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About the Gender Issue in Italy between History, Politics and Research

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This paper aims to explain, on the basis of analyses made during a long research on the history of women in Italy[2], the reasons why the seventh power in the world is still in many respects a macho and patriarchal country.

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Marco Severini

I. Far from Parity

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There are nearly 31 million women living in Italy, accounting for 51.3 perecent of the population. The area in which inequality appears perhaps most evident is in employment: Italians contribute almost 40, 15 percent of job creation and occupy about half of new fixed-term jobs but only one-third of permanent jobs; they tend to be better educated and boast better educational attainment than men, but earn less than men; female employment has returned to rise in early 2023 compared to the pre-pandemic two-year period (2018-19), but the gap with the leading European economies remains substantial: the female employment rate in Italy is 55 percent, more than 14 percentage points lower than the European average and more than 18 points lower than the most advanced economies in Europe; the educational qualification only partially protects against job loss so much so that the most educated Italians remain in the labor market (65 percent of female graduates), but more than 16 percent stop working compared to 21 percent of mothers with a secondary school diploma; the prevailing Italian family model limits the female component in the role of primary caregiver, with obvious employment and wage repercussions in both the short and long term[3]. In addition, rigid gender stereotypes, "an asymmetrical division of family labor, a macho corporate culture and poor or absent reconciliation policies" persist in the workplace, explained sociologist Chiara Saraceno[4].

As far as political participation is concerned, Italy recorded from the 1st to the 19th legislature - the current one - 66 governments and 28 premiers, of which only one was a woman; as for the positions of minister, deputy minister (the position of deputy minister was introduced by Law No. 81 of 2001) or undersecretary conferred in each government. Out of more than 1,600 ministerial positions awarded in the 66 governments of the Republic, Italians obtained 137 (plus 2 interim), just 8.56 percent, mainly in the social, health and education sectors. Within the EU-27, the average number of women in government is 32.3 percent, with very different results among the states: the presence of women in the governmental team goes beyond parity in Spain (60.9 percent), Finland (57.9 percent), Belgium (53.3 percent), France (51.2 percent) and Sweden (50 percent); followed by Austria, Lithuania and Estonia (46.7 percent) and, again, Germany (40 percent). With regard to the presence of women in the European Parliament, in the first five legislatures, Italian women elected always resulted in percentages below 15 percent: since 2014, first the double gender preference was introduced and applied and, since 2019, the so-called “triple gender preference”, according to which, in case the voter decides to express three preferences, these must concern candidates of different sexes, otherwise the second and third preferences will be cancelled.

The European Parliament, representing about 450 million people, is currently composed of 705 members of parliament of which 76 are Italian: of these 30 are women (39.47 percent). Finally, with regard to the organs of the regions, the female presence in Italian regional assemblies averaged (until before the

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[1] A. Libonati, *Raggiungeremo la parità di genere nel 2154*, «CNC media», 21 giugno 2023; *Global Gender Gap Report 2023 – l’Italia scende di quota*, «SheTech», giugno 2023.

[2] M. Severini, *Le fratture della memoria Storia delle donne in Italia dal 1848 ai nostri giorni*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2023.

[3] *L’occupazione femminile in Italia*, 18 maggio 2023, https://injob.com/news/occupazione-femminile-in-italia/(data are taken from the latest report signed by Bankitalia, Ministero del Lavoro e Anpasul); sul tema rinvio a A. Pescarolo, *Il lavoro delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea*, Roma, Viella, 2019.

[4] F. Piccinni, *Chiara Saraceno: “La cultura maschilista prevale, l’Italia è impreparata a dare riconoscimenti alle donne qualificate”*, «HuffPost», 23 gennaio 2018.

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pandemic) around 22.4 percent compared to the average recorded at the EU level of 34.2 percent [5].

In terms of entry to the parliamentary career, the twenty-first century opened for Italian female parliamentarians with a continually upward trend until 2022: the declining figure in 1996 (10.6 percent, of women elected to Parliament) increased by almost a percentage point (11.5 percent) in 2001 and touched a record that was considered historic in 2006 (XV legislature) when 108 female deputies (17.1 percent) and 42 female senators (14 percent) were registered, the highest ever in Italian history[6].

The 2006 figure was surpassed in the following three legislatures: in the 16th legislature (2008-13), there were 21 percent women among deputies and 18 percent among senators; in the 17th legislature (2013-18), 31 percent in the House and nearly 29 percent in the Senate; and in the 18th legislature (2018-22), with the enactment of Law no. 165, which introduced specific provisions for gender rebalancing, the percentage of women parliamentarians reached 35 percent, exceeding the number of 300 women in Parliament for the first time[7]. Finally, in the nineteenth legislature, after twenty-six years of growth, the value instead declines and settles at 34.47 percent for those elected in Palazzo Madama and 32.25 percent for those in Montecitorio[8]. Between 2013 and 2022, for the first time in national history, for two consecutive legislatures, one branch of Parliament was headed by a woman (first Laura Boldrini and then Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati), but there are still too few female parliamentarians.

Italian politics-despite a few recent successes, such as the law passed in 2019 against *revenge porn*, a crime consisting of sharing pornographic material, in images or videos, through the network, with instant messaging systems, social networks, without the consent of the person portrayed and with the purpose of harming him or her humiliate or blackmail her - still struggles to take the side of women both because men do not see a benefit in it and because there is a tendency to view equality as strictly a women's issue, ignoring the fact that it would benefit the whole of society, regardless of gender[9].

Motherhood, often lacking government support and aid, is an obstacle (and not an asset) in women's working lives; Italy has a low birth rate due to several factors, including the reduction in the number of women of childbearing age, lack of family-supporting policies, economic uncertainty and difficulty in reconciling family and work life; in 2022 it reached a new record low in births (392. 598 girls and boys, -1.9 percent compared to 2021); despite the contribution of migration, the Italian population remains in steady decline[10].

However, in 2022, a new political conjuncture has emerged, in many ways unprecedented.

II. New Political Conjuncture

In Italy, the general elections of September 25, 2022-a date unknown until then to national political consultations-confirmed the structural electoral abstentionism, progressive since 1979, and decreed victory Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), a political formation led by Giorgia Meloni (and founded by her in 2012 together with Guido Crosetto, an entrepreneur and former member of Christian Democracy and Forza Italia, and Ignazio La Russa, a former Missino) who, on Oct. 22, 2022, became the new premier of the center-right government, the first woman in the history of Italy to hold this position: 45 years old, Roman, professional journalist since 2006, vice-president of the Camera (2006-08), minister for Youth in the fourth Berlusconi government (2008-11), was co-founder in 2014 of Fratelli d'Italia, a right-wing, far-right party about which adjectives are wasted but which is undoubtedly nationalist, conservative and populist, an ideal continuation of the political tradition of Alleanza Nazionale (1995-2009), a post-fascist right-wing party, itself an evolution of Movimento Sociale Italiano (1946-1995), a neo-fascist-inspired party founded by former members of the dissolved National Fascist Party (1921-43) and the Republican Fascist Party (1943-45)[11].

FdI won as part of a center-right alliance comprising Forza Italia (FI), a party founded in 1994 by businessman Silvio Berlusconi, who died at the age of 86 on June 12, 2023, and the League, led by Matteo Salvini.

Included in PM Meloni's resume is the fact that, in the spring of 2021, in a country where 237 books a day were being edited (a country increasingly composed of writers than readers), she signed a book,

[5] Camera dei Deputati, *La partecipazione delle donne alla vita politica e istituzionale*, 7 marzo 2022, data updated with those of the current legislature obtained from *I ministri del governo Meloni*, «Openpolis», 25 ottobre 2022.

[6] G. Galeotti, *Storia del voto alle donne in Italia*, Roma, Biblink, 2006, p. 303.

[7] Senato della Repubblica, Ufficio Valutazione Impatto, *Parità vo cercando 1948-2018. Settanta anni di elezioni in Italia: a che punto siamo con il potere delle donne?*, 2018, p. 8.

[8] *La quota di donne elette cala per la prima volta dalla xiii legislatura*, «Openpolis», 27 ottobre 2022.

[9] E. Moro, *L'Italia è (ancora) un Paese maschilista?*, «Elle», 22 novembre 2019.

[10] Alleanza Italiana Sviluppo Sostenibile, *Donne e maternità in Italia: una vita in equilibrio fatta di ostacoli e criticità*, 24 maggio 2023, https://asvis.it/notizie-sull-alleanza/2631-16965/donne-e-maternita-in-italia-una-vita-in-equilibrio-fatta-di-ostacoli-e-criticita-.

[11] P. Ignazi, *L'estrema destra in Europa*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2000, p. 255.

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with a reassuringly trendy title, of 336 pages to tell about herself[12].

An analysis of electoral flows from the latest political consultations shows that the success of FdI-which had won just 4 percent of the vote in the 2018 general election-is fueled by substantial inflows from the Five Star Movement (M5S), a populist formation founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo and digital entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, and compared to 2018 by the League-whose official and full name is Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania, currently Italy's oldest party, founded in 1991- , while the recovery from abstention is all in all limited. Even more noticeable is the flow of voters who since the 2019 European elections have shifted from the League to FdI (nearly 4 out of 10 League voters opted this time for Giorgia Meloni's party)[13].

As soon as Giorgia Meloni was nominated for the post of premier, after 67 republican governments headed by 30 men (because "doubling up has almost been the rule", until the two Conte governments), Barbara Stefanelli, deputy editor of the "Corriere della sera", Italy's best-selling and most influential daily newspaper, asked herself three questions to which she put three answers side by side; first, she wondered, answering in the affirmative, whether having a woman premier could entail "opening up spaces of recognition for women", helping to shake up the dominant culture of an Italy where not even one in two women has a paid job and "where unconscious prejudices - the most insidious because they are often elusive - hold girls' destinies hostage?"; second, she wondered why it was a center-right side that achieved this "change of pace" instead of the left "which fills programs with sincere aspirations for equity", answering, in the wake of an interview with Hillary Clinton given to the same newspaper some time earlier, that looking at female leaders around the world, none has "headlined" any revolution or carried out reforms in favor of women such as to shake up the patriarchal system so that, while in the progressive house the best candidates have been made to wave "like flags at half-mast until they tore themselves apart", on the other side, a rising political formation (which in the 2022 politics has sixfold increased its support) did not think twice about running its co-founder -"prepared, ready"- and winning the last round of elections; finally, more open and possibilistic was the answer to the third question, "perhaps the most important one",regarding the question of whether or not the season opened with Meloni represents" a threat to rights, including women's rights", stressing that identity does not automatically guarantee "policies, investments, feminine sensitivity" and hoping that the call for "responsibilities" made by the newly appointed prime minister would constitute a guarantee for women's achievements "which in Italy have been arduous and still need to be strengthened"[14].

On March 12, 2023, Elly Schlein, 37, born in Switzerland in 1985 and the daughter of two university professors, holding three citizenships (Swiss, U.S., and Italian), became the new secretary of the Democratic Party (PD), after coming out on top in the primaries with 53 percent of the vote, the first woman, as well as the youngest, to lead the party founded in 2007: The newly appointed secretary's resume includes membership in various center-left and left-wing formations, involvement as a member of the European Parliament for Italy in the 8th continental legislature (2014-19), election as a regional councilor in the Emilia-Romagna Legislative Assembly, and the post, in this same region and until Oct. 24, 2022, of vice president of the regional council led by Stefano Bonaccini, the challenger defeated in the primaries[15].

For the first time, Italian political history thus revolves around two middle-aged women, the older one at the presidency of the Council of Ministers and the younger one at the head of the main opposition party.

The battles of feminists have not only served to bring more women into politics but also to question the complex reasons for their historical remoteness, amid objective difficulties in getting their way, the perception of an insurmountable goal, "or indifference, self-exclusion or disinterest of women themselves"[16], not to mention the fact that not a few policies have emulated and traveled male (and macho) paths and attitudes instead of identifying and addressing one of their own.

A first consideration: Fratelli d'Italia, which has the League and Forza Italia, two other conservative political formations, as allies, won by getting 23 percent of the vote out of 63.91 percent of voters, the lowest figure ever recorded for a general election, more than 9 points lower than in 2018, when 73 percent of voters went to the polls at the same time. Political turnout figures mark a new decline, a phenomenon that is widespread in all regions, but particularly strong in southern Italy, where nearly half of eligible voters deserted the polls[17].

[12] Istat, *Produzione e lettura in Italia*, 11 gennaio 2021, in <www.istat.it>; *Quanti sono i lettori di libri in Italia? Le risposte e i dati dell'ultimo rapporto Istat*, in «Il Libraio», 12 gennaio 2021.

[13] Ipsos, *Elezioni politiche 25 settembre 2022: i risultati elettorali e le analisi post-voto*, https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/elezioni-politiche-risultati-elettorali-analisi-post-voto-ipsos.

[14] B. Stefanelli, *Un'altra storia*, «Corriere della Sera», 22 ottobre 2022, pp. 1, 36.

[15] M.T. Meli, *Pd, prima da leader per Schlein*, *ibid*., 12 marzo 2023, p. 10.

[16] C. Mazzuca Poggiolini, *Donne e politica*, in *Cinquant'anni non sono bastati Le carriere delle donne a partire dalla sentenza n. 33/1960 della Corte costituzionale*, a cura A.M. Isastia, R. Oliva, Trieste, Scienza Express edizioni, 2016, p. 155.

[17] *L'astensionismo e il partito del non voto*, «Openpolis», 11 ottobre 2022.

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III. The Balance of the First Year of Government

The presence of two women in the top two forces in Italian politics could have made a significant contribution to the gender issue. According to researcher Ilaria Masinara, campaigns manager at Amnesty International, the rights of women and Lgbt+ people have regressed in a year of the Meloni government:

> There is a boulder that weighs even in this legislature: the failure to pass legislation to combat violence and discrimination based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation. We are also behind in improving mechanisms to collect data on hate speech and hate crimes that stigmatize the Lgbtqi+ community. On the rights of same-sex couples, we saw when the Ministry of the Interior instructed prefectures to align with the Supreme Court ruling of 2022, which refused to register the birth certificate of a child born in Canada through gestation for others, and some municipalities refused to accede to the request not to register children. This is a violation of children's rights because it discriminates against them if they are born to homogenous couples. Policies, on the other hand, must protect all people, with a view to substantive equality.

Particularly on women, there are two discouraging aspects that go against women's self-determination:

> There is a first package that starts with Law 194, which has been progressively emptied on the ground because of the very high percentage of conscientious objector personnel. That, for example, in the Marche region reaches almost 70 percent. In the same direction goes, for example, the "Fondo vita nascente" and the "anti-abortion room" at the Sant'Anna hospital, in Turin, or the popular initiative bill "Un cuore che batte," again signed by Fd'I, in Ancona, which precisely suggests that in so-called "listening rooms" the fetus' heart be heard by mothers who decide to have an abortion.

The judgment of the head of AI on the measures taken to combat gender-based violence is a "Ni," since while on the one hand the government has shown interest and commitment with a view to protection and prevention (reinstatement of the Anti-Femicide Commission in which, among other things, the implementation of the Istanbul Convention ratified in 2013 will be discussed), on the other hand there is a lack of a strong emphasis on training, since "creating a real culture of violence prevention means putting the woman at the center. And it cannot be done if the woman is not seen as the person who can handle consent and who has to give it"[18].

In its first year, the Meloni government cut funding for the prevention of violence against women by 70 percent, so that the 17 million euros allocated by the Draghi government for 2022 was reduced to 5 million for 2023. In short, the executive led by the first premier fueled the public debate, deluding about an action that was then not implemented and treating the issue often as badly as when chemical castration was invoked for perpetrators of rape[19].

The governmental absence on a very sensitive issue occurred amid the general increase in the phenomenon of feminicide[20], which provoked outrage and popular demonstrations, especially after the November 11, 2023 murder of university student Giulia Cecchettin by her ex-partner Filippo Turetta; the letter sent to the o the Veneto edition of "Corriere della Sera" by Elena Cecchettin, the victim's sister, on Nov. 20, 2023, three days after Giulia's body was found, constituted yet another indictment of a patriarchal society dominated in large part by a rape culture that expresses itself through anti-feminine behaviors such as "control, possessiveness and catcalling" or the justification of those who use violence against women; "every man is privileged by this culture"[21]; Elena Cecchettin was designated at the end of 2023 as person of the year by the newspaper "L'Espresso" for transforming "private pain into collective assumption of responsibility, forcing us to name the evil we suffer from: patriarchy"[22].

In 2023, 107 cases of femicide were recorded[23]. However, different data have been circulating since there is neither an institutional database dedicated to feminicides, since "legally" feminicide does not exist in our Penal Code, nor an institutional definition of feminicide shared by the 27 countries of the European Union; our Code does not identify feminicide as a specific crime, since it is a homicide (Article 575) but not as a "case of crime". In the absence of the legal one, statistics comes to the rescue, with ISTAT proposing this definition in its annual report on Equitable and Sustainable Welfare (Bes): "gender-based homicides, commonly called feminicides, are defined as those involving the killing of a woman as a woman". The variables needed to identify a feminicide are many and relate to the victim, the perpetrator and the context of the violence[24].

[18] E. Martini, *Un anno di governo Meloni e sono regrediti i diritti di donne e persone Lgbtq+*, «il manifesto», 21 ottobre 2023.

[19] E. Nicolosi, *Action Aid: "Dal Governo Meloni molte chiacchiere e pochi fatti contro la violenza sulle donne"*, «la Repubblica», 13 novembre 2023.

[20] Severini, *Le fratture della memoria*, cit., pp. 411-416 e *passim*.

[21] E. Cecchettin, *«I "mostri" non sono malati, sono figli sani del patriarcato»*, «Corriere del Veneto», 20 novembre 2023.

[22] E. Bellavia, *Ecco perché Elena Cecchettin è la persona dell'anno per L'Espresso*, «L'Espresso», 29 dicembre 2023.

[23] G. Romagnoli, *107 nomi di donne, tutte diverse ma unite dall'unica linea rossa della violenza*, "la Repubblica", 24 novembre 2023.

[24] E. Messina, *Numero femminicidi 2023: perché circolano dati così diversi?*, «Corriere della Sera»-La 27esimaOra, 5 dicembre 2023. This article reports the main different data reported on the phenomenon, including the 88 recorded in the 27thOra database; the 106 read and written in the many official celebrations against violence; the data from the Viminale, which counts among the 109 women killed from January

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Also on a definitional level, in 2022, the United Nations Statistical Commission specified that there are three types of "gender-related killing": murders of women by a partner; murders of women by another relative; and murders of women by another person, whether known or unknown, "but occurring through a modus operandi or in a context related to gender motivation[25]. Still, according to L'Eige (European Agency for Gender Equality) along the lines of the UN Statistical Commission, comparing data collections and indicators used in the various EU countries and the UK, concluded that in addition to cases of crimes committed by partners or ex-partners, the following should be considered feminicides.

The killing of women and girls for so-called honor motives and other killings resulting from harmful practices, the targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict, as well as cases of femicide linked to gangs, organized crime, drug trafficking, and trafficking in women and girls. And also crimes committed against women because of their sexual orientation or gender identity[26].

Finally, the first Italian Parliamentary Commission on Femicides attempted to give a political definition, which, basing itself on the declarations of the Istambul Convention (the Council of Europe treaty "on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence" also ratified by Italy in 2013) proposed this definition: "Killing of women by a man determined by gender reasons"[27].

Gender-based violence, that is, violence against women as women, should be considered a structural phenomenon of Italian society, strongly linked to the context of discrimination and social prejudice in which it matures.

IV. In the Absence of a Cultural Revolution

Italian life and culture are still conditioned by strong prejudices against women. On the latter, Norberto Bobbio, one of the most profound philosophers of the twentieth century, observed how racism is a prejudice, that is, a false belief held to be true on the basis not of reasoning or fact, but by appealing to tradition, adapting to established customs or uncritically accepting constituted authority. Any prejudice is combated with adequate knowledge, that is, based "on arguments that derive from our ability to learn from experience," with democracy, freedom and an education oriented toward universal values. Bobbio has written how the women's emancipation movement is "the greatest (I would be tempted to say the only) revolution of our time"; the most odious prejudice is the myth of the superiority of men over women, not least because anti-feminine prejudice, unlike racial and social prejudice that is an expression of a majority toward a minority, is directed toward a majority, precisely women[28].

Usually the same, small number of names are mentioned: from Olympe de Gouges to Mary Wollstonecraft to Tina Anselmi and Nilde Iotti, considered Mothers of the Italian Republic. But why not recount the stories of Marianna De Crescenzo and Maria Alinda Bonacci who, in the fall of 1860, a year before united Italy was born and without the electoral law allowing it, were, in two contexts as different as Naples and Recanati, the first two Italians to lay a ballot in the ballot box for the plebiscites of annexation to the Savoy dominions and thus the first voters in contemporary Italy?

Either the story of the Italian and European proto-electricians (ten precarious schoolteachers from the province of Ancona who gained the right to vote politically in 1906)[29] or that of pioneers in the professions, from the first female engineer Emma Strada to the first female lawyer Elisa Comani who became such in two cities as different as Turin and Ancona?[30]

The truth is that males have had their own biographies since ancient Greece: Plutarch put together, with Parallel Lives, between the late 1st and 2nd centuries CE, pairs of biographies, each narrating the lives of a Greek and a Roman, but still men, with the intention not already of making history, but of describing the character of the character and his moral considerations and actions; the Greek writer possessed to a remarkable degree the ability to attract the interest of readers, elaborating on the earlier authors he had drawn on and quoting "very often, honestly, his sources"[31].

In twentieth-century Italy it was, for the most part, journalists and writers who wrote biographies, a genre of undoubted appeal, increasingly less practiced by historians, even viewed with snobbishness by

1 to December 4, 2023, crimes committed in the affective family environment (90) and among these, those committed by partners or ex-partners (58); up to the figure of the Observatory of the feminist movement Non una di meno which, updated as of Nov. 8, counts 110 victims divided, however, into "94 feminicides, 1 trans*cide, 9 suicides and 6 deaths under investigation induced or suspected to be induced by violence and hatred of a patriarchal nature".

[25] Istat, *Commissione Parlamentare d'inchiesta sul femminicidio, nonché su ogni forma di violenza di genere* - Audizione dell'Istituto Nazionale di Statistica Dott. Saverio Gazzelloni Direttore della Direzione centrale delle statistiche demografiche e del censimento della popolazione, 23 gennaio 2024, p. 12.

[26] Messina, *Numero femminicidi 2023*, cit.

[27] *Ibidem*.

[28] P. Polito, *Un'altra Italia*, Fano, Aras, 2021, pp. 174-177 (177, for the citation).

[29] M. Severini, *There is no story without its heroes. Ten women and the right to vote in Italy in 1906*, in «HECL», XIV/1, 2019, pp. 625-640.

[30] On these cases I refer to the various essays in the collected volume, *Pioniere. Storia di italiane che hanno aperto nuove frontiere*, L. Pupilli (ed.), Fano, Aras, 2021.

[31] C. Carena, *Introduzione* a Plutarco, *Vite parallele*, Milano, Mondadori, 1974, pp. 16-18 (p. 18 per la citazione).

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academic circles: biographies mainly of men, with women relegated to the usual corner. Recently there has been a boom in autobiographies[32]: magistrates and entertainers, writers and footballers, journalists, politicians - who are never lacking - statesmen and others, in short, an audience of characters, with several women, who significantly affect the number of the 282 books that were published every day in 2022, while at the same time the number of readers has decreased[33]. This is a production that alienates the common reader even more from history books written by historians.

In the 1950s, a group of Italian journalists planned at the table how to take over the large audience of history readers. The Storia d'Italia (1965-97), written by Indro Montanelli, Roberto Gervaso and Mario Cervi, without their respective contributions being specified, is quite well known, a story that was certainly "very readable and captivating," but with several errors and inaccuracies, intended for the middle-class reader of average culture eager for background, minute details, perspective glimpses, caustic judgments, gossip and prudery. This type of narrative has had great fortune because it has been conveyed mainly by Montanelli, one of the most famous newspapermen of the last century, both protagonist and witness of events that occupy roughly half of that work: a journalist indeed, but not a historian[34].

The relationship between historians and journalists is as full of clichés as it is of undeniable data, starting with that of the latter being the former's first competitors. Professional historians work from first-hand sources, follow rigorous methods - such as the *Chabodian canon* (high language, extensive critical apparatus, complex reconstruction)[35] or that reiterated by the Polish intellectual Krzysztof, Pomian (about especially the marks of historicity)[36] - as well as codified preliminary procedures (perusal of bibliography; verification of the state of studies; examination of known sources), which are essential to carry out research that is full of pitfalls and generally long in duration: historians are often (unfairly) accused of not knowing how to write clearly and of not being able to reach the general public. Journalists, on the other hand, mostly work on secondary sources and are distinguished by more or less nimble writing, remarkable readability, and more copies sold.

In essence, biography is one of those literary genres that has always enjoyed considerable success in Italy, although it has mostly focused on men.

This is confirmed by the creation of the largest national biographical repertory, the Biographical Dictionary of Italians, a 60-year undertaking (1960-2020) that highlights extremely eloquent data: the modest percentage of women biographed in the Dictionary - 1,600 female profiles out of a total of 40,000 made in sixty years by more than 28. 000 different authors - corresponds to 4 percent, which is in line with values known in Italy, such as women elected to the Constituent Assembly (3.7 percent) or those to whom a street, square or public place is dedicated (6.6 percent): however, this 4 percent is lower than similar European repertories, since in Great Britain the Oxford Dictionary of national biography came to 8 percent of women biographed and in Germany the Neue Deutsche Biographie touched 5 percent [37].

V. A Distorted Historiographical Citizenship

Certainly, basic female biographical research as well as historiographical citizenship of Italians continues to be lacking.

It is true that scholarly journals and women's associations have made a significant and growing contribution in recent times: however, at present, only three regions out of 20 - Lombardy, Marche and Sicily - have women's biographical repertories, circumscribed in the second case to the contemporary age only[38]. So why not have similar tools for all other regions? At first glance, one would be inclined to point out that these are regions ruled by men. In reality, it is the widespread machismo throughout public opinion that determines this incredible disconnect: of men, famous or not, from every age of human civilization we know and can have tools to know everything or almost everything, of women much, but really much less.

It must be remembered, however, that research on women's history has proposed to give visibility to a "marginalized subject" in traditional historical

[32] M. Masneri, *Un diluvio di biografie e autobiografie. Vite di santi e santoni*, «Il Foglio», 11 ottobre 2021; I. Zaffino, *Biografie e nuove rivelazioni: è boom dei libri dedicati alla regina Elisabetta*, «la Repubblica», 21 settembre 2022.

[33] *In Italia si pubblicano più libri ma cala la percentuale di lettori*, «il Sole 24 Ore», 31 dicembre 2023.

[34] Montanelli worked on *Storia d'Italia* with Roberto Gervaso from 1965 to 1970, but then interrupted the collaboration, which resumed, proving to be much more lasting with Cervi: the latter and Montanelli had different characters but were able to complement each other so that, having met in Via Solferino in 1946 (at the institutional referendum Cervi voted for the republic and Montanelli for the monarchy), they became friends and collaborated until the end of the century; when the Tuscan left "il Giornale" to found "la Voce," Cervi followed him, except when he returned to "il Giornale" and became its editor. L. Offeddu, *Montanelli e l'intesa con Mario Cervi. Sinfonia di estro e ordine*, «Corriere della Sera», 15 aprile 2018.

[35] V. Vidotto, *Guida allo studio della storia contemporanea*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004, pp. 35-36 e ss.

[36] K. Pomian, *Che cos'è la storia?*, Milano, Mondadori, 2001 (ed. or., 1999), pp. 277-278.

[37] M. Severini, *Il completamento della biografia della nazione*, «Il materiale contemporaneo», 2, 2022 pp. 59-72.

[38] *Dizionario biografico delle donne lombarde*, R. Farina (ed.), Milano, Baldini&Castoldi, 1995; *Siciliane. Dizionario biografico illustrato*, M. Fiume (ed.), Siracusa, Ed. Romeo, 2006; *Dizionario biografico delle donne marchigiane 1815-2022*, L. Pupilli e M. Severini (ed.), Ancona, il lavoro editoriale, 2022 (1ª edizione, 2018).

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investigations without, moreover, being a "minority" in numerical terms: women have been placed side by side with subaltern groups in past societies - such as peasants, workers, criminals, deviants and those previously mentioned as bankrupt, banned etc. - ignored by nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography, groups that recent studies, in convergence with the social sciences, instead intend to "recover to memory as subjects of action in history" by making them the object of study. Therefore, women's history was born with an "additional" and "supplementary" intent to current history and even this "additional operation" was pursued with the belief that even the mere placement of women in historical scenarios constituted in itself an alteration of dominant reconstructions and led with it the questioning of traditional acquisitions, the identification of new paradigms and the reorientation of findings[39].

The *Dictionary* concerning women in the Marche, the result of a scientific project spanning two years and involving more than 40 authors (only two scholars participated), initially proposed 300 profiles of women who, belonging to the most disparate social classes, touched with the fifth edition of the work 366, after the work's editors and curators had listened to the territory and had tried to incorporate suggestions and proposals for new entries. Of the latter, only those that met the work's scientific criteria, which remained unchanged, were accepted. Women who "made their incisive contribution in the events" included along a little more than 200 years, from the Congress of Vienna, the first international treaty in which "the word Marche" first appeared, to the years of the five editions (2018-2022) were biographed[40].

In particular, an attempt was made to promote a bottom-up view, thus biographing not only famous women, but also, precisely, "representatives of trades and professions who have written a story different from that told in school and academic textbooks, but no less important and fascinating"[41].

Let us now ask how much the knowledge of women's history could have benefited if every Italian region-and not just two-had repertoires similar to those mentioned above. We hypothesized that individual regional councils could set up working groups gathering historians and scholars to fill this gap. The recent experience in the Marche region shows that by relying on a rigorous methodology and a working group divided into autonomous sub-groups coordinated by a contact person and asked to comply with the methodological criteria previously discussed and approved by the meeting of the contact persons, such a project can be accomplished in a time that is anything but long.

Looking at the Italian academic world, one finds a number of no less interesting elements.

The survey presented, in 2013, by the Department of Political Science of the University of Roma Tre identified only 56 gender teaching in Italy, including bachelor's and master's degree programs, 12 postgraduate courses, 6 master's degrees and 4 doctorates: the U.S. University of Berkeley alone offered at the time more than 60 courses in Gender studies, while more than a thousand were counted in the United States. Still, out of a total of 57 public Italian universities, there are only 16 in which there is at least one undergraduate course in gender studies: 74 percent of the courses are in universities in northern Italy (64 percent are concentrated in the University of Bologna), 10 percent in the Center, 16 percent in the South and Islands[42]. Gender studies itself in the peninsula revealed critical issues: the significant lag in institutional legitimacy, the ambivalence of feminist academics, the fragile structure of university teaching practices, and the coexistence of excellent specialized programs with the scarcity of introductory courses in major Italian universities[43].

VI. First Changes

Things are slowly changing and, in the last decade, Gender studies have grown significantly in our country as well as internationally: not only have specific teachings on gender issues increased, but realities such as the Gender Equality Plan (GEP) - that is, the set of actions, in line with the European Commission's definition, integrated into a single strategic vision, aimed at eliminating gender inequalities with a view to occupational well-being - witness how the changes do not only concern the academic sphere, but society itself. International conventions (Istanbul, 2011), international feminist movements weaving their engagement with that of anti-racist and Lgbt+ movements, and the increased space that inclusive language occupies in public space are all signs of concrete change: nevertheless, resistance to the affirmation of gender studies has not disappeared, in academia as well as in the public sphere, while there are numerous groups and individuals "who, both online and offline, act out strong anti-feminist resistances and offensives to the change advocated by feminisms and gender-related disciplines"[44].

Still, as of September 2022, the first Master's Degree Course in Gender Studies, Media and

[39] S. Feci, *Storia di genere*, in *Dizionario di Storia*, 2010, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/storia-di-genere_(Dizionario-di-Storia)/.

[40] I curatori, *Introduzione*, in *Dizionario biografico delle donne marchigiane*, cit. (2022), p. 5.

[41] I curatori, *Alle lettrici e ai lettori*, in *Dizionario biografico delle donne marchigiane*, cit. (2018), p. 6.

[42] Severini, *Le fratture della memoria*, cit., p. 378

[43] P. Di Cori, *Sotto mentite spoglie. Gender studies in Italia*, in «Cahiers d'etudes italiennes», 16, 2013, pp. 15-37.

[44] M. Poggio, *Gli studi di genere in Italia: passato, presente e futuro di una sfida ancora aperta*, «AG AboutGender» 11(21), 2, 2022, p. 296.

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Communication Cultures and Policies was activated at "La Sapienza" University of Rome, the result of the collaboration between the Departments of Communication and Social Research, Humanities and Modern Cultures, and Psychology[45].

However, within academic institutions, the female component appeared to be underrepresented in 2021: compared with 12,303 full professors, there are 2,952 women full professors; there are 19,676 associate professors and 7,575 female colleagues. One of the biggest problems lies in the fact that the concepts of scientific excellence and meritocracy in academia are not neutral in nature: “they are defined on performance parameters that are strongly male-stereotyped but to which women are expected to adhere in order to demonstrate the validity of their work”.

Moreover, according to data from the European University Association (2020), among 28 EU member states there were only 15 percent female university rectors (varying from 9.5 percent in 2010 to 13 percent in 2013 and 14.3 percent in 2019) and in Italy only six[46]. In 2022, after the election of Donatella Sciuto at the top of the Milan Polytechnic, Italy's female rectors will become ten: still few if we compare them to the more than 80 male colleagues, but if we think that the first woman at the top of a university came only in 1992, when Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli, who recently passed away, was chosen for Roma Tre, the landing in double digits is nevertheless encouraging[47].

Coming out impoverished, because not adequately supported by institutions, is basic research, that which is (or should be) taught in universities and which is substantiated by indispensable elements: the methodology of work, the passion for knowledge, the importance of writing and communicating research, the attendance of those fundamental archives that are often bypassed or forgotten, such as municipal and state archives, parish, family, private and public archives, emphasizing for the municipal ones the importance of offices such as the Anagrafe and the Stato Civile, indispensable to carry out research of this kind[48].

The dimensions of knowledge and narrative are indispensable to historical knowledge no less than the historian's own writing skills: “A poorly written history book is a bad history book”, pointed out one of the most brilliant contemporaryists of recent times, Tony Judt[49]; models and theories are important, but they should not be given absolute meaning; in analyzing the events of the historical process, due consideration should be given to national cultures, but without erecting them as a single or indisputable parameter of one's research itinerary; updating is another vital component of the historia''s craft, of his or her effective abilities to reconstruct the past through archival and documentary research and to communicate it to a broad audience that, in addition to scholars and the scholarly community, includes first and foremost readers.

Someone has pointed the finger, on the one hand, at the fact that the inability on the part of some Italian historians to write books “as readable in form as they are solid in content”, without therefore reaching the general reader, has contributed to the fortunes of “amateur historians” and journalists; and, on the other hand, on the fact that the very preservation of polysemous language still allows historiography, and thus historians, to remain "still very close" to the common language, due to the far from minor fact that the recipients of research are “not only” the historians themselves, but "still" ordinary citizens.

Putting the thirst for knowledge and the capacity for storytelling (and interpretation) back at the center of historical work can thus lead to reclaiming the foundational elements of a profoundly human discipline that sits “at a delicate junction” between the past, the present, and the future[50].

[45] See R. Scalise’s interview with P. Panarese, course president, «Roba da Donne», 5 giugno 2023 (https://www.robadadonne.it/240170/studi-di-genere-gender-studies-italia/).

[46] G. Ubbiali, *La faticosa carriera accademica delle donne in Italia*, «il Sole 24 Ore», 8 marzo 2021.

[47] E. Bruno, *Gender gap negli atenei, la spinta delle dieci rettrici*, *ibidem*, 21 novembre 2022.

[48] I curatori, *Introduzione*, in *Dizionario biografico delle donne marchigiane*, cit. (2022), p. 6.

[49] T. Judt [con T. Snyder], *Novecento. Il Secolo degli intellettuali e della politica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012, translated by P. Marangon (original edition: *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, London , Penguin, 2012), p. 257. On the originality and historical method of the Anglo-Saxon scholar I refer to M. Severini, *Tony Judt, le eredità del Novecento e la lezione di metodo storico*, in «Ricerche Storiche», LI, 1, gennaio-aprile 2021, pp. 93-112.

[50] M. Severini, *Public History. Undici anni sul campo*, Dueville (Vi), Ronzani, 2022, p. 66.

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