, 14 February 2013). *Agi* [Factiva].
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CHAPTER 5

'Femminicidio', Gender Identity, and Feminism Contested. A Narrative of Ideology

The 'femminicidio' narrative has sparked intense criticism from a variety of social actors in civil society. Even some 'femminicidio' advocates who initially urged institutional intervention against VAW on a later stage criticised the emergency/security approach of the government and the insufficient allocation of funds to implement the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention to fight against VAW. However, my focus is not on these specific arguments as my aim is not limited to that of a critical analysis of the appropriation and distortion of VAW discourse by the State alone, as if the State was the only one responsible for the distortion of a 'pure' version of reality on VAW. More so, my aim is to explore one of the recurrent narratives emerging in spaces of contestation against the dominant discourse on gender deployed by 'femminicidio' narrative.

In particular, in these spaces of contestation, counter-hegemonic discourses do not narrowly revolve around the 'femminicidio' narrative and VAW/GBV discourse specifically. Rather these spaces expand and connect with other viable discourses that enact and normalise the same gender framework that underpins the 'femminicidio' narrative. As already discussed, this gender framework builds upon a critique of power relations in patriarchal society and intersects with a radical constructivist narrative that positions discrimination (or violence) as stemming from gender identity, which is in turn understood as a cultural construct. Therefore in this chapter I open up the analysis to include contestations of gender discourses that operate in parallel to 'femminicidio' discourse but do not

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necessarily address the topic of violence singularly. I have adopted this approach in an attempt to address concerns regarding the possible consequences of this radical constructivist semantic plot and the wider understanding of gender and heterosexuality it articulates as it travels across different orders of discourse beyond the VAW discourse in which it originated. Here I will explore the voices contesting the gender framework in the specificity of the 'femminicidio' narrative and VAW discourse, as well as voices that contest the gender framework as it is deployed in different areas of political debate, namely the issue of discrimination of homosexuality and same-sex couples in terms of homophobia and rights to marriage and family.

It emerges from my thematic analysis of interviews with family activists, including anti-gender movement as well as men's rights groups and divorced fathers, that a recurring word around which contestation is played is 'ideology'. Therefore, in my analysis, the word ideology becomes the qualifier of the narrative (what I refer to here as the ideology narrative) produced in these spaces of contestations to counteract the hegemony of the gender paradigm. Hence, the whole chapter is built around the semantic plot of ideology. This counter-discourse qualifies femminicidio, gender discrimination discourses, and the large political feminist project as ideology or devices of ideology. Definitions of ideology abound and vary across philosophical paradigms from false consciousness in Marxist theory to any thought and discourse in postmodernism. By combining Althusser's, Hall's, and van Dijk's definitions, I understand ideology as a mental framework employed by a group of people in a given cultural context, or across multiple cultures, to interpret the world without making the constant effort to check on the ground to evaluate to what extent that mental framework works. This framework is composed of beliefs, ideas, and practices that through institutions (not necessarily State institutions but also media, NGOs, universities, etc.) are translated into meanings conveyed and reinforced by discursive chains which are shaped by the historical and social context and that frame social relations as immutable (Althusser 1994; Hall 1982, 1996; Makus 1990; Van Dijk 2000). Those with access to discourse production draw their representation of reality and this version through reiteration across different debates and genres wins 'a universal validity and legitimacy for accounts of the world which are partial and particular' (Hall, in Makus 1990, p. 498). In other words, a certain view of the world becomes the dominant understanding of what the world itself is.

Ideology, which can be defined in countless ways, seems to be used with the following meaning: imposed specific representations of human identity and relationships between the sexes that are disconnected from scientific reality. In this sense, these representations are viewed as building upon a melange of true and false statements, where people are made to believe through the continuous repetition of these statements specific narratives, and images. A shared view is that of an Orwellian operation of politically correct language is at work to bring about a project of social and anthropological change that aspires to a gender-neutral and gender-fluid vision of society, inhabited by identityless consumers.

Before looking into this narrative of contestation let me first introduce the groups that articulate this discourse: the shared parenting movement and the anti-gender movement. Later, I will spend a few paragraphs reflecting on a possible definition of feminism(s) in light of international literature that criticises the ideologisation of feminist discourses. This section will allow me to clarify my position as a researcher working across slippery intellectual and political slopes such as feminism, gender studies, and anti-feminism. At that point I will address the crux of the discussion: arguments that compose the narrative of ideology.

1 The Shared Parenting Movement in Italy

The shared parenting movement's main goal is a full implementation of the shared parenting law (54/2006). Enacted in 2006, the law establishes that both parents equally provide for their children's growth, not only economically but also in terms of personal engagement. In reality, for the majority of divorce cases, children are assigned to live primarily with their mothers whereas fathers are relegated to secondary caregivers, seeing their children during fixed time slots (usually weekends and an occasional weekday or holiday) (Colantoni 2013; Deriu 2007; Ruspini 2006; Vezzetti 2014). This situation is the result of judiciary praxis and bureaucracy shaped by a conception of gender roles according to which women are naturally inclined to raise children and men's function of fatherhood is more easily expendable. Groups in this movement attempt to change this scenario through lobbying and legislative actions, public rallies, online activism, and through direct counselling of divorced parents.

The movement is variegated and includes several different components. The most well known and studied are the men's rights (also referred to by scholars as the masculinist movement) and the divorced father movements.

There are also divorced mothers, housewives, new partners of divorced fathers, family experts, and child's rights activists with a range of different professional profiles that participate in these movements. The literature on the men's rights and divorced father movements is not particularly abundant, and most of the work that has been done in this area is produced by members of the movements themselves or by scholars working within a gender and feminist paradigm (Piccone Stella 2000; Ruspini 2012).

Internationally, academic studies tend to talk about men's rights and divorced father movements as reactionary and chauvinist forces, a kind of revanchism, as a backlash movement against women's emancipation, that wants to re-establish male supremacy, and insists on maintaining traditional institutions of family as situ of gender inequality, and pretends incoherent privileges and rights (Bertoia and Drakich 1993; Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2011; Faludi 1992). This stream includes a recent book published by two Italian researchers from the University of Genoa, Gabriella Petti and Luisa Stagi (2015). Their analysis focuses on repertoires of the principal voices of the divorced father discourse in Italy and on how these activists' repertoires intertwine with social psychology discourse on family with the aim to 'take distance from the alarmist clamor surrounding the topic of fatherhood [in the divorced fathers movement], which gains legitimation through a *purely rhetorical* use of the incontestable reality of fathers' suffering and the collapse of the family' (p. 8, my translation). These scholars read the movement and the discourses of divorced father activists as ideological and reactionary, particularly in how the movement assigns the father with an essential role for the healthy psychological development of children and for the health of society in general (albeit built upon a heterosexual conception of family). Recurrent topics of these movements' counter-discourses on feminism and gender violence, such as the concealed existence of female violence against men, forms of bureaucracy in divorce proceedings that penalise men, false allegations of male violence instrumentally used by divorcing wives as an advantage in the custody battles for children, as well as the topic of alienating mothers, are all read flatly by Petti and Stagi as 'false myths' (p. 78).

My approach to the study of these counter-discourses is the complete opposite: in fact, I interrogate the discourses spoken within this movement as possible contributions to social change rather than dismissing them altogether as hateful rhetoric. Therefore, my intent goes far beyond a mere recognition of the discourses advocated by these groups in the public sphere and rather aims to identify those discourses that can help us to

advance a critique of what I call in this study the 'gender discourse'. I examine the voices of men's and divorced father's rights alongside the voices of female, family and child's rights advocates that all particularly focus on shared parenting. These voices have variegated political sensibilities, are generally well educated and have different professional profiles (e. g. lawyers, jurists, psychologists, social workers). Here I redefine the identity of a broader movement around the discourse of shared parenting, and ultimately the discourse of the child's rights to be co-parented, rather than focusing only on men's rights and divorced fathers movements as purely anti-feminist movements but rather as part of a conversation around parenting that takes place in a diverse set of social spaces. Having clarified this methodological approach, let me dip into the existing literature on the men's rights and divorced father movements in Italy and sketch the main traits and discourses of this component of the broader shared parenting movement in Italian society.

According to Venitmiglia (2006) there are two fundamental factors in the establishment of male groups in Italy since the 1980s. The first is related to the impact of the feminist revolution on gender roles and society at large: women's emancipation, feminist achievements around particular women's rights (abortion, parenting, pink quota), and the inroads of a radical feminist view of society where women do not need to be in relationships with men. The second factor that encouraged reflection on masculinity was the questioning of the very fundamentals of male and female identity, which could enable the conception of a radical possibility of a society governed by women only, a society in which the typical functions of men (related to physical strength and reproduction) could be made obsolete, even eliminable.

This possible scenario is elaborated on in the discourse around the fatherless society. A pioneering voice in this discourse is Jungian psychoanalyst Claudio Risé. To him, the discrediting of the father's role in society goes hand in hand with the devaluation of the sacral nature of love between men and women that characterises postmodern secular societies. Risé (2003, 2010) points the finger at a contemporary culture that is blind to the symbolic role of the father who projects the child into the world by detaching him/her from the enjoyment of maternal bodies. This society rejects the power of nature and is populated by sadistic personalities that want to aggressively invade everything. This is in Risé's view the origin of violence: the imposition of reason upon nature. Similarly, Massimo Recalcati (2011) reads the loss of centrality of the father as a by-product

of capitalism, a system in which pleasure is limitlessly encouraged and in which a discourse on love is kept at the margin.

Parallel to the rise of this envisioned scenario of a society without fathers is the emergence of a new model of male parenting, a model that has developed together with a redefinition of masculinity in society. Maurizio Quilici (2010), founder of the first research institute on paternity in Italy, considers the topic of new fatherhood to be an unprecedented upheaval that is deeply changing the Italian family, previously defined along the dichotomy of the absent and authoritarian father and the thoughtful, patient and caring mother. In the past the dominant culture, including the State, promoted the tight association between fatherhood and virility: fathers were authoritative, a symbol of *patria potestas* (power of the father), in charge of transmitting social and moral norms (Ruspini 2006). Traditional markers of virility, which has been a strong component of nationalistic rhetoric and a device for keeping in place a rigid division of gender roles, is today redefined in a negative way associated with chauvinism and misogyny (Bellassai 2011).

Today family structures are different and gender roles, which still remain marked, are not as widely divided as in the past: more and more women are educated and determined to pursue self-realisation in their professional and personal lives, and men have more opportunities to engage in domestic duties and their children's education (Canal 2012; Romano et al. 2012; Zajczyk and Ruspini 2008). The new man and the new father is more inclined to express his feelings and sensitivity, he defines his identity of father in a relational and emotional way rather than through the authoritative, detached model (Magaraggia 2013; Recalcati 2013; Quilici 2010; Ventimiglia et al. 1996). This is not to say that traditional typologies of fathers have been extinguished in Italian society: rather, they coexist with those who go beyond the economic support of the family, those who engage in the daily care and ludic activities with their children and establish an emotional peer relationship with their partners (Zajczyk and Ruspini 2008).

In the Italian as well as international landscape of men's rights and father's rights movements, different streams coexist. Categorisation usually divides the movements into three main streams: the anti-feminist rightists, the mythopoietic, and the pro-feminist. The first stream gets inspiration from international authors such as Marc Feigen Fasteau, Herb Goldberg, and Warren Farrell, vocal voices in the reflection on discrimination against men and double sexism generated by stereotyped

knowledge and representations of masculinity, as well as by feminist culture and affirmative actions. In Italy the most visible representatives of this stream at the moment are two groups: A Voice for Men, which is a branch of the same international group born it the United States, with the core mission of exposing the widespread hatred against men and to reaffirm the principle of gender legal equality against a current situation in which men are discriminated; the second group is *Uomini Beta*, which stands out for applying a Marxist critique to gender roles through which they expose the oppression of men and rejecting the role of men as oppressor assigned by what they see as a feminist revision of history.

The mythopoietic stream was developed internationally with the publication of Robert Bly's (1990) bestseller *Iron John*. The principal voice in Italy, again, is Claudio Risé, a Jungian psychologist who around 20 years ago started a series of seminars on the importance of revitalising self-awareness on anthropological identity markers of men through a recuperation of male archetypes and instincts. Participants in seminars founded *Maschi Selvatici* (wild men), an intellectual organisation with a Catholic spirit, dedicated to the reaffirmation of the central roles of men and fathers in society. They believe that authentic virility is an essential source for male identity, which can be strengthened through an attention to symbols and feelings.

Finally, we have the pro-feminist stream, with its leading group *Maschile Plurale*, engaged in a reflection on the need to redefine a new male identity freed from the traditional assumption of male superiority, able to relate to emancipated women and attune to feminist principles. The feminist revolution is seen as an opportunity for men to reinvent themselves and experiment with new roles and relational modalities. In this stream, male violence is interpreted as an expression of the pressure of traditional gender roles on men and male identity. These groups, in partnership with women's organisations, engage in social activities that aim to contribute to the cultural change required to fight violence while also providing support to abusive men. Although the literature generally includes these groups in the men's rights movement, during qualitative coding I found it more relevant to analyse their discourses along with those emerging from interviews with the feminist movement, since they orient themselves around gender theories with similar origins.

Besides men's movements, I also included in my interviews those voices linked to divorced parents groups and advocacy organisations for children's right to family. This is a multifaceted landscape with a plethora of local and national NGOs, bloggers and professionals with shared as well as

very divergent positions on political strategies and the legal aspects of shared parenting reform. Co-ordination and dialogue within these movements mainly occur online. One of the most prominent organisations in this stream is *Crescere Insieme* (Grown Up Together), whose founder is Marino Maglietta, the author of the first shared parenting law (54/2006). *Crescere Insieme* was created in 1993 and since the outset it engaged not only divorced fathers but parents more generally, divorced or not, as well as lawyers and psychologists, in order to encourage a broader reflection on parenting in contemporary families whose equilibrium is more often affected by separations. Marino Maglietta's work has also inspired a recently established group called *La Nostra Campagna* (Our Campaign) that advocates for Maglietta's nomination as Ministry of Equal Opportunity.

Another important organisation in this movement is *Adiantum*, which since 2009 has sensitised civil society to acknowledge a child's right to have a family, two parents and a house to ward against juvenile distress, as an effect of a parent's absence. *Adiantum* is also engaged in the reform of the current shared parenting law and is active in the protection of children from excessive invasion of social services when children are taken away from 'disadvantaged' families and placed in the foster care system. Finally the group *Colibrì*, a network of 31 organisations spread across different European countries, promotes confrontation on shared parenting legislative frameworks and institutional lobbying.

Unique groups active in promoting both mother and father equality in parenting is *Donne Contro – Movimento Femminile per la Parità genitoriale* MFPG (Women Against – Female Movement for Equity Parenting). The group was established in 2011 as a spontaneous aggregation of women, mainly new partners of divorced husbands, and women who are victims of psychological violence committed by other women and who experience discrimination under existing family laws. This group advocates for shared parenting and for the overcoming of a sexist culture that affects both genders. Through their blogs and Facebook pages they provide counter-information on DV with the aim of increasing awareness on the role of women as perpetrators of violence. They have repeatedly been targets of cyber stalking and intimidations.

In this movement I also include people who established social services that work outside the mainstream methodology: for example the independent and self-funded anti-violence centre *Ankyra* in Milan as well as the public anti-violence centre CEAV established by the Vicenza City Council, that welcome both male and female victims of violence.

2 The Anti-gender Movement in Italy

In 2014, while the 'femminicidio' media hype was gradually exhausting itself, another gender-related discourse was moving to centre stage in the political debate: in order to respond to an alleged increase of homophobia in society, Member of Parliament Ivan Scalfarotto drafted a law that categorises homophobia and transphobia as crimes. Like 'femminicidio', homophobia law revolved around specific terms with no clear definitions (with the result that being guilty of homophobia or 'femminicidio' might rely on the subjective decisions of judges about what these terms mean and to what extent they should be punishable).

Like femminicidio, the homophobia debate sparked intense opposition, driven most of all by groups with a strong Catholic affiliation and rooted in a pre-existing social prolife and pro-family movements, although also animated by laics and people of other faiths. These anti-gender groups share a similar critical view with 'femminicidio' opponents on dominant representations of different aspects of relations between the sexes, although their counter-discourses focus on (gender) identity instead of (gender) violence.

These groups are part of a broader social movement called the 'anti-gender' movement. Paramount to the international acknowledgement of this movement is the booklet published in 2015 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies titled *Gender as Symbolic Glue*. The essays collected in this booklet analyse the emergence of the anti-gender discourse in France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia and describe it as an attempt to 'introduce misleading terms "gender ideology" or "gender theory" which distort the achievements of gender equality' (Kováts and Põim 2015, p. 11). According to the authors the discourse of this social movement overlaps with far-right and conservative parties' politics. Curiously, this booklet did not address the parallel formation and the arguments of the anti-gender movement in Italy. Let me try to fill this gap.

Anti-gender groups in Italy channel their advocacy against what they call 'gender ideology': the normalisation of the false assumption that human beings are mere cultural beings detached from any biological data, an ideology which serves to realise a project of social and anthropological change in which human beings are no longer identifiable as male and female. In other words they contest the radical constructivist paradigm which I previously demonstrated as a paradigm deployed by the 'femminicidio' narrative of cultural gendered violence.

They claim that the right to publicly defend marriage is an important aspect of freedom of speech, a right that may be endangered by this new homophobia law. This law would modify existing hate speech laws by detailing a specific sub-category of hate speech crime, namely homophobic speech. The problem according to these advocacy groups is that this sub-category is based on a purposefully vague definition of homophobia, and that this incertitude could potentially lead to applying the charge of homophobia to any ideas that do not conform to a constructivist notion of gender identity. This, for example, could include acknowledging the biological foundation of heterosexuality as the only possible site for the procreation of life and the formation of a family (a biological family with children).

Another related frontline of these groups is the law on same-sex partnerships drafted by Member of Parliament Monica Cirinnà (PD), which entered into force in May 2016 after a long and volatile political debate. Cirinnà's law is not the first legislative attempt to reform the family institution with an extension of partnership agreements and the recognition of domestic partners regardless of sex. However, political consensus has never been reached in any of these attempts with strong opposition not only from the Centre-Right coalition but also from Catholic parts of the Centre-Left coalition.

A parallel mission for these groups is to raise awareness around the ideology underlying certain anti-discrimination educational programmes for children and kids. These include specific programmes and educational content following the guidelines developed by a group of 20 experts from 9 European countries under the guidance of the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) in Cologne, Germany and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, and implemented in Italy by the National Office for Racial Anti-discriminations (UNAR) in primary schools. These programmes, according to anti-gender groups, expose children too early to activities and ideas that unnecessarily sexualise the body. This includes materials teaching ideas like all individuals are equally free to be a man or a woman, and that children do not necessarily need two parents of a different sex. The groups argue that this kind of content may be either age inappropriate or unnecessarily confusing. Pro-life and family organisations launched a public petition on this topic asking the State to respect family sovereignty regarding the ethical and sexual education of children, to withdraw any educational projects that teach sexual indifferentiation and rather encourage the participation of parents and family in the ideation of educational strategies aimed at the development of personality in harmony with nature and family.[1]

In a nutshell, these groups argue that the false idea that sexual and gender identity can be self-determined is being increasingly exposed and spread in society through educational programmes, laws, and public administration policies.[2] The focus of concern is twofold: the indoctrination of new generations with the notion that gender identity is a mere cultural construct that can be fluid and changeable at one's own whim; the loss of children's rights to have both a mother and a father, a loss that they view would be automatically realised if same-sex couples are legally allowed to marry, undermining the fundamental function of marriage which is ensuring the continuation of society. Scalfarotto's law is, in their view, a powerful tool for silencing views that disassociate themselves from this ideology, the first step to kill the dissent on gay marriage and adoption.

In this anti-gender movement, composed of several organisations, think-tanks, informal networks, individual participation of journalists and intellectuals, there are two groups who are the most visible that have been established precisely with a mission of contradicting the gender discourse. The first is the *Manif pour Tous*, started in 2012 in France in response to the law presented by the Holland Government on same-sex marriage. The Italian branch was established with a specific goal of awakening consciences of people and inviting them to stand up against the demolition of family carried out through the laws and programmes discussed so far. Activists wear gags in public rallies to symbolise the threat to freedom of expression advanced by the Scalfarotto law. The organisation has expanded its capacity with more than 60 local groups monitoring the infiltration of what they call 'gender ideology' in city councils, regional governments, and schools.

The second group is *Sentinelle in Piedi* (Standing Guards), which began in synergy with, and with the same objectives as *Manif Pour Tous Italia*, likewise inspired by French anti-gender movements. However, this group differs in method: *Sentinelle in Piedi* holds gatherings in squares across the country with participants aligned two metres distance from each other, facing buildings of power, while silently reading books. Their intent is to symbolise the consistent learning that is needed to be able to serve as 'watch dogs' of society and denounce attempts at the destruction of civilisation.

A highlight event of anti-gender mobilisations was the public gathering called Family Day in Piazza San Giovanni in Rome on 20 June 2015 by a grass-roots committee of the pro-family organisation called *Difendiamo i Nostri Figli* (Let's Protect our Children). *Manif Pour*

Tous and *Sentinelle in Piedi* were also involved in the event. One million people participated in the event, which was not exclusively a Catholic event (as it was depicted by the mainstream media) but also attended by laics and representatives of other religions (such as Muslims and Evangelists) and endorsed by the pro-family committee of Members of Parliament. The anti-gender movement cannot, nor the event on 20 June, be summarised simply as an anti-gay marriage mobilisation of conservative Catholics. Although it is undeniable that the movement has strong Catholic origins, it also attracts participants who would typically not identify themselves as Catholic believers, including people from different religions as well as atheists.

Also, to further complicate the picture is the official position of the Catholic Church and its selective mobilisations in the anti-gender battle. Pope Francis repeatedly expressed his concern with the spread of gender ideology in society. For example he spoke about 'ideological colonisations' that 'poison soul and family', and wondered whether gender theory, which he described as 'a mistake of human mind that produce a lot of confusion', is an 'expression of frustration and resignation aimed to erase the difference'.[3] However, it is interesting to note that the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) did not join the protest of 20 June, a decision made by the Secretary General due to CEI's general dislike of mass gatherings. The same motivation was also given for the absence of *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL), an ecclesial movement for Catholic education. Also, at the 2015 annual CL meeting in Rimini, the presentation of a book by Dominican priest Giorgio Carbone titled *Le Bugie del Gender* (The Lies of Gender) was censored and the topic was completely absent in the whole meeting's programme.

3 Feminism and Ideology: A Tempting Intimate Dance

Having sketched the main features of the two movements that are contesting feminist gender discourses, let me now attempt to look at feminism and gender as ideological concepts and the relationships between them. The main problem with providing a clear definition of feminism is that any endeavour carries the possibility that it will be dismissed for being too generalist (and derogatorily labelled as universalist), for failing to capture the diversity of theoretical frameworks and political ideology of countless

streams (equality, gender, cultural, eco-feminism, post-structuralist, pro-sex, liberal, post-colonial, queer, etc.), having too prolific objects of enquiry (civil rights, pornography, femininity, etc.), for different hierarchical positions in organisation of knowledge (paradigm, method, epistemology, theory), and/or for the vastly different environments of implementation (academia, movements, institutions, popular culture). Sharp divisions between feminisms can be an effective strategy to discourage intellectual critiques that aim to point directly at the responsibility of feminist theory in cultural change (Vandermassen 2005).

Indeed, copious intellectual effort has been spent to chart the diversities of feminism and classify these diversities in different categorisation systems, which in turn generates more feminism-s (Ferguson 1984; Jackson and Jones 1998; Lewis and Mills 2003; Restaino 1999). I will not engage in this kind of effort, which would be useful if my intellectual interest was one of analysing the specificity of the contribution for each stream of feminism to the understanding of VAW, DV, and IPV. On the contrary, given that my interest is to argue that the same social phenomenon can be constructed through different discourses, seemingly detached from feminism, I need to clarify the typifying characteristics of a feminism framework across different streams, levels of knowledge and environments of application, in order to delineate the boundaries of my critique. This approach is necessary in order to justify the possibility of working within the areas of gender, violence, the body, men's and women's issues without necessarily adopting a feminist standpoint, and, at the same time, to withstand the accusation of being anti-feminist or sexist (Berns 2001; Dragiewicz 2011; Faludi 1992; Klein 2002). Positioning one's own intellectual work within the unsettled area between these two opposite factions is contentious, requiring an argumentative strategy of anticipated self-defence and disclaimers (Derber and Magrass 2008).

Setting boundaries and defining feminism is also problematic when we consider that, since the 1980s, feminist themes and perspectives have travelled from feminist social movements to be incorporated into national and international institutions, academia, soft literature, and the media, with different degrees of dialogue with empirical social theory, accuracy of data, generalisation, and use of slogans (Baden and Goetz 1997; McLean and Maalsen 2013; McRobbie 2004). Contemporary culture is imbued with feminist principles, which have trickled down, not always with the intent of the original versions, from social movements to institutional bureaucracies and government chairs, but also down to daily life and the

private intimacy of families and couples (Crittenden 1999; Hooks 2003). In these private spheres, feminist values constitute a viable framework for defining and reclaiming personal gendered identity, that is, to shape our femininity and masculinity according to feminist readings of womanhood and manhood (Hoerl and Kelly 2010). This framework is also viable when individuals need to make sense of personal dynamics with the other sex (e. g. quarrels, courtship, rejections) as well as when parents explain gender roles and expectations to new generations of young men and women (Young 1999).

To define feminism in this contemporary picture, I borrow Rosalind Gill's definition of post-feminism as a 'sensibility' (2007, p. 148). In other words, I see feminism as a personal attitude that embodies specific values propagated in society through a political cultural project, which has attained a certain level of hegemonic consensus and has been internalised across generations. However, having reached the status of a morally legitimised cultural value, these feminist values are not easily recognisable as specifically feminist and on the contrary are conflated with simple common sense in the public imaginary. Indeed amongst younger generations of women there is a tendency to disassociate themselves from feminism, as they associate feminism with the most radical expressions of past and present mobilisations while taking for granted those aspects of society that have been modified by feminist discourses of which they benefit (Pomerantz et al. 2013). Also, it is interesting to note the findings of a CBS News Poll that although majority of women tend to positively value past achievement by women's movements, they responded that they do not consider themselves to be feminists, unless a definition of feminism is included in the survey as 'someone who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes' (Alfano 2005). According to Kuhle, this bizarre finding might be explained by the general unpopularity of the claims made by one specific stream of feminism, namely gender feminism, which preaches the self-determination of one's identity detached from sex difference (Kuhle 2012).

Any attempt to question discourses that incorporate feminist principles can easily be interpreted as an attempt to subvert the moral order, an assault to social justice that ultimately hurts women (Carnegie 2015). In this vein, it is not clear whether topics such as the body, gender representations, femininity, and equal opportunity, topics which are traditionally colonised by a feminist standpoint, are open to analysis through frameworks other than feminism, and whether intellectuals who dare to do so

would be labelled as dissident feminists or anti-feminist. For example, it is difficult to define the status of public intellectuals such as Christina Hoff Sommers, Danielle Crittenden, Camille Paglia, Janet Halley, and Janice Fiamengo, who publicly question feminist orthodoxy. On the other hand, even theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva, who are landmark feminist thinkers, do not recognise themselves as feminists. Journalist Cathy Young resolves this dilemma this way: 'Do I still consider myself a feminist? No, if feminism means believing that women in Western industrial nations today are "oppressed" or if it means "solidarity with women"... Yes, if it means that men and women meet each other as equals, as individuals first and foremost' (1999, p. 9).

Having said that, what is the common denominator of multiple discourses produced under the auspices of a broader feminist category? I maintain that the central topic of this immense production is the oppression of women as a gender category. Oppression which has been theorised either within a structuralist paradigm of powerholder/powerless and within post-structuralist scholarship of multiple coexistent pervasive mechanisms of power on body and identity (Sawicki 1991). Notwithstanding the philosophical paradigm, all feminism-s maintain and rework that original ontological premise which was explicated in the 1792 seminal book *A vindication of the rights of woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft, regarded as the pioneer of feminist philosophy (even though the word 'feminism' itself did not appear until 1895): the premise is that in patriarchal society men hold a privileged position at the expense of women. This assumption has been gradually reworked through different streams of feminism that shift the focus from lack of (largely legal) rights for women, to more symbolic dimensions of power and power relations between the body and subject. The current version of that original premise of oppression appears to be the following: in a patriarchal heteronormative society, heterosexual men hold a privileged position at the expense of all others.

In this vein, I conclude this section with a definition of feminism that I find more apt in a critique of ideology.

> Feminists argue that, intellectually, they are the equal of men and hence, deserve equality under the law and in power, resources, and cultural standing. It is their mission, they feel, to rectify the structural inequalities that millennia of discrimination and cultural biases have put in place and that are reinforced by institutional structures and everyday practices. Women suffer from three major, overlapping and interpenetrating sources of bias: sexism,

> androcentrism, and patriarchy. Sexism is a system of attitudes or practices that discriminate against women as a sexual category; patriarchy is the institution of male dominance; and androcentrism is a male bias, the tendency to view men as the center of the universe. It is the goal of feminism, its adherents aver, to eliminate these sources of bias and discrimination and help usher in an era of sexual equality. (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2010, p. 221)

3.1 Is Feminism an Ideology?

It is not surprising that many authors speak of feminism as an ideology (Bawer 2012; Benatar 2003; Benford and Snow 2000; Derber and Magrass 2008; Farrell et al. 2008; hooks 1984; Klein 2002; O'Leary 2006). One stream of critique focuses on the ideological nature of the discourse on VAW and on female victims of sexism in general in patriarchal society. These critics emphasise the inaccuracy and mystification of data circulated by feminist associations and writers, and at the same time demonstrate instances of sexism suffered by men (Badinter 2006; Crittenden 1999; Farrell et al. 2008; Sommers 1994). A popular case in this stream of critique is to interrogate statistical claims by feminists. For instance, one common statistic widely circulated by mass media on sexual assault, advocacy organisations, and even prominent feminists such as Susan Faludi and Naomi Wolf is that one out of every four women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape by the time they reach university. This claim originates from a 30-year-old study sponsored by *Ms* magazine back in 1985, whereby the researcher more generally asked participants if they engaged in sexual practices because of feeling overwhelmed by a man's pressure, without indicating severity of that pressure (Badinter 2006; Farrell et al. 2008; Sommers 1994).

In general, the underlying problems with providing statistics on VAW and GBV is that there is no standard definition of violence, and the collection of data itself is not gender neutral, neither in its purpose nor in the institutional setting in which it is collected. Indeed, worldwide statistics on GBV are mainly generated in studies aiming to expose male VAW, or through studies that rely on reported cases of violence to the police and/or in women's shelters to provide statistics for crime victimisation. However, when the occurrence of violence is investigated within heterosexual couples, taking both genders into account as either perpetrators or victims, results suggest that violence is symmetrical (Straus 2008).

A vocal proponent in this stream of the critique of feminism is Warren Farrell, formerly an activist alongside American feminists, who later became a reference point for the men's movement. He maintains that feminism is an ideology undermining women as well as men whenever, for example, it constructs a VAW discourse in which rape is synonymous with unwanted intercourse regardless of severity and that 'exaggerating claims of rape might be good for politics, but they are bad for women who want to love men' (Farrell et al. 2008, p. 44). Farrell argues that it would be wiser to understand sexual violence by acknowledging a shared responsibility in contributing to a society that he views as reinforcing sexual addiction. It is precisely this issue of shared responsibility in which feminism has failed, according to Farrell: women have fought for equal rights, but not with an equal assumption of responsibility.

Likewise David Benatar, another pioneer of the men's rights movement in the United States, advances a critique on the issue of affirmative actions for women, actions which are justified with an alleged existence of a universal oppressive patriarchy and that generate forms of exclusion and disadvantage for heterosexual men (Benatar 2003). In his view, these actions become absurd once discriminations experienced by men are acknowledged. This second sexism expresses itself, for example, whenever men's lives are valued less than women and children, who always come first in emergency situations or as recipients of aid. Another typical example of the discrimination put forth in this discourse is that men are the only ones obliged to undertake military service.

Also, scholar Janet Halley breaks from feminism in that, she argues, feminism underpins violent theoretical and conceptual structures and that recent feminist successes can carry violent distributional consequences for other groups (Cossman et al. 2003). These consequences, along with newly attained privilege in the social order, are not acknowledged by feminism, building on the injury triad logic that assumes female innocence and male immunity.

A second stream of ideological critique focuses on feminist theory of gender identity and intersects with bioethics and a broader critique of ethical relativism. Prominent authors in this stream are Dale O'Leary (2006) and Gabriele Kuby (2007), who look at feminism as a political cultural project of subversion of the natural order based upon the biological distinction between men and women. This project, according to these authors, is pursued by feminist and gay lobbies in international organisations and elitist sites of power. They argue that through

conferences, protocols and platforms for actions these actors institutionalise the false idea that identity of humankind is a cultural construct and that biological sex is modifiable (while hormonal and surgical treatments can only modify anatomy and not sex differentiation which resides in DNA). According to their theses, this falsehood constitutes the backbone for justifying the introduction of a series of new human rights in the reproductive sphere (e.g. abortion and artificial insemination).

Having reviewed principal viewpoints on feminism as an ideology, I feel it necessary to ask whether discourses can possibly remain discourses only and not succumb to ideology. Put another way, is there any difference between discourse and ideology? Mills sees discourse simply as a post-structuralist version of Marxian ideology: whereas in Marxist theory power is oppression imposed from above and resistance implies a revolutionary project with a clear goal of structural change, while in Foucauldian theory power is negotiated and contested by subjects concurring to determine a 'messy, complex vision of the future' (Mills 2004, p. 27).

I believe that a distinction is necessary to develop any critical analysis of discourse while avoiding a descent into relativism or rhetorical arguments. The methodological trick that I find helpful, and that I use in my study, with no pretention to formulate any new theories of ideologies, is to recognise whenever a discourse remains open to critical method, that is to say, the discourse that admits a confrontation with factual reality and scientific argumentation, and considers the possibility to declare dead its own premises or statements. As soon as discourses refuse any immanent dialectic critique and activate mechanisms (such as characteristics of political correctness, discussed in Chapter 1) that silence dissent through moral and pathos argumentation or derision of critical voices, those discourses are likely to be considered ideological discourses. In this vein, feminism becomes ideology, as soon as it assumes that its premise is a priority and ahistorical truth, refusing to investigate its validity over time and space, and rejecting any confrontation with other discourses (Makus 1990).

Does feminism, this pervasive sensitivity and its associated institutions, allow the questioning of its core statement, that of the oppression of women because they are women? Are the mechanisms of political correctness at work to defend that underlying assumption and discourage dissent? Daring to ask these questions is not synonymous with denying that women are discriminated altogether. The point is: Are women victimised because they are women? Are they killed because they are women? Is

gender identity always relevant in understanding social phenomena like violence in public and private life? Have women gained so much power in the family setting to the extent that they have displaced men's agency? Does feminism help us to explore these questions in a nuanced way, and moreover, is feminism ready to disconfirm its assumption as soon as other phenomena of social life are 'discovered'?

4 Ideology Narrative: 'Femminicidio', Feminism, and Gender in Focus

The ideology narrative engaged by anti-gender and shared parenting movements in Italy echoes the two streams of international critique that I have introduced so far. In particular, the 'ideology' qualifier is used to refer to three interconnected objects: the feminism project at large, the 'femminicidio' narrative specifically (a critique that has more in common with the American men's rights discourse), and gender theory of identity (which in these counter-discourses is referred to as 'gender ideology' and drawing from the stream of arguments from Kuby and O'Leary).

Yet, one needs to acknowledge that there are significant points of overlap and rupture between these three objects of ideology discourse. For example, although gender 'has become so central to feminism that to discuss gender invites the assumption that one is discussing feminist theory, and vice versa' and 'gender analysis in rhetorical studies could be taken as a rough index of the state of feminism in the field' (Stormer 2006, p. 4) some streams of feminism, such as feminisms inspired by French philosophers of difference, have long disassociated themselves from the gender theory, which they ascribe to specific American-born streams of feminism, so-called gender feminism (Muraro 2011). In this stream we find for instance Australian feminist Germaine Greer (1993, 1999), who has always defended the importance of biology in making one individual a woman against a modern tendency to classify male to female transgender as women. In 2015, because of her critical positions she was accused of misogyny by a group of students petitioning to prevent her from speaking at Cardiff University in Wales.

Nevertheless, even though in Italy today difference feminism is careful to disassociate itself from gender feminism, they are also noticeably silent in this ideology narrative, insofar as its elites do not speak out against the spread of gender discourse, a discourse which redefines human identity as culturally constructed, detached from biological and anthropological data.

However, it is interesting to note that difference feminist in France (and in Italy too) are taking a stance against maternal/gestational surrogacy, a practice that they frame as a patriarchal exploitation of a woman's body and a harmful practice for children who are forcefully detached from the 'mother' soon after birth (Agacinski 2013). However, in this feminist discourse against maternal/gestational surrogacy the link between the gender philosophy of identity and the existence of this practice, especially when babies are commissioned by same-sex couples, remains widely unnoticed. It is also curious that feminists tend to put motherhood at the centre of their discourse against surrogacy while the importance of the father in children's life is not discussed.

I believe that given the extreme intertextuality of feminist, gender, and VAW/GBV discourses, it is more fruitful to focus on common threads that subtly link these three 'ideological' objects rather than diluting the analysis with continuous disclaimers of disassociation of one stream of feminism or another, of one dissident voice or another. To sum up, the picture of the ideology narrative that I paint in these pages builds upon the contestation of two main discourses, both stemming from feminism, and both endorsed by institutions in different stages of public debate: one is 'femminicidio' and VAW theorised as discrimination based on gender; and the other is discrimination of sexual orientation, namely homosexuals in terms of homophobia and rights of family (marriage, adoption, artificial procreation). Therefore, 'gender' is an inter-discursive device playing the role of trait d'union between the 'femminicidio' discourse and an anti-homophobia/gay marriage discourse. This trait d'union is blatantly revealed in *Il Gioco del Rispetto* (The game of respect), an educational project for fighting against VAW in kindergartens in my home city of Trieste, a programme I will elaborate on later in this chapter. But first, the following section will provide an initial snapshot of this ideology narrative that connects the 'femminicidio' narrative with an anti-homophobia and gay rights discourse.

4.1 Snapshots of Ideology Narrative

The ideology narrative maintains that gender discrimination discourses ('femminicidio' and LGBT discourses of discrimination) rest on the assumption that prejudice originates in the cultural construction of sexual difference. Both discourses are ideological in the sense that they engage a strict

understanding of human beings and social relationships, revealing specific partialities. The partiality of 'femminicidio' is one that negates different causes of violence and different relations between aggressor/victim: it reaffirms the victim status of women in society at large as well as in the context of private relationships. At the same time to maintain the stereotype of men as singularly violent oppressors, this partiality conceals from public scrutiny incidences of discrimination and violence against men, while legalising affirmative action initiatives for women, rendering men's lives and rights expendable. The partiality of the LGBT discrimination discourse resides in a solely cultural understanding of gender identity, gender roles and possibilities, an understanding of human identity that excludes biological dimensions that, as repeatedly shown by scientific studies, contribute to shaping identity, roles, and possibilities of all human beings.

In this ideology discourse, the 'femminicidio' narrative and anti-discrimination narratives with associated educational programmes are understood as tools of a global social/anthropological project. This project, according to this ideology narrative, is carried out through the criminalisation of men and the promotion of antagonism between the sexes to disrupt the status quo and promote social change. This disruption forces people to consider their individual rights to fully determine their identity in complete autonomy from sexual characterisation and embrace the possibilities of life that so far biologically attain only to heterosexuality. The ultimate goal of this project, according to this ideology narrative, is to realise the erasure of gender difference and give way to the creation of a 'new human', a commodified hetero-directed individual (De Benoist 2014; Perucchietti and Marletta 2014; Schooyans 2000). The gradual exclusion of heterosexual men from the generational transmission of knowledge, both privately in family and publicly in schools, along with models of androgyny and the normalisation of artificial or commodified reproduction (artificial insemination, surrogacy) are some of the manifestations of this process of gender erasure.

In my interviews, informants describe the specific modality and goals of this alleged revolution.

Fabrizio Marchi, founder of male group *Uomini Beta*:

> Feminism is a tool of capitalism. The objectification of human beings is the goal. Feminism was not established in Maoist China or Soviet Russia. It is spreading along with capitalism. Masculinity and fatherhood, as principles, cannot be transformed into a commodity form, capital and its reproduction.

> They represent a potential obstacle for capitalism, it is why they want to devitalise these principles.[4]

Giancarlo Cerrelli, Catholic jurist:

> Feminism is one stage in a broader revolutionary process that aims to demolish all authorities (the Church, the King, the Father, God) and will put the human at the centre rather than God. When we state, in the wave of ethical relativism, that there is no one absolute truth, we mean that there is no nature anymore, there is no normality. It is where ethical relativism becomes gender ideology: liquid society is expanded at a level of sexual genders when we claim that everyone can choose to be what they perceive to be.[5]

Enrica Perucchietti, journalist, author of book titled *Unisex*:

> Global powers need to introduce the single thought (pensée unique) in order to establish a political, financial and economic government. For decades a perfect citizen of this global government has been under construction: since the revolutions of the 50s and 60s, individuals have been depersonalised, conformed and transformed through eternal adolescences, in order to render them more manoeuvrable. In order to accomplish this plan, all intermediate levels are to be destroyed: the national identity, religious identity, family identity, and even sexual identity.[6]

4.2 Gender Discourse at Kindergarten. The Trieste Case

In 2015 children ages 3–6 years old who were enrolled in 18 kindergartens across Trieste province in northeast Italy were targeted by a new educational 'gender transformative' project called *Il Gioco del Rispetto*.[7] The project was sponsored by the Trieste City Council with funds allocated by the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. The project was framed as an initiative to contribute to the goals in the fight against VAW outlined by the Istanbul Convention through the eradication of gender stereotypes beginning in early childhood. The project's rationale is that gender stereotypes need to be challenged in so far as these stereotypes are factors that influence unequal opportunities, low employment rates for women, and high prevalence of VAW and femicide. Activities such as playing dress-up and sensorial exploration of other bodies, matching games with visual representations of parents and elephants engaging in interchangeable activities (e.g. housewife/househusband; female teacher/

male teacher) were elaborated to help children develop their identity in autonomy, detached from cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity and cultural imperatives of gender differentiation.[8]

This project sparked the concern of a group of parents, some of them affiliates of *Sentinelle in Piedi*. They argued that the project was a device of what the anti-gender movement calls 'gender ideology' now deployed amongst small children at an age when stereotypes have yet to sink in and sexualisation has not begun. This project in their view could generate unnecessary feelings of insecurity and confusion in children, initiating the same stereotypes the project aimed to combat. These parents' objections also revolve around the fact that this project was approved without the consent of children's families, which they argued are by law the principal educators of their children, especially in the domain of sexual identity and sexuality.[9]

Local Right-wing politicians addressed parents' concerns and called for the suspension of the project and also brought the project to the attention of national institutions. The media distorted the case by framing the project as a 'sexual education' activity in which children were invited to touch each other.[10] This misrepresentation went hand in hand with a depiction of the discourses of concerned parents as prudish reactions, and further polarised the debate by invoking the traditional opposition of a conservative Right (associated with traditional family activists and Catholic movements) pitted against a progressive Left (associated with the feminist movement and support of gay's rights) (Adinolfi 2014; Mellone 2006).

Several opinion makers commented on Trieste's case, which was even picked up by international media outlets such as BBC and *The Guardian*.[11] For example, lesbian writer Susanna Tamaro, herself an early supporter of the 'femminicidio' narrative, dissociated from this kind of gender initiative. She commented in the national newspaper *Corriere della Sera* about her concern on

> the centrality that is being given in our culture to the urgency to establish in childhood our adult sexual identity.[12]

From the scientific sphere anthropologist Andrea Zhok pointed out that pedagogy built upon the theory that

> 'gender identity is prevalently given by social convention' is inappropriate given that that this gender theory lacks scientific validation.[13]

Psychologist and paedophilia expert Valentina Morana published in a local Catholic newspaper a psychoanalytic semiotic analysis of one of the cards of the matching game:

> Absence of nose, ears, arms and hands, render it difficult for a child to identify body schema, which at that age is in the process of construction . . . Also, ears and most of all noses are physical traits that identify the sex of individuals, and in these drawings they are absent.[14]

In a press release the Mayor of Trieste Roberto Cosolini stated that he is

> 'frankly astonished and disgusted by certain falsifications', he reaffirmed his support to the Game of Respect 'because we believe in respect', and framed the project as an initiative in line with the historical spirit of the city of Trieste 'an example of vanguard for the entire world'.[15]

Despite his firm statements, nine games out of the 11 originally provided by the project were withdrawn.

Following Cosolini's press release, the *Legione Templarii Culturae Federiciana Pacis et Disciplina* presented a petition to the attorney's office against Trieste City Council, which has been accused of funding a project 'contra naturam'. Federician Templars National Coordinator Filomena Falsetta wrote:

> Nobody has the right to dispose of the Human, by causing in it that loss of contact with its natural traits, and by questioning the entire foundation on which rests the objective truth, truth in which human freedom is inherent. The game of gender represents an authentic 'abuse of power', in that it is an expression of subjective choices absolutely irrespective of what the Human is in nature, unity of soul and body.[16]

A couple of weeks later even Pope Francis defined the theory of gender as a

> mistake of the human mind which makes a lot of confusion.[17]

On the other side of the debate, the regional Guild of Psychologists defended the necessity of projects such as this by reiterating the same rhetorical schema underpinning GBV discourse:

> The project prevents violence, improves knowledge and understanding of the nature of gender violence as well as its causes which concern application

> of gender stereotypes and gender inequality... It prevents that enormous discrimination of women at an early age when stereotypes start.[18]

Also, the Guild referred to critics of the project as 'pseudo-professionals'.

What does this case demonstrate? First of all, the Game of Respect re-enacts the same statements that were earlier normalised by the 'femminicidio' narrative: partner violence is made by men and originates in difference between the sexes, difference that is only a matter of cultural conventions and constructions that need to be overcome because these constructions represent the oppression of individuals. In other words, the Trieste case confirms my initial suggestion that the implicit assumption that gender identity is a mere cultural construction, identified previously in the 'femminicidio' narrative, is further circulated and thus reconfirmed in other similar adjacent narratives of VAW.

This inability to even question this assumption is achieved through two techniques that are typical of ideology and political correctness as presented in chapter one. The modification of original meanings of words and the fabrication of new words aim to steer the modification of the public imaginary on society and on the self. This operates in tandem with moral framing, which in the case of gender discourses is that of a moral progressivism to be accomplished in order to expand universal rights. The consequence of moral framing is the elimination of dissent, which is also ostracised through overt intimidations and derisions.

4.3 New Meanings

The importance of words in sedimenting and normalising meanings that shape certain views of the world is widely recognised by scholars working within critical theory and by social actors who therefore engage in what Stuart Hall called battles of signification. In this line, Marcuse in his seminal text *One Dimensional Man* stated that a word,

> once it has become an official vocable, constantly repeated in general usage, 'sanctioned' by the intellectuals, it has lost all cognitive value and serves merely for recognition of an unquestionable fact. (1964, p. 94)

In Laclau and Mouffe's theory of signifiers:

> Hegemony involves competition between different political forces to get maximum support for, or identification with, their definition of 'floating

> signifiers', such as 'freedom' and 'equality' (terms which can assume different meanings, depending on whether they are 'articulated' in, for example, liberal or socialist discourse), or 'empty signifiers', such as 'order' or even 'democracy' (terms which can be invested with a variety of meanings because they have no inherent content and can serve to unite disparate movements). (in Townshend 2004, pp. 270–271)

The following is a brief overview of crucial words that lie at the core of battles of signification fought by anti-gender and shared parenting movements.

'Femminicidio'

As discussed previously, 'femminicidio' invents a new category of homicide: as soon as the word is used to qualify a specific case of homicide, standard gendered causes of violence are automatically inferred in the specific case. Armando Ermini, a member of the male group *Maschi Selvatici* (Wild Males) commented on 'femminicidio' as follows:

> The word 'feminicide' immediately evoked the word 'genocide', which means a series of actions . . . deliberately taken to destroy, partially or totally, a national, ethnic, racial and religious group . . . Collective imaginary will be taken to think of Italy as an enormous concentration camp where women, only because they are women, are killed and raped daily. Can this narration depict reality?[19]

Gender

Until recently, the word 'genere' (gender) in Italy was used only as a grammatical system of noun classification that organises knowledge about the outside world, with little meaning on its own in vernacular (Galeotti 2009). Males and females were referred to as the two sexes, not the two genders, and women were ironically referred to as 'the weak sex' or 'the gentle sex', not the weak or the gentle gender.[20] However, the word gender entered political language alongside the constructivist theory of gender's entrance into academia where today 'gender issues' and 'gender violence' are common expressions. At an international level, the word gender was absent from official political and judiciary jargon until the 1990s when it was mainstreamed through international conferences and declarations, particularly with the landmark UN Beijing Conference for Women (Baden and Goetz 1997). Indeed, in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

male and female are referred to with the word sex, not gender. A more recent document, the Yogyakarta Declaration, seems to redefine gender as a matter of feeling and sex as an attribute exteriorly assigned:

> understanding 'gender identity' to refer to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms. (Corrêa and Muntarbhorn 2007, p. 8)

Giulia Galeotti (2009) in her book *Gender (Genere)* defines the new word as a more elegant choice initially offered as a politically correct synonym of 'sex'. However, Galeotti notices that since the popularity of Butler's theory on gender performativity, a theory which interprets biological sex as a sheer invention of the human mind, gender has become the only viable signifier in common language to refer to sexual (in)differentiation. The term gender in Anthropology and Social Science was used in the context of a theory of sex roles, as a set of cultural expectations attached to the male and the female biological sex. Only later with the constructivist turn did the binomial sex/gender fall apart and intellectual inquiry around human identity, sexual or otherwise, discarded interest in biological data (Scott 1986; Sunderland 2004). Therefore, today using the word sex to mark a distinction between biology and culture, and in so doing reaffirm the existence of biology, is an act of resistance (Galeotti 2009).

Stereotypes

In the previous chapter I discussed that the eradication of gender stereotypes is argued to be a crucial tool to prevent VAW within the gender framework, an argument underpinning the Istanbul Convention on VAW, and endorsed by 'femminicidio' activists in Italy as well as the political representatives who support their initiatives. In the same spirit, there are also specific educational projects like the *The Game of Respect*, as well as the UNAR anti-discrimination educational projects. Likewise, a protocol signed by the Italian Ministry for Public Education and feminist organisation Soroptimist, provides that

> working on *identity* at school means to intervene at a cultural level to deconstruct *stereotypes* and *prejudices* that characterise gender relational

> modalities in a society where conflicts and violence escalate. Here there is the need to intervene with an educational action on construction of gender *identity*.[21]

Such educational actions are intended to be implemented in 21 provinces across the national territory.

As noted by Silvio Brachetta, a journalist for local Catholic weekly *Vita Nuova*, the word stereotype, a word so crucial in gender discourses and projects, is not clearly explained to the public and it is used, like the word gender, with an imprecise Orwellian meaning that seems almost indistinguishable from the word 'identity':

> The term is not explained because the goal is to indoctrinate male children with the fact that a predilection to football is not instinctive, but an artificial conditioning of society.[22]

In fact, the word stereotype has a precise meaning in Social Psychology and refers to a set of selected characteristics of things, individuals, and acts, which constitutes the simplified representation of those things, individuals, and acts and helps to place each inside or outside of a category (Goffman 1971). Therefore, a stereotype cannot be equated with (psychosexual) identity in that the former rests in the realm of representation, symbolism, and perception and the latter in one of *self* (Gobbi 2014). However, by rendering the two words interchangeable, as in the case of sex and gender, the risk is that one of the two 'signifieds' is missed.

Homophobia (and Transphobia)

Another 'hot' word with an ambiguous meaning is homophobia. Although its literal meaning is 'fear of the homo' (the human), its current use refers to the discrimination and fear of homosexuals. The official meaning according to UNAR is 'prejudice, fear and hostility towards homosexual persons and actions derived from such prejudice' (UNAR & Council of Europe 2013, p. 41). However, even if we adopt this definition, the use of this word, especially in a context of proscription and sanctions, presents some problems.

Massimo Introvigne, a Catholic intellectual and former representative for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OCSE)

programme on preventing xenophobia and religious discriminations, points out that:

> The problem with homophobia law is that it provides punishment for speech of instigation of discrimination. Let's take the literal meaning of discrimination, which is treating differently. It follows that if I publicly state that homosexual marriage should not be recognised I could possibly be accused of the instigation of treating homosexual couples in a different way than heterosexual couples.[23]

Another problem with this word is that associated proscriptions aim to punish not concrete acts of violence or insults but also the domain of representation. In this line, UNAR National Strategy against discriminations provides another problematic term:

> 'interiorised homophobia' which is defined as a 'form of homophobia often unconscious, which is the result of education and values of society, which sometimes victimises even homosexual persons themselves.' (UNAR & Council of Europe 2013, p. 41)

As a provocative counter-action against the imposition of gender-phobic terminology, pro-life lawyer Antonio Amato (2013) titled his book *Homophobia or Heterophobia?* in which he discusses the increasing intolerance towards those voices speaking of heterosexuality as the only possible natural form of sexuality and human reproduction. A 'prejudice' that UNAR defines as 'heterosexism' and identifies as 'principal cause of homophobia' (UNAR & Council of Europe 2013, p. 40).

4.4 Closing the Dissent

The erasure of what the gender discourse calls 'gender stereotypes', which I showed is based in an incorrect meaning of psychosexual identity, is presented in spaces of public opinion as a moral imperative of civilisation. On the other hand, those engaging the ideology narrative, in other words the opponents of this gendered vision, are vilified as un-professional or extreme political conservatives, or even worse dismissed as homophobic. Evidence of this approach has already been observed in the Trieste case, for example in the words of the Mayor of Trieste (with a progress and civilisation frame) and in the Psychologists

Guild's press release (disqualification). Also, it is telling that psychologist Valentina Morana, and she is not the only one, because she wrote and spoke out against the *The Game of Respect* and its dangerous effect in terms of psychosexual development of children, is under investigation by the Psychologists Guild.

A climate of subtle censorship and overt intimidation is a widely shared feeling amongst voices of this ideology narrative. For example, the group *Sentinelle in Piedi* holds public rallies for freedom of opinion organised in city squares across the country which are frequently interrupted by LGBT groups. Another symptom of censorship can be found in UNAR guidelines for gender sensitive reporting on LGBT issues: in the category of discrimination, journalists are encouraged to avoid specific comments or phrases that might appear homophobic, including the depiction of homosexuality as a choice that can be changed with therapies[24]; or even simply using the term 'gay marriage' as the UNAR claims the term suggests that differentiating marriage as gay encourages the idea that it is different from the traditional institution of marriage.[25] Also, recently a website launched titled *Registro Italiano dei Razzisti e Omofobi* (Italian register of racists and homophobics) which contains a regularly updated list of names, pictures, and profiles of people (including politicians, journalists, bloggers, etc.) who publicly expressed opinions that could be interpreted as against gay marriage and adoption.[26]

To conclude this section, I would like to mention another strategy for containing the dissent around gender: questioning the existence of the object of dissent, which in this case, means the denial that gender not only is an ideology but even a theory. This approach seems to be undertaken at a level of left-oriented press and also at an academic level.

Bioeticist Chiara Lalli commented on the *Internazionale* website that:

> 'Cassandras of "gender ideology" are fighting against an enemy that they imagined and made up, by turning reality upside down, with the aim to render the enemy unrecognisable and in that way make it possible to point at a terrible monster'. According Chiara Lalli, this ideology was invented in 'conservative, Catholic circles, that are obsessed with the loss of control'. These Cassandras include, the Pope Francis.[27]

Gender scholar Lorenzo Bernini, states that a theory of gender does not exist and that

> the category of gender coagulates the hostility of Vatican elites and Catholic integralist movements toward the achievements of civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, queer and intersex people. (2014, p. 81)

5 Unpacking Gender Assumptions: Counter-Discourses of Equality

Until this point I have elucidated the main themes of the ideology narrative, that is to say recurrent descriptions of the ideological nature of feminism, 'femminicidio', and gender, as well as main symptoms of this discourse that suggest that these three terms are at the centre of an ideological endeavour (the symptom of politically correct words and meanings and the symptom of disqualification of dissent). In the following section, by drawing from arguments advanced by voices in this ideology discourse, I will try to deconstruct the ideological plot upholding gender discourses previously introduced in the chapter on 'femminicidio'.

The plot can be synthetised as follows. I showed that 'femminicidio' frames the discrimination of women as a typical phenomenon of the patriarchy where being born a woman is the original source of sexist discrimination. It follows that this discourse and other discourses underpinning the same premise reconfirm again and again the original statement that women suffer discrimination because they are female in a society which assigns to individuals fixed gender roles based on biological sex. In other words, the following assumptions are rendered unquestionable: pervasive gender inequality discriminates women in every aspect of social life, women suffer violence because they suffer discrimination, discrimination rests in sex/gender identity, and individuals can determine their identity which does not relate to their biological sex.

Part of the ideology narrative wonders whether we can still talk about gender inequality in today's society where women's participation in public life is encouraged through affirmative actions benefitting women's social mobility and where contemporary culture does not impose the same roles on woman as experienced prior to the feminist revolution. Another part of the ideology narrative questions the assumption that being gendered entails discrimination. I suggest that the first counter-argument could be placed in a broader post-feminist discourse whereas the latter connects to a difference and equality discourse.

Post-feminist discourse qualifies feminist discourse as passé, an old rhetoric, which is built on an outdated picture of social values, gender

roles and women's status, family dynamics, and heterosexual relationships, which are not reflected in contemporary society (Faludi 1992; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2004; Negra and Tasker 2013). Interviewees speaking in this post-feminist discourse question the extent to and in which areas of life women in Italy today are in an inferior or more disadvantaged position than men and urge the acknowledgement of men as capable of being victims of discrimination too. The classic example brought to the fore by men's rights activists is one of the Titanic, where men die in the place of women and children and that those who are part of the lower strata of society, both men and women, are equally more at risk of dying than those belonging to the upper class who are evacuated first (Della Vecchia 2004). Likewise, they wonder whether a politics of 50% is representative of the differences between men and women. A pink quota is often regarded as a discriminatory tool, part of a distorted equal opportunity policy that itself becomes sexist by predominantly addressing women's needs, in a paternalistic retribution, while failing to address the needs of men.

Consider the following statements from critics of the reality of gender equality in Italy:

> Adriano Mazzola, shared parenting activist: I am not convinced by those who claim that today in Italy there is a strong inequality between men and women. Of course there is still a lot do; however pretending that Italy is the same as Afghanistan is a cruel falsehood.[28]

> Costanza Miriano, Catholic writer: Here in the western world we are really light years ahead. Let's go beyond this old story, let's dare to! If I ask my two little daughters if in their opinion women can be astronauts they would look at me as if I was drunk. One of them answered 'What's the problem mum? Of course women can be astronauts, engineers, and head of the State'.[29]

In the same spirit, voices in this stream of critique question not only the scope of discrimination of women but also the real scope of VAW and femicide. In this regard, earlier chapters showed that homicides of women remained stable while 'femminicidio' advocates claimed homicides were increasing at an alarming rate, one of a national emergency. I also showed that the ambiguous definition of 'femminicidio' renders it problematic to collect data to confirm the number of homicides of women simply 'because they are women'. These points were raised in September 2013 by the non-profit organisation for child protection *Adiantum* in a letter addressed to major national institutions which were in the process of

approving the law on gender violence, a law that it is worth reminding was advocated to address this VAW emergency. *Adiantum* highlighted that the data on 'femminicidio' is only collected by feminist NGOs and each provides different data in the range of 140–150 cases per year.[30] This number is much higher than the 57 intimate partner femicides that can be extrapolated from official statistics of the Ministry of Interior.

Similarly, many critics pinpoint that according to UN statistics, Italy is one of the safest countries for women in terms of homicide rates and that the recurrent slogan that male violence is the first cause of death for women 16–44 years old is a false claim, given that the WHO reports that first cause of death for women globally is transmissible diseases, and Italy is no exception.[31] ISTAT (2014) reports that the first cause of death for women in Italy is cancer, not male violence.

My take on this type of an argument targeting the tenability of the discrimination against women is the following: provided that truth needs to be continuously verified with a suitable methodology and that common knowledge would benefit from attempts of unmasking deliberate distortions of truth, I also think that a generalist argument about whether women are or are not victims of discrimination is incapable of interrupting the semantic plot of this dominant discourse. I recognise that this type of argument is likely to attract a series of particularistic objections which would point at existing discrimination affecting women in one pocket of society or another as evidence of the persistent general disadvantaged status of women in society as a whole.

A more effective endeavour in my view would be to show that the presence/absence of discrimination is not necessarily associated with the possibility to act/suffer discrimination and violence (Felson 2002). In other words, we need to acknowledge that violence can be performed by subjects who hold either more, equal or less power than the victim and that even when subjects commit violence from a privileged position of power this does not exclude the possibility that the same subject suffers discrimination in some or many other aspects of his/her life. This reasoning will be explored with more detail in the following chapter where I will direct the discussion towards violence perpetrated by women.

The second recurrent counter-discourse attempting to break up the semantic plot of gender discourses does so by problematising the relationship between difference and equality, by reaffirming the factuality of biological sex as a constitutive component of humankind (Pinker 2008). This counter-discourse glorifies the diversity of the

two sexes and the diversification of opportunities and possibilities derived from sexual difference. This reasoning connects back to the fundamental dilemma regarding how to pursue egalitarian projects while maintaining the right to be different. In a nutshell, this second counter-discourse allows the disconnection of discrimination (lack of equality) from sexual difference and at the same time enables the consideration that prejudices attached to sexes on a cultural level do exist and do generate discriminations.

In this regard, I find Giulia Galeotti's (2009) recipe particularly apt in counteracting 'gender ideology' through reviving the possibility for the coexistence between difference and equality. She urges an engagement with a broader reasoning around false synonyms such as difference/discrimination and equality/identity. In this line of thinking, one needs to acknowledge that 'any difference is richness' and that it is a false assumption that the absence of sexual differentiation (which is implied in the concept of changeable gender) would lead to equality. In other words, biological traits are not in and of themselves sources of discrimination, but rather should be examined in the positive/negative, inferior/superior connotation that these traits are ascribed by culture.

However, if we maintain that discrimination does not reside in the body but rather in the value attributed to the body, why should we feel the necessity to use the language of 'sameness' to teach 3–6-year-old children that mum and dad are equal? Clearly, the message conveyed through a discourse of equality in which subjects are represented almost identically is that not only do men and women have the right to engage in identical roles but more precisely that their distinctive male/female traits are interchangeable and irrelevant in the determination of (gender) identity. As clearly explained by French intellectual Alain De Benoist (2014) in his account on the historical development and mechanisms of gender ideology, sexual sameness does not mean the erasure of sexual traits but rather the erasure of a natural combination of these sexual traits in two fixed categories, male and female. According to the French intellectual, these two categories, which gender supporters feel limit the multiple possibilities of humankind, have been replaced by a new singular one, the category of gender, which can be filled with disparate characteristics derived from one or the other original male/female categories, and hence admits multiple sub-categories.

This counter-discourse relates to a well-established philosophical dilemma on the limitations of the right for humankind to accomplish its drive to submit nature, including human nature, to its ends and desires (Anstey 2003). Several

contemporary discourses, such as environmentalism, abortion, artificial procreation, euthanasia, plastic surgery, and post-humanism dip into the dilemma of the limitations of human agency, a dilemma that is progressively more complicated with technological advancement and the normalisation of a positively valued binomial technology/progress (Faber 2007; Sabet 2014; Saurette and Gordon 2013; Spaargaren et al. 2000). The human drive to modify the natural order and the nature of human beings was both applauded and condemned when it developed into specific eugenic projects. Similarly, at present the human drive of modification is condemned and applauded when it manifests in the expansion of universal rights to encompass the possibility for every human being, regardless of their body, to have a child (Ingram-Waters 2016); or when it manifests in the extension of universal rights to the 'possibility' of accessing surgical and hormonal therapies initially developed to cure exceptional cases of dimorphic sexuality for more general use. Applause for these modifications in today's debates especially comes from gender advocates. Consider this extract of an interview with a gender activist running educational projects for primary school teachers on gender stereotypes:

Interviewer: Do you encourage children to think they can decide to become a male or a female regardless of their sex, for example by replacing their vagina with a penis?
Respondent: Well, this is our final goal but we are far from that point.[32]

At this point one might wonder how a gender theory of VAW could possibly end up normalising such a robotic vision of the human. It goes without saying that discourses are spoken at a different degree of purity and coherence by different voices. Therefore, those who endorse the 'femminicidio' refrain do not necessarily agree with a queer studies vision of the world where children are encouraged to question their sex identity and orientation. The semantic plot and the conflation of terminology discussed in this chapter are not immediately visible to the public who applaud anti-discrimination educational projects as a moral necessity for rendering society more fair and equal. On the other hand, only when taken to the extreme do these ideologies reveal their consequences to the public if left to continue unquestioned. However, it is precisely the role of intellectuals to warn that an ideology, with its underlying theories and envisioned but not necessarily implementable projects, is floating across areas of public debate with more support than comprehension.

6 Conclusions

To sum up, let me attempt to synthesise this ideology narrative. 'Femminicidio' and the broader gender discourse on VAW as well discourses of gender discrimination such as homophobia and same-sex marriage are understood as devices that reiterate the common denominator of feminism: women suffer discrimination because they are women. This statement rests on a social constructivist view of humankind according to which sex identities are determined by culture, which is another false truth of feminist discourse that notoriously is at odds with biological knowledge (Vandermassen 2005). These two assumptions mingle with the result that biological sex and cultural expectations attached to this male/female dualism are conceptualised as the very source of human oppression.

Where are the psyche, the biology, and the complexity of human beings in these gender discourses, which are fully focalised on culture and the body to the extent that even the word identity is replaced by the term stereotype and sex with gender? I do not want to position this question as a reclamation for the return to a fully biologist positivist discourse of understanding the human and the social. It is not a contention between the biologist or constructivist mutually exclusive views of human identity. This would be a passé invitation for contemporary social research.

Human history has already gone through phases of extreme application of the two streams, and revolutions have already occurred to enlighten public knowledge, which for centuries was swindled by dogmas of obscurantism. We do not need to reject the factuality of sexed identity in order to recognise that human identity is exposed and modified by cultural objects that are in turn constructed by human beings (Griswold 1994). Sociology is already in the process of experimenting with new frontiers at the crossroads of biological knowledge and in light of an interdisciplinary call that contemporary scholarship can no longer turn a blind eye to new discoveries within the domain of neurosciences and genomics (Meloni 2014). Therefore, if scholars in Social Sciences and Humanities today have the possibility to acknowledge the biological data in their theorisation of society without running the risk of being charged with accusations of being one of those 'biologists', why does this same possibility seem to be neglected in public discourse? Or, let me put it another way: why is the mainstream political discourse on gender identity not embracing or at least acknowledging this bio/cultural knowledge and rather flatlines along simplistic lines of conservatism of nature and progressivism of culture? Why the exigency of

a certain radical identity politics to promote and advocate for the normalisation of ways of interpreting the self that do not correspond to what several scientific disciplines show about the complexity of humankind?

Yet these mixed comprehensive understandings of the human immersed in the social seem to be interpreted as common sense in society. In this chapter I showed that the voices of the ideology discourse position the human being as a complex being in its interaction with culture, at the centre of an analysis of violence. In this regard, let me add two more extracts that account for this bio/cultural or anthropological frame.

> Tiziana Ciprini, Member of Parliament, *Cinque Stelle* movement: Men and women are neither antithetical nor identical, but different and complementary. It is the acknowledgment of difference, of diversity, that guarantees real equal conditions and neutralises violence.[33]

> Fabrizio Napoleoni, member of men's group *Uomini Beta*: Human history is a violent history marked by the hoarding of natural resources. Why have men had a dominant role in such a history? They have more body strength. Who works in building construction today? It is more difficult for women to do it. On the other hand, women can give birth, men cannot. Biological differences have determined human evolution.[34]

Of course this frame is not the exclusive prerogative of these voices. In fact, the coexistence of biology and culture is also knowledge ascertained by many feminist thinkers who talk about 'innate' differences and qualities (Mies and Shiva 1993). For example Carol Vance, even back in 1984, urged scholars to step outside of the dichotomy and 'describe and analyse how cultural connections are made between female bodies and what comes to be understood as "women"' (p. 10). It is likely that this particular notion of common sense is also accepted by many gender activists speaking in regards to stereotypes instead of identity.

However, how would this common knowledge be modified by the prolonged intersection with the kind of common sense advocated by the gender discourse? When the right for self-determination is elevated through discourses inferring that nothing is innate and that identities are culturally determined and thus fully modifiable, are not individuals exposed to this discourse manoeuvred from outside, at a cultural level, and encouraged to stretch the limits of their agency? In other words, to what extent does gender discourse enable human beings to determine

themselves in autonomy and to what extent is self-determination discourse nothing but another device of biopolitics?

Notes

1. Petition available at: http://www.notizieprovita.it/petizione-sulleducazione-affettiva-e-sessuale-nelle-scuole/ (accessed 20 November 2015).
2. For example Piemonte Region approved a resolution that provides the possibility for public servants of choosing the type of gender with which to be identified on their badge regardless their registered record. (http://www.regioni.it/sociale/2015/06/23/regionipiemontesesso-di-elezione-su-tesserino-dipendenti-410338/).
3. Speech made in Rome on 14 June 2015. Retrieved from: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150614_convegno-diocesi-roma.html (accessed 20 January 2016).
4. Personal interview, 6 May 2014, Rome.
5. Personal interview, 29 April 2014, Skype.
6. Personal interview, 23 June 2014, Skype.
7. Project's website: http://giocodelrispetto.org/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
8. Project guidelines (authored by Lucia Beltramini and Daniela Paci) are made available online by the newspaper *Il Giornale* at: http://www.ilgiornale.it/sites/default/files/documenti/1426079229-IL%20GIOCO%20DEL%20RISPETTO_Linee%20Guida%202_slim.pdf (accessed 6 January 2016).
9. Groups of parents and educators who disagree with the spread of gender-based activities in schools have organised across the country a network of committees called Articolo 26, name that refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states the priority role of parents in the choice of education for their children. The committee's website: http://comitatoarticolo26.it/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
10. Tieri, S. (2015, 12 March). Trieste, all'asilo il 'gioco del rispetto' ma per i media sono 'lezioni porno'. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Retrieved from: http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/03/12/trieste-allasilo-gioco-per-i-media-lezioni-porno/1499660/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
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15_marzo_12/spiegare-bambini-cio-che-sesso-non-8ce64de8-c884-11e4-9fa6-f0539e9b2e9a.shtml (accessed 6 January 2016).
13. Zhok, A. (2015, 15 March). Gioco del rispetto: lodevole ma pone dubbi. *Il Piccolo*. Retrieved from: http://ilpiccolo.gelocal.it/trieste/cronaca/2015/03/15/news/gioco-del-rispetto-lodevole-ma-pone-dubbi-1.11049613 (accessed 6 January 2016).
14. Morana, V. (2015, 12 March). Gioco del Rispetto: perfino i disegni non vanno bene. *Vita Nuova*. Retrieved from http://www.vitanuovatrieste.it/gioco-del-rispetto-perfino-i-disegni-non-vanno-bene-2/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
15. Cosolini: 'Il gioco insegna l'uguaglianza. Falsità vergognose'. (2015, 9 March). *Il Piccolo*. Retrieved from: http://ilpiccolo.gelocal.it/trieste/cronaca/2015/03/11/news/cosolini-gioco-insegna-uguaglianza-falsita-vergognose-1.11024435 (accessed 6 January 2016).
16. Falsetta, F. (2015, 12 March). I Templari: 'il gioco del gender? Un progetto contra naturam'. *Il Giornale*. Retrieved from: http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/i-templari-gioco-gender-progetto-contra-naturam-1104403.html (accessed 6 January 2016).
17. Matzuzzi, M. (2015, 22 March). Il Papa: 'La teoria del gender è uno sbaglio della mente umana'. *Il Foglio*. Retrieved from: http://www.ilfoglio.it/laltro-mondo/2015/03/22/il-papa-la-teoria-del-gender-uno-sbaglio-della-mente-umana___1-vr-126919-rubriche_c206.htm (accessed 6 January 2016).
18. Press release 22 March 2015. Retrieved from: http://www.psicologi.fvg.it/notizie.php?action=379 (accessed 6 January 2016).
19. Ermini, A. (2013, 30 June). Aborto, omofobia e femminicidio? Retrieved from: https://maschiselvaticiblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/30/aborto-omofobia-e-femminicidio/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
20. Let us for example take the example of prominent Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci's book published in 1961 titled *Il Sesso Inutile* (*The Useless Sex*).
21. Progetto pilota 'Prevenzione della violenza contro le donne: percorsi di formazione-educazione al rispetto delle differenze', p. 1. Available at: http://www.soroptimist.it/public_nuovo/786-10-01-2015-MIUR.AOODGSIP.REGISTRO_UFFICIALEU.0006901.27-11-20141-1.pdf (accessed 6 January 2016).
22. Brachetta, S. (2015, 27 March). Il Gioco del Rispetto, l'Ordine degli psicologi e la teoria del gender. *Vita Nuova*. Retrieved from: http://www.vitanuovatrieste.it/il-gioco-del-rispetto-lordine-degli-psicologi-e-la-teoria-del-gender/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
23. Personal interview, 19 April 2014, telephone.

24. Let me clarify my position on this slippery point: Although forcing anyone to repress his/her homosexual inclination is certainly condemnable, I do think it is important that psychologists play an important role in helping individuals to express their identity (Spitzer 2003). As psychologist Gilberto Gobbi (2014) argues, as part of our development as human beings during life, and especially adolescence, we have doubts on our psychosexual identity and answers that we give to ourselves to solve this temporary crisis are highly influenced by the social environment. It is the role of psychotherapists helping patients to find their way.
25. Avviso ai giornalisti cattolici. Come non scrivere un articolo con 'tic omofobici' (2013, 16 December). *Tempi*. Retrieved from: http://www.tempi.it/avviso-ai-giornalisti-cattolici-ecco-come-non-scrivere-un-articolo-con-tic-omofobici#.Vo0r0PH0905 (accessed 6 January 2016).
26. RIRO website: http://www.registrorazzista.it/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
27. Lalli, C. (2015, 31 March). Tutti pazzi per il gender. *Internazionale*. Retrieved from: http://www.internazionale.it/opinione/chiara-lalli/2015/03/31/teoria-gender-diritti (accessed 6 January 2016).
28. Personal interview, 8 April 2014, Milan.
29. Miriano, C. (2015, 14 March). Tutto tranne una mamma. Retrieved from: http://costanzamiriano.com/2015/03/12/tutto-tranne-una-mamma/#more-13205 (accessed 6 January 2016).
30. *Adiantum* (2013, 11 September).
31. Onu: l'Italia è uno dei paesi al mondo più sicuri per le donne (2012, 20 October). Retrieved from: http://www.centriantiviolenza.eu/onu-italia-fra-paesi-piu-sicuri-per-le-donne/ (accessed 6 January 2016).
32. Personal interview, 23 June 2014, telephone.
33. Speech made on 4 June 2013 at the Chamber of Deputies, session 28. Retrieved from: http://www.camera.it/leg17/410?idSeduta=0028&tipo=stenografico (accessed 6 January 2016).
34. Personal interview, 6 May 2014, Rome.

CHAPTER 6

Abusive Women, Male and Female Victims. A Discourse at the Margin

Previous chapters showed that the debate on DV and IPV in Italy is dominated by a gender reading of male VAW and that this reading has exacerbated since 2012, the year when partner femicide transformed into a national emergency as a central political topic through persistent media hype by feminist groups and political élites. It was also shown that the 'femminicidio' narrative along with its underlying gender paradigm is contested through a discourse on ideology advanced by anti-gender, men's rights, and shared parenting activists. At the same time, another counter-discourse is arising amongst social movements independently of and in opposition against the 'femminicidio' and GBV discourse. The central point of this second counter-discourse is the topic of common forms of female violence (violence perpetrated by women) against male partners, ex-partners, and the new partners of ex-partners and husbands.

Let me clarify that it is not the aim of these groups nor mine, as a researcher focused on the study of discourse surrounding these social movements, to diminish the issue of VAW by juxtaposing the issue alongside forms female perpetrated violence in a range of severity. In other words, the counter-argument emerging from social movements advocating for public recognition of female perpetrated violence cannot be summarised as a slight of hand, merely a statement of 'yes there is X but let's talk about Y'. If this were the case, I would consider my own intellectual work trivial. Instead, the female perpetrated violence discourse is worthy of study in so far as it points directly at the inconsistencies within the

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dominant GBV discourse and compels a reinvention. Counter-discourse in this context brings to the fore social issues and victims that so far have remained concealed from the public eye and neglected by public policies. It might also contribute to rendering the existing approach to DV and IPV, including VAW, more effective. This is the spirit in which the discussion to follow is intended.

The groups speaking about female perpetrated violence is varied. They are composed of males and females, people with different social status, educational background, and political orientation; some raise their voice because of their personal history, while others speak in their professional capacities, as lawyers, psychologists, and family volunteers who encounter female violence in their daily work; there are also writers and researchers, and those who belong to more than one of these categories. If we want to locate these voices within the arena of social movements, we would find them predominantly associated with men's rights groups, divorced fathers, shared parenting activists, and also amongst more general DV activists. Amongst the voices that I identified, there is also an anarchist feminist speaking about female violence (in terms of vindication of the right for women to be bad). It goes without saying that in such a diffused grouping, there might be many other voices echoing similar sentiments, undetected during my investigation. For example, more voices aligned with these topics might be intercepted in the networks of public health services, suburban social services across the country, inside institutions as well as in newsrooms and publishing markets, areas that I have not specifically investigated.

I will work through these topics to highlight meanings that are overlooked in the dominant debate of DV and IPV and typically neglected by a gender discourse of violence. The discussion will acknowledge the possibility for women to be violent against those subjects that in dominant discourse and social theory are understood to be either their equals or more powerful, namely other men and other adult women (in the context of heterosexual relationships e.g. ex-husband's new female partner). This is the focus of this chapter which does not discuss discourses on female perpetrated violence in general (such as filicide, female bullying, and so on) but focuses on a precise discourse, that of female violence in the context of heterosexual relationships, dating and family in Italy.

Before narrowing down the discussion to the Italian context let me start with a review of existing international literature on female violence and its discourse in so called Western society.

1 Women Perpetrate Violence Only in the Real World. An Underrepresented Discourse

Copious evidence on the fact that women are capable of violence can be found in news reports, in historical archives, in police records, and academic publications (Berrett 2010; Boyle 2004; Morris 2008; Pigozzi 2012; Porter 2010, 2012; Tani 2016). The existence of female offenders, such as serial killers, abusive and sexually abusive mothers, tyrannical mother-in laws, aggressive partners, mothers who kill their children (filicide) and their partners and husbands (uxoricide), stalkers and cyber-stalkers, female teen bullies, and abusive nurses and teachers, is well documented by research in Criminology, Sociology of Deviance, Sociology of Family, and Cultural Studies (Belknap et al. 2012; Betsos 2003; Glass et al. 2004; Elliot 1997; Muftić and Baumann 2012; Martellozzo et al. 2010; Salerno and Giuliano 2012; Valcarenghi 2011; Walklate and Petrie 2013). Empirical studies on DV show that females initiate violence as often as men and that female same-sex couples can be more violent than heterosexual couples (Costa et al. 2015; Gelles and Straus 1979; Stiles-Shields and Carroll 2014; Straus 2008). Also, studies on sexuality show that women increasingly engage in sadistic, domineering, and exploitative sexual practices, and this suggests that women not only perpetrate violence but can also enjoy it recreationally (Kappeler 1986; Ogas and Gaddam 2011). Also, it would be naïve to think that in a world of global violence women are immune from participating in acts of genocide, terrorism, and torture (Cragin and Daly 2009; Enloe 2007; Foster 2000; Egan 2007; MacDonald 1992).

Notwithstanding such a strong corpus of knowledge on the abuses perpetrated by women, female violence remains backgrounded in public debate, which instead continues to focus on male violence. As I discussed in Chapter 3, male violence has been widely theorised since feminist mobilisations on DV in the 1950s and as a result, sexual violence against women and children has developed into its own specific discourse, which gradually has been institutionalised and mainstreamed in media and popular culture. In comparison, female violence remains a marginal discourse mainly circulated within men's rights movements (Kenedy 2012).

In the United States and other liberal democracies since the 1970s, men's rights activists and associated female intellectuals and feminist dissidents have been attempting to shed light on the gender symmetrical participation in interpersonal violence and on structural discrimination against men (Badinter 2006; Farrell 1974; Sommers 1994;

Pizzey 1998, 2011). Empirical research is fundamental to their discourse and is partly drawn from studies on family conflicts, such as those of Murray Straus, conducted over a span of 30 years which developed the Conflict Tactics Scale to measure the frequency of psychological and physical violence between partners (Gelles and Straus 1979; Straus et al. 1996; Straus and Gelles 1986). These studies found gender symmetry in the use of violence as a response to conflict (Dutton and Nicholls 2005). Although limitations in Straus' methodology have been widely debated, these studies are considered important 'especially for eliciting the quotidian, commonplace acceptance of violence as a means to communicate' between men and women (Kimmel 2002, p. 1341).

Another empirical argumentation is that female violence against men is not detected in national statistics for a number of reasons. First is the lack of a standard definition of violence with the second being that the collection of data is generated in studies aiming to expose male VAW and by crime victimisation studies that mostly rely on reported cases of violence to the police and women's shelters. The third argumentation is that men are far less likely to report abuses against them. Also, violence towards men may be considered less noticeable and carry less severe consequences. Finally, partner homicides planned by women and carried out by male accomplices (paid or otherwise) are not classified as female perpetrated crimes (Cook 2009).

What I consider more interesting is not the diatribe over figures, but rather the attempt of men's rights and associated female activists to reconceptualise DV and IPV outside the gender framework. More precisely, this reconceptualisation urges others to step outside the feminist narrative of violent patriarchy, which exposes only power abuses suffered by women but neglects dysfunctional relationship dynamics and promoting healthy solutions for conflict resolution for both men and women. For example, Benatar (2003) points out that men have always been suffering violence more often than women in specific contexts such as assaults, and corporal punishments within families. Also, this discourse stresses the need to redefine heterosexual violence in light of a contemporary advanced status with the increased legal protection of women and the reconfiguration of power gender relations in patriarchal families. Core topics of this attempt to re-contextualise DV and IPV discourse are women's abuse of the power granted by divorce and child custody laws, interpersonal violence against male partners (psychological, verbal and physical), the

ridicule of men in media and popular culture, and the violation and lack of protection of men's reproductive rights (Farrell et al. 2008).

This discourse has sparked harsh criticism in several areas of feminist movements and within the scholarship dedicated to DV. Female violence discourse has largely been regarded as a chauvinist backlash against the emancipation of women, an attempt to blame female victims, distract public awareness from the severity of violence suffered by women, and as a reactionary political project to maintain patriarchal power (Berns 2001; Cataldi 1995; Dragiewicz and DeKeseredy 2012; Faludi 1992). Dominant discourse of DV and IPV remains focused on the strict categories of female victims and male abusers. This dominant discourse, even when discussing female perpetrated violence, does so by placing female offenders in the role of a victim, only partially responsible for their violent actions: because they are victims of mental illness, have a history of suffering male perpetrated abuses, or are otherwise induced to commit violence by their male partner (Morrissey 2003; Rogers 2012).

In this vein, violent women are understood as victims of a pervasive patriarchal culture of prevarication that they either internalise or serve as innocent executors of a violent system crafted and manoeuvred by men. For example, Italian feminist Luisa Muraro explains episodes of female violence, such as a female soldier who took part in sadistic 'plays' in Abu Ghraib, as a woman subjugated by the male architecture of torture of the State, whereas just a few pages earlier she reads systematic rapes in the Bosnian War as evidence that the State has never had a monopoly on violence but rather men have always taken part in such a privilege independently (Muraro 2012, pp. 36, 42). Another well-known victimisation strategy of female offenders is the Battered Women Syndrome: a syndrome theorised by feminist activists to make sense and provide a defence of abused women who perpetrate violence against their partners, and kill their abuser as a delayed form of self-defence (Lehrner and Allen 2008; Polletta 2009; Walker 2009).

A quite different approach to understanding female violence is offered by postcolonial feminist scholarship, whose reading of human relations through racial dimensions, shows that violence cuts across genders, men and women that are both involved as victims and perpetrators (hooks 1981, 1984, 2000, 2003; Lewis and Mills 2003; Mohanty 2003; Trinh 1989). bell hooks for example fleshes out inconsistencies and shortcomings of radical feminism within a broader critique of an unjust imperialist consumerist society. As part of her overall commitment to make feminism

comprehensive of the concerns of those excluded by white-bourgeois feminism, namely women of colour and men of any race, she stresses similarities between men and women:

> Violence is inextricably linked to all acts of violence in this society that occur between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated [. . .], [which in turn are caused by] the Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority [. . .] [as a] belief system that is the foundation on which sexist ideology and other ideologies of group oppression are based. (hooks 1984, pp. 117, 118)

By exposing the pervasiveness of violence, and by shedding light on the role of women in maintaining it, hooks dismantles the radical feminist 'ideology' that equates oppression and violence to masculinity (hooks 1984, p. 86). Such an equation enables feminists to explain certain women's violent behaviour (moreover against children) as ordered by men or resulting from women's identification with men, and in so doing to cover up women's own drive for power:

> feminist rhetoric pushing the notion of man as enemy and woman as victim enabled women to avoid doing the work of creating new value systems. (hooks 1984, p. 86)

By disassociating herself from those feminists who conceive women as naturally peaceful because of their natural role of child-bearer, she urges the recognition that women do use coercion and violence to maintain power, especially over children, and that is a cause of VAW to the extent that women maintain the assumption that a violent model of relation is natural. Having said that, I am not suggesting to replace a feminist gender framework with postcolonial theory: indeed both vantage points build upon the same binary reading of power, one along gender lines, the other along race. Rather I believe that violence can be more accurately understood through post-structuralist theory, which enables us to go beyond the binary assumption that violence is committed by the powerful individuals or groups against powerless, innocent victims.

Further reflections on female violence are offered by studies on the representation of violent women throughout history and in contemporary media and popular culture (Berrett 2010; Boyle 2004; Morrissey 2003; Rogers 2012). Simkin (2014) argues that the public imaginary of the

violent female is trapped between two main partial representations: that of femme fatale and that of monstrous femininity. Monstrous femininity retains a form of agency and is generally represented with masculine traits that disconfirm her (biological) female nature, as an 'aberrant form of *faux* masculinity', sometimes lesbian, insane, but always deviant in terms of beauty and in term of moral standards and psychosis (Simkin 2014, p. 9). On the contrary femme fatale implies an element of allure and emphasises traits of sensual femininity (Paglia 1994).

However, both representations underpin and reproduce a stereotyped understanding of femininity, a representation which does not admit violence as a possibility for every human being, regardless of their sex, and on the contrary fixes a normative representation of women as non-violent. Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue that this lack of recognition of women's possibility to be violent is rooted in and reinforces gendered representations: 'deviant women are set up in opposition to idealised gender stereotypes', 'as the exception to clearly understood gender norms' (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, p. 7). In other words, female and violence seems to be an oxymoron.

This fixture is also entrenched within a cultural representation of criminality and violence typified predominantly as male (D'Cruze and Jackson 2007). In Chapter 3 I showed that violence is more likely to break the news when the crime is reported to the police, or when it is physical and cruel, embeds some tragedy, and/or has a sexual component. Given that when the perpetrator is a man it is more likely that the violent act results in serious physical injuries, and conversely when men are on the receiving end of female violence (either physical and psychological) they are usually reluctant to report, it follows that the gendered binary discourse focused on male violence against women is reinforced by the media (Kimmel 2002). Besides, routine media coverage, in absence of a specific media narrative or moral panic that might temporarily change the routine, tends to emphasise extreme violence committed by strangers, outside the family. Given that female extreme violence such as physical abuse and murder occur predominantly at home, it follows that the media portrayal of violence is gender biased and that female violence as a result is portrayed as extraordinary (Morrissey 2003).

On the other hand, a new narrative genre called sexism against men, male bashing or male ridicule has emerged within a post-feminist representation of heterosexuality which depicts power positions of the sexes as interchangeable (Cataldi 1995). Practical examples of this cultural phenomenon span across the following representations, portrayed in a positive fashion: female

verbal and physical aggression against men portrayed as an expression of female superiority, jokes with women humiliating partners for their style of dress or their sexual performance, subtle reference to innate animal-like, violent masculinity, quotation of pseudo-scientific research that finds men are less intelligent than women, and so on.

To sum up, although VAW and violence against men are two existing phenomena in society, only male and structural VAW seem to be intelligible at a level of media and institutional discourse of DV/IPV. However, literature acknowledges that the phenomenon of female violence against men is represented elsewhere, at the margins of public debate, mainly within a counter-discourse advanced by men's rights movement and men's studies. Previous chapters showed how gender is the dominant reading of this phenomenon: VAW is read as violence acted against the subject who historically has been assigned less power than men and whose identity has been forged by the norms dictated by male knowledge. This dominant reading excludes the possibility for subjects to be at the same time both actors of violence and victims of discrimination or victims of violence and not discriminated against. It also excludes the possibility for women to be represented as even capable of violence and harmful to men, and men as capable of suffering and being victimised by women. As a result women and men are trapped in normative femininity and masculinity.

2 Partner Violence. The Italian Double Standard

On 19 September 2012, 28-year-old bartender William Pezzullo was attacked with acid by his ex-girlfriend and her friend. The ex-girlfriend wanted to punish Pezzullo for ending their relationship, which he told her had become problematic. She was pregnant. He survived the attack with permanent damage to most parts of his face, and 40% of his torso. He lost both of his ears, is now almost blind, and had to have the muscles in his neck reconstructed to support his head. His ex-girlfriend was charged with the crime of grievous bodily harm and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Local and National media reported the crime, but more extended coverage in national media did not develop around the case. Today Pezzullo lives with his parents, whose only income is his retired father's pension. The family does not receive any financial support for Pezzullo's medical treatment and the victim has not received any compensation.

On 16 April 2013, 38-year-old lawyer Lucia Annibali was attacked with acid by two men hired by her ex-boyfriend. The ex-boyfriend wanted to

punish Annibali for ending their relationship, which she told him had become problematic. Tragically, her face is disfigured and she too has experienced multiple surgeries. However, unlike Pelluzzo, she has retained her mobility and is not confined to her home. Annibali's ex-boyfriend was charged with attempted murder, infliction of serious wounds, and stalking and was condemned to 20 years in prison, twice the sentence length of Pelluzzo's attacker. Annibali received 800,000 euro in compensation for the attack. The incident sparked a mobilisation of women's groups to speak out against VAW and femicide and the assault received intensive media coverage, was commemorated on the International Day for VAW on 25th November and again the following year for International Women's Day on 8th March. Furthermore, Annibali received declarations of support from institutional representatives with the President of Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano honouring her with the title Cavaliere al Merito (knight by merit).

Dalla Parte di Giasone (On Giasone's side) is an organisation dedicated to fighting against violence against men and for the rights of divorced fathers. The group wrote a letter to the President of Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano to point out the asymmetry of institutional support towards the two victims and to urge public acknowledgement of male victims. The President did not reply in person but through one of his female consultants, Professor Giovanna Zincone. The professor stated that the presidency does not ignore men, that in fact on the International Day on VAW he also honoured an awareness campaign against VAW that included men as testimonials. *Dalla parte di Giasone* commented that such a dismissive reply was an insult to their intelligence.[1]

This story shows a specific bias in the dominant discourse on DV and IPV in Italy, a discourse which provides narratives, institutions, organisations, and celebrations that form a crucial support network for female victims while male victims are left in the background, with few interpretive frameworks despite suffering from the same harmful relationship dynamics. This disparity is strikingly noticeable in media coverage. Fabio Nestola, director of research in the Italian federation for shared-parenting Fenbi, has been monitoring and archiving media coverage of female and male violence for the last 10 years. He found that incidents of female violence against men are unlikely to reach national media outlets and is relegated to local press reports (Nestola 2015). He also found that such disparity also applies to cases with the same intensity of violence, including homicides: a case with a female aggressor is much more likely to remain in

local media whereas the case with a male aggressor becomes a national case of femicide, discussed by editorialists, politicians, and as a topic of focus on the news, talk shows, etc. As a result, whereas male violence constitutes a stream of narrative at a national and political level, the flipside of partner violence is only recognised by local communities, if at all.

Despite public silence on cases with male victims, a discourse on female violence occurs in civil society, albeit outside of the mainstream. Mainly this discourse circulates online through blogs, Facebook pages and groups, YouTube channels, and Twitter accounts. These spaces are dedicated to the topic of female violence, or to broader discussions on men's and divorced father's rights and shared parenting.

A milestone in the recent development of this discourse is a pilot study on the modality of female violence against male partners conducted by a pool of independent researchers with a sample of 1,025 male respondents. The study was published in 2012 by Italian journal *Rivista di Vittimologia Criminologia e Sicurezza*, and it is the only study of this kind available so far in Italy (Macrì et al. 2012). Participants were asked similar questions formulated by the ISTAT in their last national survey on VAW conducted in 2006 (Macrì et al. 2012).

Questions in the survey revolved around psychological, physical, and sexual violence, but many questions were modified to adapt to the specificity of male victims. For example, ISTAT asked women 'whether a man has ever pushed her, grabbed her, wrenched her, twisted her arm or pulled her hair with intent to harm or frighten'; the independent study with men amended the same question to include 'tripping and scratching'. Another example: whereas women were asked 'whether a man has forced her to have intercourse, threatening, keeping her still and causing harm'; men were asked 'whether a woman has ever initiated foreplay and then rejected him with no explanation to cause a state of psycho-physic suffering'. Projections of the findings on the total Italian population suggest that 18.8% of men are victims of female physical violence, and 23.7% are victims of female sexual violence. These results with male respondents show similar results as the ISTAT survey on VAW.

Another important event of this discourse is a book titled *L'Uomo Vittima di una Donna Carnefice* (Man victim of woman offender) written by criminologist student Glenda Mancini out of her undergraduate thesis in consultation with the vocal voices of this social movement. This book echoed within the network and the author continues her dedication to the cause with her participation in conferences and Facebook activism.

These studies attempt to fill a research gap in DV experienced by men, but raises questions regarding the definition, experiences, and parameters of female violence within these groups. How is female violence narrated in this emerging discourse? In the following sections I will first sketch different forms and modalities of female violence as they are brought to the fore by my interviewees. The analysis will focus on the factors keeping this discourse at the margins and later I will discuss whether female violence can be considered a form of GBV. Finally, I will conclude with implications overshadowing and emergence from this discourse.

3 Psychological Violence. Children as Weapons

Female violence is described as psychological and commonplace, almost embedded in seemingly ordinary relational modalities with male partners, either during a relationship or during and after separation. The intentions of a female psychological abuser are connected to her will to gain control over her partner's life and diminish his self-worth. Here women control men through manipulation and blackmail, with children viewed as pivotal tools for these strategies. In this discourse a woman exerts power upon a man by taking advantage of his love for the child: she prevents him from freely determining time spent with his child in order to punish him for ending the relationship or not being a good partner, for adultery or any other intimate partner dynamics that are external to his role as a parent. If we want to summarise this form of control a typical threat would be 'If you leave, you will never see your child again'.

These strategies are regarded by men as successful in so far as they are further encouraged by a dominant cultural understanding of 'children-belong-to-their-mothers', a belief spread not only in Italian society at large but also in judiciary culture and institutional policies of family. Although the shared parenting law enacted in 2006 establishes the right for children to be raised equally by each parent, the majority of judiciary verdicts do not implement the law. On the contrary, mothers are typically assigned the role of principal guardians and children are allowed to stay at their father's house only in fixed time slots, at the mother's ultimate discretion. Judges also tend to order that mothers retain the family home, and that fathers provide not only for expenses related to the child's needs but also for the ex-wife to maintain the same standard of living as prior to the divorce. In 2013, the Italian State was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights for failing to implement fathers' rights of parenting under

a violation of European Convention of Human Rights Article 8, right to respect private and family life.[2]

Men in this counter-discourse articulate that in cases of separation they are at their partners' mercy; unprotected and discriminated by a State which, as far as family law is concerned, grants protection disproportionately to women while penalising men, either through economic agreements and/or in terms of diminished parenting rights. These men feel victimised by a phenomenon they call judiciary sexism: discriminations rooted in patriarchal resistance, creating a cultural prejudice that women are better parents than men, women are harmless, and that women are more inclined to parenting. Moreover, men describe a vulnerability to any sort of legal conspiracy that their ex – partners might want to initiate against them with the support of judiciary machinery and associated social services. The recurrent fear is that men will be charged with false allegations of violence against their partner and child if they do not submit to their female partner's demands (or simply choose to end a dysfunctional relationship). Several lawyers and magistrates, such as Guglielmo Gulotta, Carmen Pugliese and Francesco Morcavallo, as well as the Italian police have reported that false allegations are an increasing practice in Italy.[3]

There is a shared belief amongst separated men that if 'she wants to she can ruin me', and 'nobody would help me'. Therefore, they resign that it is 'better to remain submissive to her'. Personal stories of power, abuse, and submission that are strikingly similar to the domestic abuse stories long narrated by women and brought to the public eye by feminist mobilisations for women's rights and divorce law since the 1950s. Female narratives of submission and abuse are still social realities in Italy and not all subjugated women can free themselves through divorce and judiciary tools introduced as a response to feminist activism. However, these same narratives, with inverted gender roles, are growing.

Separated fathers' groups report that women, through the manipulation of children, judiciary strategies, abduction, and arbitrary prohibition are able to initiate total or partial deprivation of the father-child relationship. Adriano Mazzola, lawyer and shared parenting activist, describes the situation:

> Psychological violence that devastates the life of the child and the father. Violation of parenting rights is an intolerable abuse, which should be equated to physical violence. Even in judiciary courts this form of violence is untold, it is rejected.[4]

Fabio Nestola, describes this form of violence as directed towards the 'destruction of the father', and as a 'castration of the parenting role'. Furthermore, he articulates that this form of psychological violence operates as the

> forced interruption of life, father-child relationships are deprived of spontaneity, limited in time and modalities, these are all violent inhibitions of natural instincts and cultural structures. This is aggression towards an intimate sphere of adults and children, a rape of father relationships.[5]

Divorced fathers also express their suffering caused by financial losses after divorce. In this context financial loss is further exacerbated by the current economic and unemployment crisis in Italy and other European nations. According to Eurispes 80% of divorced fathers in Italy (roughly 3.2 million men) are unable to economically fulfil their personal needs (Eurispes 2011). Although this striking social reality remains marginal in public discourse, in the last few years it has drawn the attention of film directors and talk shows. Severe financial loss can result in a dual loss of independence, through a man relocating to his parents' house, or through the necessity to rent a small studio or a room in shared accommodation that holds the consequential impossibility to host their children in an adequate space and social environment during their court allocated time. A number of 'dad's houses', founded by municipalities and charities, have opened across the country as an initial response to this emerging social need. This intervention provides impoverished divorced fathers with a temporary solution for a number of months, as a bridging phase until they find a more long-term solution.

Poverty as a result of severe financial loss can also lead to a feeling of wounded masculinity and insecurities around their abilities to be a truly good father, which in dominant Italian culture revolves around men's capacity to convey security and provide economic support to their family. A feeling of humiliation and failure to meet the expectations of their children can arise from simple incidents such as the inability to buy new toys for their children. Divorced fathers groups report that many of their members experience severe depression and contemplate suicide. Indeed Eurispes (2011) found that every year 100 divorced fathers commit suicide in Italy.

Another central topic in the shared parenting movement is one of Parental Alienation: a relational problem between a child and parent

caused by the repeated vilification of one parent by the other parent, a project which results in the child being actively involved as he/she reject the vilified (and thus alienated) parent (Gardner et al. 2006). Parental Alienation can be initiated by mothers or fathers and some shared parenting groups advocate for a full recognition of this form of psychological violence in the Italian judiciary system.

4 Her, Him, the Other Woman, and the State

Women's attempts to control their ex-husbands and partners extend, directly and indirectly, to their new female partners and recomposed families. This is a noteworthy area of the discourse on female violence vehemently advocated by the group MFPG (*Movimento Femminile per la Parità Genitoriale*), composed mainly by new female partners of divorced fathers. Their discourse is particularly relevant for our discussion in that it actively encourages a breakdown of the gendered binarism of dominant representations of DV and IPV through a double displacement of aggressor and victim. MFPG reads violence in light of social critique of the State and broadens the angle in which DV and IPV are approached, from a focus on aggressor to structural violence that enables women to commit psychological abuse. This discourse points out contradictions in the discourse of equality that are entrenched in dominant discourses of male violence within feminist movements. In this regard, I find arguments similar to that of postcolonial scholarship's critique of the sisterhood rhetoric invoked by mainstream (white) feminism while neglecting unequal power relations between white and black women (hooks 2000). Before unravelling the discourse on equality and discrimination, let me first provide some examples of how new partners of divorced men describe the kind of abuse and intimidation they experience from their partners' female exes.

> There are continuous economic demands: she buys a rubber and he must refund her with half of the price. We get that point, you know. It is on the rebound, for the sake of interfering. Texts that could be sent on Monday are sent during the weekend.
>
> It is a form of control, of intrusiveness in my life, a way to reaffirm 'I still exist'. But it is not recognised by the institutions as a form of control, it is read as thoughtfulness.

> On one side I am considered a stranger, because I am not the mother of the child. On the other hand, I am asked to show my tax return statement because my wallet matters when it comes to evaluating our household income.[6]

Besides suffering indirect abuses and interferences, new female partners are the primary recipients of direct violence: stalking, anonymous phone calls, death threats, defamation, and physical assaults are some examples. An interviewee recalls this proverb from William Congreve's play *The Mourning Bride:* 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'.

MFPG places the discourse on female violence within a broader critique of institutional power. They shed light on a discriminatory hierarchy of women and of victims that is realised in contemporary society through a dominant institutional and media discourse that validates only male forms of DV and excludes other pervading sufferances. MFPG's point is that institutions such as equal opportunity policies, pink quota, laws protecting women in marriage, special provisions for women's rights, judiciary practices of child custody, combined with the lack of legal protections for recomposed families are all built upon the gender prejudice that males are the only violent subjects, the oppressor. This automatically generates new discriminations across and beyond gender lines. Women, children, victims, men, and families are, according to MFPG's view, all divided into first and second classes, the former with more rights, protection, media representation, and public validation, the latter penalised, unprotected, socially stigmatised, and lacking representation. A few examples of this first and second class categorisation include: first class women (first wives, and mothers of the first born) and second class women (new partners of divorced men, their sisters, grandmothers, etc., women who are not mothers, women who are mothers of the second born child, and mothers with other pre-existing families); first class children (those conceived within a first marriage) and second class children (those conceived after a divorce with another woman); first class victims (women abused by men) and second class victims (women and men abused by other women); first class men (married, never married, new male partner of divorced wives) and second class men (divorced fathers).

It is noteworthy that this discourse underpins a multilayered understanding of power relations; it would be erroneous to synthetise MFPG's arguments as an anti-feminist project aiming to preserve male domination of women by demonising other women. In fact, this discourse rather

advances a vision of human equality coexistent with sexual difference and does not exempt itself from pointing the finger against the patriarchal state. This spirit emerges clearly in the following statement:

> We are witnessing social injustice. Likewise in the past feminist fights for equal rights between men and women were carried out, nowadays there is a need to fight for equal rights within the same gender![7]

MFPG views violence as a possibility for both men and women, which is socially accepted or sanctioned at different degrees in light of biological sex and the family status of the aggressor and victim. This discourse seems to be misunderstood by institutions and by dominant social movements (such as some feminist groups engaged in 'femminicidio' narrative). MFPG activists report that they are often labelled as 'women with moustaches, patriarchal supporters, chauvinists and misogynists'.

It is important also to note that their discourse does not deny male violence and is no stranger to some of the core topics of classic feminist critique of the patriarchal State. The remarkable difference is that MFPG reworks these topics by looking at discriminations within the same female gender and at the same time by extending the gaze to reach male victims. For example, some feminists argue that the State fails to recognise women's needs and that patriarchal culture authorises only a limited number of roles for women while relegating other roles to the circle of immoral deviants. MFPG's point is different in so far as it suggests that although the State has learned through feminist movements to address the needs of one category of women, in so doing it discriminates against men and continues to fail to reach the needs of other women: women who cannot find a place in the moral circle of first wives or mothers and therefore find themselves without decent representation.

At this point one could argue that this discussion has gone off topic in that this is not exactly a discourse on violence but a discourse on structural discrimination. I would like to point out that, as seen in previous chapters of this book dedicated to feminist theory of GBV, discrimination and violence have been extensively theorised as if they were synonymous. Let us for example consider that discrimination against women, perpetrated personally by men or indirectly by patriarchal institutions and culture, is framed as GBV by international and domestic law and policies through frameworks such as CEDAW (for the sake of mentioning one). In this line of reasoning, violence is understood according to its extensive definitions

revised in Chapter 3, as behaviours that hinder individual capabilities and 'impairs . . . persons in their positive understanding of self' (Honneth 1992 pp. 188–189).

Up until this point I have discussed one of the possible forms of female violence, namely psychological abuse, and how this form of violence is rendered practicable by institutions built upon a dominant discourse of DV and IPV. However, female violence discourse does not limit itself to psychological and structural forms. In terms of physical violence, the discourse rejects a common dismissive belief that female violence would be less serious than male violence in that the former is mainly psychological and the latter is physical. In the words of one MFPG member:

> Women who have suffered male and female violence are ideal testimonials of this discourse on multifaceted reality. They would say that violence is expressed with different modalities but at the end of the day it is interchangeable. Physical violence is not only male and psychological violence is not only female. These women can disrupt a taboo, which is experienced by a niche of people whilst the majority of people are aware of VAW and 'femminicidio' only.[8]

5 Ordinary Interpersonal Violence

While the previous section focused on the violent dynamics occurring in separation and divorce circumstances, this section discusses another area of the discourse on female violence, precisely ordinary violence which men experience during relationships or while dating women. In this context, the discourse encompasses psychological, verbal, as well as physical and sexual violence. My interviewees talk about these forms of violence as common dynamics, almost 'normal', part and parcel of relationships. Notwithstanding such ordinary characteristics, interviewees lament that the violent attitudes of women towards their male partners is a topic denied in public and institutional discourse on family and heterosexual relations, which offer only angelic portrayals of women. On the other hand, a male bashing genre, which I discussed briefly in the review of international literature, is also found on Italian television with the result that female violence against men is positively normalised.[9] In this vein, there is a growing sensitivity amongst men and divorced fathers activists that a new image of an ideal man is coming forward: a weak man subjugated by his female master, a man who is punished for expressing

traditional markers of masculinity such as physical strength, proactivity in courtship, and vigorous sexuality (Risé 2010).

Subjugation of men by domineering women can be found outside of the media, recurrent in real partners daily lives: insults, private and public humiliations and ridicule, verbal aggression and initiations of quarrels, are all forms of abuse described by interviewees as typically female. Repeated statements with a pre-assumption of men's inferiority such as 'you do not earn enough', 'you are wrong', 'you are a loser' are coded as typical patterns of female psychological domination of their partners.[10]

Interviewees lament that these forms of daily psychological abuses are not taken seriously by the public nor by institutions.

There is a common belief that physical violence is more harmful, that physical suffering is more detrimental for human integrity. Neurologist Veronica Cardin, collaborating with *Ankyra*, one of very few anti-violence centres for male and female victims, says:

> I understand that there are not enough resources and that we need to channel funds to protect women from physical violence because men can be more dangerous from a physical point of view. However, psychological violence exists and remains concealed by a domestic wall, as if it were a right that parents have upon children and partners have to the other. The police recommend that men avoid any kind of reaction when they are provoked, otherwise they automatically put themselves in the wrong. This means that psychological violence is understood as a trigger of physical violence but not as important as physical, it is at a lower level.[11]

Although there is no strong consensus amongst my interviewees on whether female physical forms of violence happen with the same or less frequency as male physical violence, many draw the attention to the need to acknowledge that women are even capable of physical abuse, no matter how often: from minor aggressions such as scratches, slaps, object throwing, and hair pulling to major violent incidences such as acid attacks, strangulations, poisonings, and murders committed in person or delegated to a third party.

Stalking is another area where female violence discourse attempts to transform the dominant gendered portrayal of aggressor and victim. In the last ten years and especially with a new law introduced in 2009, stalking has received special attention in public debate and by institutions as a form

of VAW. However, although the National Stalking Observatory reports an increase in female stalkers, this crime continues to be framed as a threat towards women by men through awareness campaigns and media coverage.[12] On the contrary, female violence discourse depicts stalking as a persecutory activity carried out and experienced by both sexes.

A marginal topic of female violence discourse in Italy, but a very powerful one to break up the common prejudice of male invulnerability and female uprightness is the topic of sexual violence. In fact, the image of men as victims of female sexual abuse appears to be even more unconceivable than any other form of female perpetrated violence (Gavin 2010). When I raise the topic of female perpetrated sexual abuse, a common reaction I get is: 'no, sexual violence is not possible. How can a woman rape a man?' Anarchic feminist blogger Eretica would answer with these words:

> Have you ever heard about involuntary erections? And about sexual vulnerability, which is not socially perceived on male bodies, who says that rape is only penetration? And that penetration can be achieved only with penis?[13]

This difficulty in understanding female sexual violence towards men can be read as a result of a dominant understanding of male and female sexuality, which is inherited from a time when marriage was not necessarily a free choice based on romance. Intercourse was taught as a wife's duty to her husband, a procreative duty that could not entail any pleasure for a good wife who was distinguished from other women, prostitutes and 'non-marriable' women, those who were allowed to climax with their men (Parca 1959). It is a common belief that a man should be able to control his erection, and that female sexual violence is less harmful because her anatomy does not enable penetration (Anderson and Doherty 2008; Cook 2009). This belief is entrenched in a dominant understanding of male sexuality as physical in opposition to a dominant understanding of female sexuality as emotional.

The complexity of sexuality, its psychological and emotional dimensions, and the concepts of consent and agency have been politicised and conveyed in popular culture primarily within a feminist discourse on female sexuality. A similarly detailed public understanding of male sexuality has never been produced. On the contrary, male sexuality has been widely discussed as capable of violence and a form of power and control, whereas very little has been said about male sexual vulnerability and

experiences of violence, a topic that has been explored in a limited capacity in homosexual relationships (Cook 2009). In conclusion, these discourses have contributed to cement a dichotomy of representation of male and female sexuality: male as primarily physical, voracious, and predatory, always 'available', thus inviolable; female as emotional and linked to love, passive, violable, and non-violent. Female sexual violence seems to be a disturbing discourse because it destabilises such a dominant dichotomy (Martellozzo et al. 2010).

Within a sexual sphere, another topic of female violence discourse is one of reproductive rights, which has been always typified as a women's right issue in its foregrounding in unplanned pregnancy and abortion debates (Jaggar 1973). In the discourse of reproductive rights, the foetus is not framed as the result of a consensual decision of two persons, thus as an entity to be treated with joint rights and responsibilities by the two contributors of foetus genetic patrimony (Farrell et al. 2008). Men's feelings and rights on abortions have remained excluded from public reasoning, which is more focused on the topics of bioethics and women's rights, with traditional divisions between Catholics and laics (Gal and Kligman 2000; Vanni 2013). Likewise, there are claims for the need for a legal reform that would be more inclusive of male perspectives, for example by including the right for the man to be consulted or informed by the woman in regards to abortion.

In conclusion, an underlying concern of all these topics is the need to acknowledge that men have the ability to be victimised by women, to be wounded in body and psyche. In parallel is an urgency to acknowledge that women do not always behave as 'madonnas'. In other words, the urgency advocated by those who advance female violence discourse is a disruption of fixed gender stereotypes, which is at the same time a major barrier hindering public capacity to more comprehensively understand IPV through different frameworks than male perpetrated VAW.

6 Barriers and Resistance

Why does the female instigated violence discourse remain in the domain of counter-hegemonic discourse while male VAW is the dominant discourse? I suggest searching for different factors that could explain the current marginalisation of female instigated violence in public discourse. My take is to look at different social understandings of violence suffered by men and by women. A difference that can be explained with the absence of

public knowledge on violence suffered by men and a parallel overexposure of male violence suffered by women, treated as special (Felson 2002). This over- and underexposure of discourse intersects with a dominant representation of masculinity and femininity, the former as active, physical, violent, unemotional, and inviolable, and the latter as passive, spiritual, peaceful, emotional, and vulnerable (Boulding 2000).

Let me reiterate the fundamental notions of discourse already discussed in Chapter 1 that will be useful to the discussion here. Discourse is created in local centres of power, and is hence a dispositive of knowledge, as it creates concepts that explain certain aspects of individual life, which, once named, develop through the accumulation of knowledge in different disciplines (Foucault 1986). Those in control of public discourse draw their own representation of reality and this version wins 'a universal validity and legitimacy for accounts of the world which are partial and particular, and towards the grounding of these particular constructions in the taken-for-grantedness of the real' or common sense (Hall, in Makus 1990, p. 498). In other words, a certain curated view of the world becomes the dominant understanding of what the world itself is.

Chapter 3 discussed how the corpus of public knowledge on DV has developed from a feminist contestation of a repressive patriarchy with the interest of exposing the victimisation of women. This knowledge developed further through Gender and Women's Studies, as well as international politics for women's rights. As a result the discourse on DV and IPV is established upon a gendered dualism: the subject is male (the villain/aggressor) and the object is female (the victim). On the other hand, local centres of power-knowledge on violence against men and on female violence (against men, women, and children) have not been established, the men's rights movement never reached the same visibility of the women's movement and Men's Studies as a discipline remains a marginal area in international academia, with a focus on abusive men and homosexual violence (Carrigan et al. 2002; Craig 1992).

> Patrizia Montalenti, founder of anti-violence centre Ankyra: If we look at the 1970s–80s fight for recognition of role of women victims, we'd see that it took time to concretely raise awareness. Double standards today are no longer conceivable. It was before this revolution was carried out. Today we want synthesis and balance. It is no longer tolerable that men today don't know which way to turn when he is the victim.[14]

> Fabio Barzagli, writer and founder of website Paternita.Info: If one day I write my third book, I'll title it 'The '68 for Men'. Since '68 women have freed themselves from many barriers hindering them to work, study, and so on. A parallel process that could free men from barriers hindering their participation in family life and parenting is more difficult. There is no subsidy in terms of law, quota, or funds, like there are for women. On the contrary there are many obstacles to the liberation of men, such as injustice in divorce and child custody arrangements. We know very well that when a man has a baby it is as if he would sign a promissory note: his house, his salary, his child are completely remitted in his partner's hands.[15]

Another factor that can hinder public acknowledgement of female violence, according to some interviewees as well as according to literature, is that men generally perceive physical violence as less threatening than women, and this might be due to more physical strength and a consequent greater capacity for self-protection (Kimmel 2002). For the same reason, female violence towards men results in being perceived as less noticeable. A typical argument raised by those who deny and minimise male victims is: 'rarely do men end up at the hospital with black eyes!' At the same time, not only is violence perceived as less threatening by men, but also the suffering experienced by male victims is perceived as less important. The seriousness of violence against men is questioned as if men would be less woundable, less inviolable.

An explanation can be located in the different socialisation of men and women who are encouraged to prove and perform their manhood and womanhood in specific ways, and therefore have different attitudes in disclosing their status as a victim. Dominant femininity is achieved through control of anger, expression of love, emotions, empathy, and a nurturing attitude (Eggins and Iedema 1997; Fellman 1998; Holmes and Marra 2010; Taylor 2003). Dominant masculinity is expressed through assertiveness, physical and emotional strength, and violence; thus men are not socially encouraged to talk about violence they suffer (Connell 2005; Tager and Good 2005). Warren Farrell, leader of men's rights movement in the United States, maintains that

> we are blind to violence against men because every society that survived had an unconscious investment in training its men to be disposable – whether at work or at war, in coal mines or on construction sites, as fire fighters or as police. (Farrell et al. 2008, p. 38)

Similarly, Fabrizio Marchi, founder of a men's rights group called *Uomini Beta* thinks that

> machismo is a culture that women have contributed to consolidating. It is a culture that prescribes men to hide his fragility and violence he has suffered. He must prove he is tough.[16]

Also, whereas the social and institutional protection of women is normalised, men are less encouraged to ask for protection. However, whenever men would like to disclose their experiences and ask for protection there is a void of structures and discourses available; their narratives end up being minimised and ridiculed, also at an institutional level. Consider the following testimony:

> If my partner, who is tiny, would break a dish over my head, shall I react with equal violence or shall I rely on institutional protection? Men are ridiculed by police officers. They say 'this is your business, here we deal with serious matters' and infer that you as a man you are not even able to manage your own family. Between the lines you are told 'if she slaps four times, you get back eight'.[17]

How is this discourse on female violence being received? Is anyone listening? First of all, there is a consensus amongst interviewees that female violence discourse still remains and is deliberately kept by institutions and feminist groups at the margins of public debate. Their speeches are regarded as politically incorrect and anti-feminist, as well as vilified as chauvinist, reactionary, and conservative. It seems that a radical opposition already sparked by female violence discourse at an international level, reproduces itself in Italy through a polarised division between feminists and men's rights movements and female associates. Ostracisation and boycotts have been experienced by international icons such as British activist Erin Pizzey, who since the 1970s has denounced the reciprocity of DV and advocates the need for shelters for both female and male victims, is well known amongst Italian discourse agents (Pizzey 2011). In fact, they are aware that focusing on victims other than the women abused by men and questioning the tenability of gender readings on contemporary society could be a dangerous activity. Possible consequences they may face, and some have already experienced, include censorship, intimidation, defamation, cyber-bullying, barriers to access of

public funding, difficulties in getting research and books published, and obstacles in establishing intellectual and political careers.

7 Is Female Violence Gender Violence?

Previous chapters have extensively detailed that the dominant discourse of IPV and DV realises a conflation of two different categories, VAW and GBV, as if they were synonymous. Is the submerged landscape of daily abuses acted by women against their partners, ex-partners and new partners of ex-partners, part of that broader phenomenon called GBV? Is GBV a useful category to make sense of these abuses? Possible answers to these questions, were these affirmative or negative, suggest that female violence discourse can provide interesting challenges to the tenability of gender as interpretive framework of DV and IPV. Let me unpack this reasoning by using some of my respondents' approaches to this problem as discussion starting points.

1. Female violence against men is GBV in the sense that it is instigated by one gender against the other gender with modalities that attain to the characteristics of the female gender.
2. GBV includes all forms of violence linked to the imposition of fixed gender identities and roles; men can be victims of GBV as can women, gay men, lesbians, and transgender people.
3. Female violence is not included in dominant discourses of GBV because it does not embody the power relations embedded in society and normalised in culture, it is not acted by the subject with a dominant position against the powerless.
4. Female violence against men is not understood as GBV because it does not even exist, or if it does, it is minimal and extraordinary.
5. Female violence is not GBV and violence is violence; however, men and women perpetrate and experience violence in different ways, and this difference reflects different biology (psychic and physic) as well as different cultural representations and expectations of femininity and masculinity.

The first approach is perhaps the less problematic approach in that it underpins a simplistic interpretation of the category of GBV which does not fully reflect its' true theoretical framework of gender. However, this approach says that one of the interpretations ascribed to GBV is nothing

but violence instigated by one gender towards the other, as if it was a synonymous of IPV in heterosexual couples.

If approach 2 is applied to the typologies of female violence discussed earlier, one would say for example that mothers who deprive their ex-partners of a relationship with their child as a punishment for past adultery are instigating a form of GBV. The same reasoning applies to women who instigate violence towards the new partners of their exes as a result of moral gender prejudices dividing women into dichotomies of madonnas and whores: according to this approach this should be considered GBV.

Approach 3 seems to incorporate a binary view of power relations which does not clearly take into account the multiplicity of power positions that subjects occupy, regardless of their gender. More specifically, this approach does not take into account an important issue we discussed earlier: that there are areas of human life, such as family and parenting, where discourses around the protection of female victims of male violence and laws on women's rights affect contemporary power-relations between the sexes.

Approach 4 is relegated to the domain of denial and the minimisation of the phenomena of GBV. It is interesting to note that some 'femminicidio' advocates label those who advocate for the recognition of discrimination of men and criticise distorted representations of violence realised with the 'femminicidio' narrative, as 'deniers' (a nominalisation likening them to Holocaust deniers), alongside other labels such as chauvinists, patriarchs, and reactionaries. Let me report the following extract from an interview with a feminist journalist as a manifest example of denial:

Interviewer (I):	Would you consider female violence against men a form of gender violence?
Respondent (R):	This is statistically unimportant, bullshit.
I:	In your opinion is female violence newsworthy?
R:	You keep insisting on this topic, I already told you this does not have any tenure in reality, what are we talking about?
I:	News can't be about events that only happen sometimes?
R:	There is NOT any gender violence by women against men. If you keep asking about this topic I will quit the interview.
I:	I did not say *gender* violence, I said rare cases of *female* violence.[18]

This kind of denial and minimising attitude is discussed by Fabrizio Marchi (*Uomini Beta*), who claims that some feminists think that there is

> a sort of historical debt for men and historical credit for women. To say it with a joke 'what importance is 3 million divorced fathers kicked out their house compared to thousands of years of women's suffering?'.[19]

Approach 5, that violence is violence and not GBV, is in my view the most inspiring in that it allows explanations outside the interpretative precinct of patriarchal power and at the same time to use analytical categories of sexual difference and gender roles to analyse differences of committing and experiencing violence by men and women. This counter-discourse maintains that women are more mental, indirect, and cause less evident damage, whereas men are more physical, direct, and result in more evident injuries. These differences are explained as determined by different physical and mental structure as well as different biological functions of the two sexes.

This reasoning could enable us to de-politicise gender readings of IPV and DV by stepping outside of the gender discourse built upon a critique of power in patriarchy and a radical constructivist view of humans. At the same time, outside of the gender discourse we can still look at sexual difference of phenomena. As shown in Chapter 3, beyond and besides the gender discourse, there are other viable interpretive frameworks of violence, which do not necessarily exclude the relationship between biology and culture, but rather are informed by an interdisciplinary knowledge of the human and society.

8 Implications

This counter-discourse identifies the complexity of the modalities and victim/aggressor relations in heterosexual couples. Because of these characteristics the discourse could be an effective tool to counteract the problematic oversimplification and binary thinking embedded in the gender paradigm. Given that this new discourse requires stepping beyond the gender paradigm it also opens up the discourse on IPV and DV to other viable knowledge frameworks.

It follows that subversion of the dominant framework could happen by acknowledging voices at the margins and incorporating their concerns from social movements to institutional sites. This is similar to process

carried out by feminist movements over the last 60 years, which at the outset also spoke about male violence at the margins of public discourse. However, notwithstanding the increased awareness on VAW the establishment of dedicated institutions and mainstreaming of feminist discourse, heterosexual couples continue to suffer violence and abuse in their relationships. Looking at the other side of the coin, the topic of female violence could possibly assist in understanding the phenomenon differently and ameliorate gender issues in heterosexual relations. This project would enable us to move a step closer towards a more equal society, where suffering subjects, unreached and unheard at the present, would be intercepted and offered effective services. Addressing the needs of all victims is fundamental to break the cycle of family abuse, which each generation inherits features from the previous one. The establishment of more comprehensive anti-violence centres and shelters dedicated at the same time to male and female victims is a promising action in that sense.

However, a parallel caveat is that more categories of victims would be established with the subsequent provision of more affirmative action and social services based on gender resulting in new forms of discrimination. Also, as the feminist movement has shown us, public awareness of female victims of violence has resulted in an adverse fixation of women in the role of eternal victims whose agency is questioned in public representation. Abused men and the divorced fathers movements have the possibility to learn from this lesson and innovate their fight by resisting the temptation of engaging in victimisation by isolating themselves from women in all-male circles and self-help groups. Maybe, a possible recipe for success could be to step aside a polarised narrative that revolves around abuser and abused and attempt a relational analysis of reciprocal harm and suffering. According to Marino Maglietta, author of the first Italian law on shared custody, we need to advance a real equal opportunity policy, more balanced and comprehensive, rather than protecting new categories of victims.[20]

Female violence discourse is also politically subversive because it enables us to innovate those fixed and stereotyped gender identities that feminist theory posits as the origins of VAW. How? By illuminating the characteristics of women and men that are denied by dominant discourse of DV and IPV: male suffering and female agency to cause harm. This process would enable us to deconstruct dominant representations of the sexes as holders of oppositional sets of opposing characteristics: powerful men/fathers with force, aggressiveness, assertiveness, and violence;

powerless women/mothers with their capacity to love, nurture, and feel empathy and emotions (Boulding 2000; Zoja 2009). Such a dualism maintains the ideological stance that one sex is superior to the other and thus demands that individuals neglect the presence in him/herself of what Carl Gustav Jung calls 'contrasexualities', which are those characteristics that are associated to the other sex (Jung 2003).

However, recognition of one's capacity to perpetrate violence does not necessarily go along with a parallel positive evaluation of that capacity. On the contrary, such positive evaluation is not part of the subversive project delineated so far, whose aim is to ameliorate heterosexual relations rather than render them more violent. This discourse in fact is likely to be appropriated by a certain feminist discourse preaching further sexualisation of femininity as a twofold liberation: liberation from a moralist/prude stream of feminism which aims at banning women's bodies from the public eye and liberation from patriarchs to be submitted. In this foreseeable eventuality, female violence discourse would serve to innovate feminist markers of emancipation and advance a proud reclamation of women's ability to inflict harm and enjoy the suffering of others. This is not the original spirit of the discourse.

Notes

1. La storia di William Pezzullo e il Quirinale. (2014, 5 April). Retrieved from: http://www.adiantum.it/public/3535-la-storia-di-william-pezzullo-e-il-quirinale.-paola-tomarelli–gentile-prof.ssa-zincone,-riscontro-sua-nota . . . asp (accessed 22 January 2016).
2. Appeal Lombardo / Italy, n. 25704/11 Retrieved from: http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-119224%22 (accessed 21 January 2016).
3. Polizia di Stato. (2011, July). Se la separazione fa vittime . . . Retrieved from: https://www.poliziadistato.it/poliziamoderna/articolo.php?cod_art=2375 (accessed 22 January 2016).
4. Personal interview, 8 April 2014, Milan.
5. Unpublished work.
6. Personal interviews, 8 April 2014, Milan.
7. Personal interviews, 8 April 2014, Milan.
8. Personal interviews, 8 April 2014, Milan.
9. Male bashing in Italian television is documented by the anti-feminist magazine in the following video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=

UVGuNaV1PwQ&list=PL3Ut39283-sfzPpIULgUyO3VSdb4ckHm3&index=4 (accessed 21 January 2016).

10. Testimonies reported in the following website: http://paternita.info/violenza-femminile/index.html (accessed 21 January 2016).
11. Personal interview, 26 August 2014, telephone.
12. Stalking: Oss. Nazionale, in aumento i casi di donne-stalker. (2013, 26 April). *Adnkronos*. Retrieved from: http://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/1231707/Stalking-Oss-Nazionale-in-aumento-i-casi-di-donne-stalker.html (accessed 22 January 2016).
13. Shia LaBeouf: 'sono stato stuprato da una donna'. Molte lo insultano! (2014, 8 December) *Al di là del buco*. Retrieved from: https://abbattoimuri.wordpress.com/2014/12/08/shia-labeoulf-sono-stato-stuprato-da-una-donna-molte-lo-insultano/ (accessed 22 January 2016).
14. Personal interview, 15 July 2014, telephone.
15. Personal interview, 29 July 2014, telephone.
16. Personal interview, 6 May 2014, Rome.
17. Personal interview, 5 May 2014, Rome.
18. Personal interview, 24 June 2014, telephone.
19. Personal interview, 6 May 2014, Rome.
20. Personal interview, 29 July 2014, Skype.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

Living Discourses: A Future Agenda for Critical Research and Social Movements

Conclusions are never easy to draft: they imply putting an end to a study that potentially could go on forever, the researcher must stop analysing discourses that, while I am writing these final pages, continue to be influenced by and to influence changing social and institutional contexts. Let me update you with some of the more recent observations on how discourse and society appears today, 4 years after beginning this study.

The media wave surrounding 'femminicidio' has deflated in the last year although VAW continues to be a narrative of activism embraced by women's groups and media, where the term 'femminicidio' itself is still used to describe cases of homicide. However, VAW is no longer at the apex of the political agenda. This does not mean that 'femminicidio' has not modified political discourse in important ways: on the contrary, as highlighted throughout this book, 'femminicidio' has shaped the way VAW is discussed on a number of levels as a structural phenomenon of gender violence. Also, it is worth noting that the very concept of 'femminicidio' was semantically constructed within specific interest groups and the political system and its definition of a major social problem was in no way the outcome of any public confrontation with other groups of civil society. In this light, 'femminicidio' realised a form of 'colonisation of the lifeworlds': it invaded an area of life in which the problems could have been resolved through a free debate in the public sphere based on a communicative action oriented to agreement (Bandelli and Porcelli 2016).

D. Bandelli, *Femicide, Gender and Violence*,
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Also, the media wave initiated the consolidation of a false equivalence between DV/IPV and VAW while the victimisation of men, including injustices suffered by divorced fathers, continues to be discussed in the realm of counter-discourses, which from time to time the media reports as a stand-alone discourse rather than part of the discourse on DV, which instead remains dominated by the topic of VAW. It seems that this narrative is more visible in the Right oriented press as a sort of political reaction to the 'femminicidio' crusade that was endorsed with more engagement by the Left parties and media, an observation that is confirmed by divorced father activists who admit that politicians in the Center-Right are more open to listening to their experiences. However, these are only observations and need to be supported with empirical data in order to be fully validated. It would be interesting to see more research done in this area, in order to monitor how narratives of men's movements specifically are recontextualised in mediatised political discourse and how they intertwine with other political discourses typifying one or the other area (e.g. nationalism, welfarism, liberalism, etc.).

Also, as shown in the last chapter, there is a concrete possibility that female violence discourse could be transformed into a discourse of female emancipation interconnected with a discourse of sexuality with a subtle incitation to use violence against men to reaffirm female power. Co-option of discourses used originally within men's movements by other social movements needs to be at the centre of discourse studies on recontextualisation. At the same time, critical analysis is also needed to intercept ideological deviations and new discriminations that these emerging discourses could generate. However, it is important that these discourses are not dismissed too quickly as merely chauvinist or conservative, as often happens in feminist literature. At the same time it is also important that these discourses are not only studied by those belonging to men's rights movements. The framework of CDA applied in my study could offer, I hope, a way forward in so far as discourses are analysed as forces of social change (Fairclough 1992).

The gender view of society underpinning the feminist discourse of violence has been propagated through the 'femminicidio' media hype and sedimented as a taken for granted concept. In other words, we can see the 'femminicidio' narrative as one of a recent and powerful gridlock for the normalisation of other gender discourses. In the chapter dedicated to the ideology narrative I talked extensively about the interdiscursivity of gender and highlighted how its undefined meaning renders the term easily borrowed by radical discourse of

social constructivism and self-determination while forgetting that not everything that constitutes the human identity is modifiable by freewill.

Another discursive effect of the 'femminicidio' moral panic is that violence in heterosexual couples is used to disrepute heterosexuality, an institution that because of this indisputable disfunctionality should give away its role of exclusive site for offspringing and childbearing while sharing this role with same-sex couples who, according with this rhetoric, can be as 'good' and as 'bad' as heterosexuals are. This argument is well exemplified in the following extract by opinionist Furio Colombo, who maintains that the real threat for children is not the possibility of being raised by a same-sex couple, as anti-gender movement argues:

> Naturally, also children know that the true threat for family is that dad, for some reason annoyed, stabs mum to death. The 'femminicidio' epidemic is also seen by children in the news.[1]

This commentary was published at the beginning of 2016, when the parliamentary debate on same-sex marriage and stepchild adoption were at the top of political agenda and central in the media. Indeed, parallel to the deflation of the 'femminicidio' narrative there was an increase in exposure of the anti-gender discourse: as in 2013 when public opinion was bombarded with 'femminicidio', since 2015 the word 'gender' (in its original English version rather than being translated with the Italian 'genere') is at the centre of an ongoing cultural war fought by social movements, media, politicians, and institutions at a national and local level. Even mayors and members of city councils, usually from Centre-Right parties, are presenting motions and taking measures against the contingent emergency of gender indoctrination in public schools. An emblematic case centred around the Mayor of Venice, who recently banned the use of children's books that advance the so-called gender ideology in schools, or in other words that promote the idea that parents can also be same-sex. Rock star Elton John, who is a symbol of LGBT advocacy for gay adoption, described the mayor as a 'yokel' and a 'bigot'.[2]

The anti-gender discourse seems to reproduce a similar political division as the discourse of violence with the Centre-Left cultural and political apparatuses supporting same-sex marriage and gender transformative initiatives in school. Conversely, the Centre-Right parties and cultural areas are advancing an opposition against these same projects. However, political positions are not as monolithic as they seem at first sight and

internal divisions are being expressed around controversial topics such as stepchild adoption, maternal surrogacy, and sexual education. Nevertheless, it is evident the danger of a progressive radicalisation of the debate with reproduction of a traditional cultural war fought by secular Leftists against Catholic conservatives. Catholic politicians within the PD have remained silent during the discussion on the Cirinnà's law on gay marriage and only recently have some of them taken an overt stance against stepchild adoption, which would automatically legitimise the practice of maternal surrogacy, which in Italy remains illegal although accessible abroad. This position is also shared by Catholics in the Centre-right parties. The young *Cinque Stelle* movement tends to endorse a civil rights agenda and to approve gay adoption, while the moderate Right of Berlusconi's party does not have a clear and monolithic position and Members of Parliament of all parties are allowed freedom of conscience in voting for family reform.

I find that such a dichotomy of pro and against discourages an informed dialogue towards possible common ground while radicalising public debate along traditional positions influenced by cultural and political prejudices. In so doing, dialogue and participatory confrontation are further complicated by partial discourses that instead are functional to societal control and electoral consensus. For example, polemics raised around *The Game of Respect* and other similar gender-based educational projects are contributing to a progressive division of public opinion in two opposing fronts: those who welcome these kinds of initiatives as a sign of modernity moving past the taboo of sexual education typical of Catholic culture and those who oppose the sexualisation of children and reaffirm the right of parents to be the primary educators on sexuality. More complex issues around how the gender philosophy conveyed through these projects affects children's sexual and cognitive development are backgrounded by a simplistic portrayal excluding scientific arguments.

Similarly, two fronts of pro and against are consolidating around the issue of gay marriage with those against depicted as homophobic and discriminatory of same-sex couples in their right to love. Many of those who position themselves in the pro-front might disagree with their own positioning as soon as they would be informed that the institution of marriage presupposes the possibility to claim a supposed right to offspring. In fact, opportunities for common ground, such as the debate on civil unions or domestic partnerships rather than one on more romantic term 'marriage', are foreclosed upon because of misleading representations of legislation. This brings me to issue a reminder that the word

'femminicidio' is part of this same semantic game: at an academic conference in Italy last summer where I presented findings from Chapter 4 of this book, and claimed that 'femminicidio' does not exist as a new social emergency, I was attacked by a prominent female sociologist for denying the sad phenomenon of male VAW altogether.

Responsibilities for this radicalisation need to be examined by analysing critically the repertoires of all voices contributing to the gender/anti-gender discourse, repertoires directly spoken and mediated by the media. As literature on moral panics and moral crusades show, it would be limiting to point a finger only at the media and mainstream portrayal of opinions without taking into consideration the discursive role of interest groups in civil society (Gusfield 1963; McRobbie and Thornton 1995). Instead, one needs to acknowledge that social movements can be vulnerable to the logic of consensus, with the tendency to replicate the same narratives and preserve their ability to be driven, and modified, by groups external to their ideological area (Trend 1996). For example, this attitude might contribute to radicalising the public perception of the anti-gender discourse as a narrative preached exclusively by bigots and hinders a broader awareness of gender discourse implications within a more diverse public opinion. At the same time, the possibility of alliances with other social movements is hindered by religious connotations of anti-gender instances: for example the men's rights group *A Voice for Men Italia*, albeit on a front-line against radical feminism and 'genderisation' of domestic violence discourse, has not yet engaged in the critique against the gender discourse at large in so far as the anti-gender movement is perceived as homophobic. One of its members Paolo Cavallari writes:

> I suggest that, while maintaining religious and political party neutrality of the men's rights movement, we look at the enemies of our enemies as potential allies. Gay people who care about men's rights should ask themselves whether they are instrumentally used as useful idiots by feminist political programmes that are damaging to them. Catholics opposing gender ideology should revise their own position in a broader perspective. Therefore, the political programme they are fighting against is just one segment of a broader political project which includes radical feminism also.[3]

In fact, I believe there are opportunities for establishing synergies and strengthening the impact of counter-discourses in terms of enhanced public awareness about social injustices that are generated by mainstream

discourses. In other words, I believe that at stake is the awareness of the complexity of social issues that are on the contrary presented with what Marcuse called a 'hypnotic formula' that is functional to reductionism, an uncritical acceptance of contradictions and ultimately obedience (1964, p. 96). However, in order to pursue this goal and thus putting together anti-gender, men's rights, and shared parenting as well as women's rights discourses there is first the need for these movement to agree on certain basic shared goals and values. In other words, each of these movements needs to background their specificity and foreground a new common objective that could overcome classic conservative/progressive divisions.

A common cause could be built upon the reaffirmation of two things: children's right to develop solid identities and the need for multidisciplinary scientific knowledge on humankind as the principal guide for social change projects and actions towards that common goal. In Psychology, psychosexual identity is formed through a process of personality development that is realised through the relationship with mother and father and influenced by biology, affectivity, and culture (Gobbi 2014). In Carl Gustav Jung's (2003) archetypes theory, the process of personality formation, which is not limited to childhood but go on throughout the lifespan, is called individuation: a self-education process directed towards gaining awareness of the forces that inhabit the collective psyche, which is part of the unconscious and is generated by a process of sedimentation of cultural models (archetypes), which are transmitted through generations by mechanisms similar to the genetic traits of the species. Therefore, gender identity does not pertain only to genital body and sexual orientation, but rather it is the result of an intertwining development of body and psyche in a given cultural context (Vandermassen 2005). Also, Biology and Neurosciences confirm that psyche is sexually connoted since conception and that sexual characterisation is entrenched in every single cell of our body (Ingalhalikar et al. 2014).

Putting the psychological development of the child at the centre, as the embodiment of the continuation of humanity, and using scientific knowledge on humankind to achieve that goal, can these objectives be labelled as a conservative cause? Probably yes, in a society where, as Michel Schooyans notes, belonging to one gender means being outdated and demolishing distinctions is a symbol of progress (2000, p. 46). French psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel provocatively asks: 'at the risk of being called neo-reactionary, should we continue to consider the constitution of identity as a precondition for individual psychic equilibrium that may therefore have

some positive social repercussions?' (2005, p. 149) However, so far science has yet to show that identity is detached from biology and has likewise yet to show that the presence of male and female parents are not required to achieve a balanced development of identity (Marks 2012; Scabini and Cigoli 2013). Social change projects that do not embed the principle of cautiousness can easily transform into social engineering projects at the expense of future generations. One does not need to belong to any pro or against front for condemning these as unethical and contesting social change projects that put the hedonistic needs of adults first and consider optional the effort of a community to provide children with better conditions to become conscious citizens, able to protect themselves from violence and subjugation (Perucchietti 2016).

Would gender discourses, which deny or exclude the complex interrelation of nature and culture in human existence, be somehow helpful to encourage a virtuous process of social change of this kind? My answer is obviously negative. On the contrary, I read gender discourses as one of the most visible and normalised discourses of postmodernity that is contributing to the advancement of what Melucci (1996) calls overculturalisation of society inhabited by subjects Foucault calls docile bodies: objectified individuals focused on their material dimension who let cultural dogmas heavily influence their private life. In this line Donati speaks of 'an irruption of the inhuman into the social, one that progressively displaces what is still human (. . .) The epochal change that we are witnessing represents an emerging society characterised by the fact that the "social" is no longer seen, heard, or acted upon as something immediately human' (2009, p. 21). The disappearance of the human dimension is in this view the disappearance of a relational dimension, which as underscored by Donati is part and parcel of society as the social dimension is part and parcel of the human. In other words, there cannot be humanity without a relational dimension of being. Therefore such a society, which in my view gender discourse contributes to realise, is an individualised or atomised society inhabited by bodies rather than complex personae, individuals beset with false illusions that life can be arbitrarily determined through the use of specific techniques.

Gestational/maternal surrogacy for example is one of these technological practices functional to realise the false assumption that there exists a right to 'have' a baby. Feminists in Italy, on the wave of Sylviane Agacinski's activism in France, are taking a stance for the abolition of the practice which is read as a form of exploitation and commodification of women's bodies, especially poor women in the Global South, and

ultimately as a new form of 'gender' violence of patriarchy, of appropriation of female functions by homosexual males' desires. In light of these considerations, during the parliamentarian discussion on the Cirinnà's law on gay marriage they were advocating for that the law would include a mandatory presence of at least one mother in cases of stepchild adoption.

It is striking that at the centre of this recent feminist discourse there is the body of women, few preoccupations are raised with the absence of the male parent in the child's life, and it is suggested that lesbians are more qualified to raise children than male gay couples. In other words, it is suggested the same cultural stereotype underlying the shared parenting and divorced fathers' discourses: that maternity is fundamental while paternity is less important. Gestational/maternal surrogacy is a social problem likely to be colonised by feminist discourse (as it happened for DV/IPV) and interpreted according to the gender paradigm which places women in the fixed role of victims, with the foreseeable result of contestation and institutional response could be partial and ideological connoted. More comprehensive social mobilisation could be achieved, once again, by putting the rights of children at the centre of discourses of violence and violations. Rather than applying the same formula of patriarchal/gendered schema to another social problem afflicting contemporary families, I believe that the challenge is first to detect discourses that incite the condemned practice of surrogacy. Gender cultural discourse is certainly one of those, intersecting with commodification, objectification, transhumanism, and hedonism, all discourses that beset individuals, both men and women. It is important, in my view, that emerging social issues will be 'constructed' through the participation of different power-knowledge centres, that is to say through participation of voices speaking different discourses, and will not be monopolised by the group of interests that have traditionally secured access to that area of discourse.

It is in this vein that social researchers working within a critical tradition should interrogate pertinent voices at the margin of public debate: in order to illuminate the complexity of reality that inevitably gets lost in representations that reflect the view of a specific interest group. More importantly, there is a need to watch out and stop possible filtrations of simplified discourses from the public debate into scientific knowledge; therefore, scholars working in Social Sciences and Cultural Studies, need to be cautious and self-reflective in designing studies on topics that in popular knowledge are overloaded with political meaning. One of the roles of CDA analysts, in my view, is to ascertain how distant competing

discourses of social change are detached from scientific knowledge and in doing so containing the spreadness of politically correctness and relativism in intellectual work. In order to re-establish centrality of the 'human' and hinder ongoing process of overculturalisation, I believe, we need to innovate contemporary discourses of social justice by rendering them more complex, less partial, more integrated with knowledge derived from disparate disciplines (Pinker 2002).

Notes

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