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Women's Leadership in Politics:

Theory and Cases

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Introduction

In his nineteenth-century masterpiece "Anna Karenina", Leo Tolstoy (1878) once wrote: *"It is a vicious circle. Woman is deprived of rights from lack of education, and the lack of education results from the absence of rights [...] Duties are bound up with rights – power, money, honour; those are what women are seeking."*

During such eventful years, the pages of the so-called Russian "thick magazines" (Leonid 2016), that is, where the majority of novels would first come to light and where most political discussions were conducted, became loaded with brand-new social matters; in particular, the slavery question, the sexual question, and, most importantly, the "woman question" (Mandelker 2004).

It is precisely through this literary and historical reference, in fact, that I would like to present the core subject of my dissertation. Provided the diversity of the position and role of women in all-time societies, my objective is to illustrate, by means of both theoretical traditions and empirical instances, how female political participation and empowerment helped (and will help) shape and improve past and contemporary political scenarios.

First of all, as a fundamental part of this thesis, it is crucial to introduce the concept of "leadership", and to note that such word encompasses several meanings. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2021), it is referred to as "the set of characteristics that make a good leader." In line with Forbes (2013), instead, it is defined as "a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal." However, ever since such term entered our daily vocabulary, the real query has not been the mere analysis of its literate sense, but rather what it represents and to which contexts it applies. Yet, because of its vast and abstract nature, this task has been a complex one to achieve, let alone its examination as related to the female sphere. Indeed, as the title of my thesis suggests, I will attempt to provide an overview of the role of female leadership within political systems, starting from relatively ancient times to our present days, and focusing on multiple elements ranging from gender disparity, distinct mediatic traits between men and women, and finally, some practical examples.

In order to cover all of this, my dissertation will be made up of three main parts.

The first section will be focusing on the fundamental reasons why women were initially denied access to the centers of political authority – notably, the gendered nature of social structures and their representation as solely housewives. At this point, not only will it be important to assess the connection between Feminism and Political Theory, but also how such relationship expanded and reconfigured the women's role as potential leadership candidates. Similarly, emphasizing the complexities of feminist strands will be critical. In this way, not only will it be possible to tackle the

elements that they address (i.e., racism, social status, ethnic diversity etc.), but also to destroy the frequent (and mistaken) cohesive categorization of women into a single homogeneous class.

For what concerns the second chapter, instead, by evaluating regimes and structures rather than individual policies, and by assessing the state at large rather than just its specific regulations, the purpose will be to analyze the impacts that the combination of structural and institutional operations has had on women in such a realm, as well as to observe the evolution of inequality by researching how different regimes and contexts might influence each other in unforeseeable ways. Furthermore, all of this will be complemented by the disparities in media coverage that women face in comparison to their male counterparts, as well as the endeavor to quantify the potential gains stemming from the female political inclusion.

Ultimately, the third section will be of empirical nature and, in particular, it will concentrate on the study of three of the most prominent female political characters of all times: former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former US First Lady Michelle Obama. Margaret Thatcher, widely known as "the Iron Lady," had a significant impact on the society of the 1980s, mainly due to her anti-feminist stance and astonishing indifference to the concerns of the poorer classes. Moreover, because of the political and economic results of her governmental measures, she is not only regarded as one of the most highly contested individuals in history, but the typical inflexibility of her form of governance also cemented her within the global political legacy, as well as making her a staggering example of consistency and discipline.

Together with her, the figure of present German Chancellor Angela Merkel will be scrutinized too. Since her fourth and final mandate is coming to a conclusion, the central emphasis will be on the imprint she is leaving, as well as the ways in which she has been able to mold and change Germany over the last sixteen years.

Last but not least, Michelle Obama is another politician who deserves recognition, however not merely as the former US President's wife, but as the brilliant and engaging lawyer that she is and, most importantly, as the committed activist who always worked hard to achieve humanitarian undertakings in favor of the most underprivileged communities.

Having now delineated a brief outline of my closing project, I would also like to explain the reasons why I picked this subject. The principal motivation can actually be traced back to my Literature education, when, among all of the male French authors whose masterpieces I admired, I additionally drew closer to Simone de Beauvoir's pioneering essay "Le Deuxième Sexe."

As a consequence, astonished by the timelessness of the topics confronted, I decided to frame the principles that she first put down in the past and recapture them in political realm, as it is the field in which I wish to succeed in the future. As a final remark, thus, having the opportunity to deepen

such interest of mine has boosted my conviction that women's multidimensionality should never limit them from succeeding in politics. Indeed, not only is conceiving of the male-female relationship (as well as the derivative "sameness-difference" debate) as an "either-or" option a terrible mistake, but it also prevents society as a whole from benefitting from mutual cooperation and vibrance of ideas, all of which could mark the beginning of a new all-embracing and fruitful administrative era.

1. Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

The academic grounds of my dissertation will be unfolding through three main points.

Starting from the primary reasons why women were originally precluded from having access to the centers of political power – namely, the gender-biased character of societal institutions as well as their depiction as merely housewives – not only will it be necessary to explore the connection between Political Theory and Feminism, but also to investigate how such relationship evolved and redesigned the role of women as potential leaders.

Finally, it will similarly be essential to highlight the complexity of feminist strands. In such way, not only will it be possible to confront the variables which they tackle (i.e., gender, race, class, intersectionality etc.), but also to dismantle the coherent unification of women into a single category.

1.1 Historical Premise on Female Exclusion from the Public Sphere

Despite the popular assumption that the originally patriarchal world began to be transformed by the rise of western feminism in the 1960s (Celis, Kantola, Waylen and Weldon 2013), further (and more accurate) perspectives about women's social conquests have been developed over the last century.

In order to grasp a better understanding of their advancements, however, it is first necessary to make a few remarks with respect to their male counterparts.

First and foremost, considering the 1950s, it has to be noted that men had the upper hand in both the public and the private sphere of life in roughly all countries of the world. For instance, not only did they constitute the wide majority of lawmakers, but family law would also usually privilege them in a variety of areas, ranging from property rights (including inheritance claims and child custody) to sexual ones (Htun and Weldon 2012).

In short, therefore, male dominance in decision-making positions was considered naturally legitimate and unquestionable, whereas, in the family, it was correspondingly perceived as biologically necessary for the well-functioning of the whole household.

Surprisingly, however, in spite of the feminist attempts to pinpoint and to question such recurring models of male authority, due to the wide range of family arrangements and kinds of social organization already existing at the time, it has still been possible to challenge any theorization of a ubiquitous public–private split or of an objective form of male domination (Lamphere 2001).

Indeed, for example, it is impressive that market trading and other economic affairs were seen as belonging to women's domain in Indonesia; or that the Oneida community, in North America, historically deemed formal politics as being part of women's realm (Brenner 2001).

Considering such premises, thus, two key points can be concluded.

Firstly, it is undeniable that, in most places, women were (and still are) legitimately rejected as political characters, being confined only to the roles of mothers and wives. What is paradoxical about it, though, is that regulations over their access to abortion and sexuality was then, as it is now, seen as a rightful area of intervention for governments, therefore unearthing the gender bias and inconsistency which still underpin the logic behind distinct spheres.

Secondly, however, women's exclusion from the public sphere – intended as covering leading positions in community decision-making and economic matters – can neither be accounted as constant nor as universal throughout history.

Further studies have comparably assessed the failure of the idea of the allegedly universal patriarchal family form too; indeed, traditional and contemporary family organizations broadly vary from polyandry (one wife and many husbands) to polygyny (one husband and many wives) and have also customarily included matriarchal traits (i.e., inheritance and affinity structures would be passed on through women).

To conclude, therefore, none of these modes of organization automatically excludes male dominance, but they perhaps prevent us from generalizing accounts of public, private and common gender roles. Actually, indeed, the belief that the world was marked by a standardized, patriarchal framework until the 1970s does not conform to the historical and ethnographic records (Brettel 2001).

1.1.1   The Gendered Nature of Politics and of Political Science

In spite of having partially debunked the natural female exclusion from power-centered charges, it is still necessary to assert that, both Politics as a real-world activity and Political Science as an academic subject, are, by all means, indisputably gender biased.

Individuals all around the world recognize that all of the fields that build up their lives (i.e., health, safety, work, freedom of expression, access to education etc.) are intrinsically dependent on their identification to a specific sex or gender group, and that such norms do not only mold personal, social relationships or professional pathways, but that they additionally determine market structures, religious habits and actions of governance.

But what does the assertion that Politics is "gendered" really mean?

Gender scholars have investigated the ways in which gender is incorporated into the aspects of political life, consequently defining the behavior of political actors over time (Chappell 2010).

Even though research has primarily focused on those institutional arrangements designed to foster gender equality and women's interests, (i.e., women's policy agencies (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007) or gender quotas (Krook and Norris 2014), there still exists a significant research program centered on the ways in which gender regulates the organization of political life, and how it is involved in

processes of political design and change. In fact, following Professor Fiona Mackay's argument (2011), not only do gender-neutral political institutions distinctly touch men and women, but gender also remains a "relevant analytical category" in approximately all political and institutional scenarios, including those where women are usually missing.

Likewise, it is no surprise that the discipline of Political Science is gendered and predominantly reliant upon sex and sexuality social rules too. In fact, the study of politics has now extended beyond the mere consideration of those holding formal office and of the politics of distribution. It now covers many brand-new fields embracing the "gender trouble" as well as innovative viewpoints about masculinity and femininity across several settings, ranging from house-related contexts to the houses of Parliament. Nevertheless, in spite of the vibrancy of the gender and politics domains, as well as of a substantial background of gender advocacy, gender is still neglected in much of such scholarly matters.

Going back to the original questions around the gendered nature of Politics and Political Science, thus, a common response seems to arise: one the one hand, gender might (or might not) contribute to shape or inspire such disciplines, but on the other one, it surely can affect their interpretation in significant manners.

1.2 The Relationship between Politics and Feminism

When it comes to presenting and understanding the practice of Politics, countless contradictory or overlapping definitions have been advanced throughout history. However, despite all the attempts to provide a single one on which everybody could agree, Politics continues to progress as an expansive term which, due to its numerous nuances, is open to interpretation.

Having Politics existed from time immemorial, how, then, does it relate to a relatively new stream of thought such as Feminism?

First of all, in contrast with the common belief viewing feminism as a western invention of the mid-20th century, it is not entirely correct to portray it as a simple recent idea.

As Jayawardena (1986) writes, indeed, "Debates on women's rights and education were held in 18th-century China, and there were movements for women's social emancipation in early 19th-century India; feminist struggles originated between 60–80 years ago in many countries of Asia [...] The fact that such movements flourished in several non-European countries during this period has been hidden from history."

Even in the western part of the world, feminism was not born in the 1960s. In fact, enlightenment intellectuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill were already voicing their opinions in

favor of women's emancipation, with the former drafting "*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*" in 1792, and the latter publishing "*The Subjection of Women*" in 1789.

Feminist thought was able to have a huge impact on the political sphere too. For instance, not only did it question the basic assumptions upon which power was based (Griffiths 1999), but it also led people to tackle gender roles and gender-based power relations which would have normally been disregarded otherwise (Heywood 2000). Another political goal which feminism was able to make achievable has been increasing female participation within legislating bodies; indeed, not only has male domination within professional politics been denounced by many (Randall 1982), but the belief that women's social experience would endow them with valuable competence in state affairs has recently been extensively recognized too.

Taking into consideration women's activism over the last century, therefore, it is evident that both changes in views about sexuality and gender, as well as policy transformation on various issues have been observed (Krook and Mackay 2011), meaning that the relationship between Politics and Feminism has proven to be positive more than simply existent.

1.2.1   Traditional Definitions of Politics

When it comes to the nature of Politics and of Political Science as a theoretical discipline, several interconnected elements come to light.

What first needs to be noted is that the categories and methods of the subject were all established by privileged men, who considered those issues as part of their realm. Indeed, such domination can be found in the very narrow and philosophical definitions of what counted as Politics according to them, definitions upon which the Anglo-American subjects have consistently been grounded over time.

Strictly interpreted, Politics is the activity of government and governing. The term itself comes from Greek and was employed by Aristotle to indicate those issues that dealt with the functioning of the polis, that is, the political and administrative center of ancient cities.

What is most relevant, however, is the that the exceptional characteristic of politics has always been its public and general nature, intended as the way in which it has always been affecting the community as a whole, rather than turning to private matters (Arendt 1958).

It is precisely through the separation between public and private sphere that the origins of the debate over what constitutes Politics can be traced back. Thanks to the work of many political thinkers such as John Locke, the Anglo-American disciplines adopted this prevalent (although misguided) conception of the universality of the public–private split. Specifically, citizens or household chiefs (men) were the ones who were active in the public sphere; whereas the subordinated women (and

children) in the family, represented the private circle where "every man's home is his castle" and where he could act as he wanted without any intrusion from the state (Pateman 1983).

To conclude, not only does the notion of a separation between public and private sphere still continue today, but it also remains decisive in everything that concerns politics and the political. Steps towards more inclusive political descriptions have nonetheless been taken: the development and addition of new gender-related factors and terminology have already expanded the political horizons towards previously excluded actors, a process which is still by no means accomplished, but which is undoubtedly bringing about substantial change in favor of former outcasts.

1.2.2   Feminist Reshaping of the Notion of Politics

Although some of the most typical definitions of politics would allow to study a larger extent of phenomena, it was the feminists who insisted for a notion that included both the personal and the private. In her work "*Sexual Politics*", Kate Millett (1969) designated politics as "power structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another".

Enloe (1996) further stressed that the study of power must not only encompass the so-called "powerful" individuals, but also all those involved in the process of creation of power, as well as those who influence the ones at the top. All things considered, in fact, the powerful, whether at an economic, bureaucratic or social level, hinges on other actors' daily, internalized actions which have the aim to turn their decisions into reality.

In order to better understand how feminists contributed to redesign the traditional (and mostly male-centered) definition of politics, it is necessary to draw some focus on the type of procedures that they implemented.

Nowadays, several political scientists identify themselves as positivists, meaning that they tend to adopt a kind of pragmatic and statistical methodology, rather than conducting descriptive analyses. Some feminist thinkers, however, support critical theorists and post-modernists on the challenge against this fully positivist attitude, favoring a deeper knowledge of epistemological questions, as well as more familiarity with philosophy of science in general.

By and large, therefore, feminist methodology has demonstrated the ways in which gender accurately constructs science, and not only by regulating the choice of tools and methods to be employed, but also by shaping the questions that scholars are to confront, as well as the areas of research to be considered (Harding 1987).

Despite all of this, it remains true that the legacy of these assumptions (namely, the sharp separation of the public and private, the employment of particular models of the single researcher and research field, and the preference for high politics) continues to be a form of opposition to endeavors to

modernize the discipline into a more inclusive and egalitarian one. As a matter of fact, indeed, when turning to Politics as practice, it is impressive how these primary precepts have affected the ways in which it has been carried out over time. For instance, Lovenduski and Norris's pioneering study described how, in the end of the 20th century, British Conservative party candidate-selection committees were shamelessly outraged by aspirant female applicants, mostly condemning them for neglecting their husbands and homes (Lovenduski and Norris 1995). In the same way (and perhaps more severely), in many countries, domestic violence has also been regarded as lying outside state jurisdiction, thus preventing the police from "interfering" in people's private realm.

In conclusion, therefore, not only was the feminist contribution to reshaping the original definition of Politics beneficial for past and current political dynamics, but also the pluralism of approaches and methods that intellectuals were able to advance stands as one of the strength points of the whole feminist thought, as well as an example for the entire field of Political Science.

1.3 The Complexity of Feminist Theories: The Gender Trouble

Long-standing criticism over the universalizing approach of feminism has ended up leading to an in-depth analysis of the concept of gender from various perspectives.

Ever since the 1980s, relevant steps forward were taken in the path to deconstruct the notion and category of gender (Butler 1990). Indeed, by utilizing the feminist methodology of displacement with respect to politics, (that is, disrupting existent oppositions, binaries and categories) academics held that although the gendered categories and concepts had, up until then, legitimized the marginalization of women, it was about time that they were profoundly re-examined, assessing, for instance, how gender-biased power relationships were able to mold the state and its bureaucracy, together with the concepts of nation and citizenship (Yuval-Davis 1997).

The attention, thus, shifted from women's participation and exclusion within institutions to the scrutiny and transformation of those bodies internalized gendered structures. As a matter of fact, indeed, it is crucial to highlight that not only are institutions merely gendered, but particularly gendering, meaning that their ability resides in producing the real gendered subjects of politics.

Hence, power is conceived as constructive, rather than merely suppressive: a kind of power which is most successful when it guides us to conform to the normative standards of masculinities and femininities (Foucault 1980).

In summary, the introduction of gender within feminist theories has not been limited to a mere academic advancement to be related to current dynamics. Indeed, such matter has encouraged the growth of the concept of intersectionality too: a research method capable of grasping the dense interrelationship between gender, race, social status and similar individual features (Hancock 2007).

What still needs to undergo deeper investigation, thus, is the multidimensionality that gender does entail: even though all of its meanings have historically been underestimated in the scholarship of politics, they have nonetheless proven essential for the further development of the feminist thought as a whole and are now ready to fully enter the political debate too.

2. Chapter Two: The Depiction and Position of Women within Political Institutions

Another branch of the discipline of Gender Politics concentrates on a broader range of societal patterns, privileging the examination of regimes and institutions rather than single policies, and scrutinizing the state as a whole rather than its specific laws.

Indeed, following MacKinnon's argument (1989) that "the state is male in the feminist sense: It sees and treats women the way men see and treat women.", it is possible to conclude that particular institutional structures are, de facto, able to substantially impact society, family and polity.

The goal of this section, therefore, will be to explore the effects that the combination of institutional and structural activities has had on women in such sphere, as well as to assess the evolution of inequality by studying how different regimes (i.e., class, gender, ethnicity etc.) and domains (i.e., civil society, violence, politics, economy etc.) can influence each other in unpredictable ways. All of this will be further enriched by the different mediatic representation to which women are subject with respect to their male equivalents, as well as by the attempt to evaluate the benefits that their political inclusion would be able to bring about.

2.1 The Different Mediatic Assessment of Male and Female Leaders

Within the contemporary political scenario, features such as lifestyle, personality, family values and private life have become crucial in the assessment of politicians (Corner 2003). Building on this so-called political "personalization" – namely, the popular interest in political figures' private matters – it will be possible to investigate not only how personalization (and spectacularization) really weight on the general perception of political actors, but especially how, through the examination of gender-related factors, women seem to be often depicted differently as opposed to their male counterparts.

2.1.1 Political Personalization and Spectacularization as Key Factors for Electoral Success

It is by all means true that, over the last decades, the mechanisms of political personalization and spectacularization have astonishingly been able to transform the ways in which political competition is carried out (Gingras 2007).

By definition, the spectacularization of politics is the practice through which political communication basically adapts to television norms, leading to the adoption of straightforward language patterns, to the supremacy of visual content, and subsequently shaping not merely the relationship between community and political organs, but also the function of political information itself. In continuity with this, the personalization of politics contributes to portray the leader and his talents as the front

image and agenda of the party to which he belongs, so that the voting citizens will be automatically able to associate their preferred political formation with the individual who runs it.

Yet, although politicians and media can be considered co-makers in matter of improved personalization and spectacularization, starting from the late 1960s, such phenomena began to be sharply criticized by several scholars. This occurred because the overlapping of the spheres of politics and media culture would be likely to cause distortion and confusion between the two fields, eventually resulting in excessive importance given to human interest and individual impression, rather than to actual political dynamics. Provided that such ability to put forth a "human persona" seems to have turned into a special requirement for gaining political and electoral success, Professor Anà-Inès Langer (2010) defines such interpretation of current leadership skillfulness as "politicization of the private persona". Overall, thus, one principal question appears to be persistent: why are personalization and spectacularization seen as so essential?

The answer lies in the agenda-setting task performed by the media, which, even though has been deemed incapable of exactly determining the public's decisions or actions, has nonetheless been regarded as a remarkably powerful influence on people's deliberations.

Moreover, whilst spectacularization and personalization continued to progress, the political life of representative societies also observed a predominant development for what concerns the growth of female elected constituents. For the most part, they were both mothers and businesswomen who continue to represent, even at the present time, exceptions in the still male-centered political picture. All things considered, then, some relevant queries inevitably surface: are male and female politicians judged in the same way? Under which circumstances is this evaluation carried out?

2.1.2 Female Mediatic Portrayal: Gender and Representation

Gender and media exposure is a significant but highly underestimated research area. This has been largely demonstrated by the lack of data concerning gender differences of men and women aiming to become leaders of nationwide political groups (Jalalzai 2006). Research has shown that the private life of both male and female political actors substantially impacts their mediatic portrayal: certain findings have documented that women appear less visible in news reports (Heldman, Carroll and Olsen 2005), whereas others have proven, instead, that female politicians usually attract more press interest (Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid and Robertson 2004). Research has further identified that news stories commonly focus more on womens' personality and appearance as opposed to their male counterparts, suggesting that a lot of importance is given to the applicants' gender, and that they are still perceived as more of an innovation rather than as real candidates.

Thus, not only is Politics still interpreted in masculine terms, but it has also come to light that cases of female politicians often end up underlining traditional gender roles too. In support of this, it has been witnessed that journalists are more prone to ask women delicate questions about their marriage situation and child-care habits, as well as how they plan to handle marriage, parenthood, and political career altogether. In such merit, Robinson and Saint-Jean undertook an investigation on the mediatic descriptions of female and male political actors from the 1960s to the 1990s (Robinson and Saint-Jean 1996). In the first period, the focus was on biological traits, all of which depreciated women's social and political efforts in favor of their adequacy in terms of looks and speeches.

The decade from 1970 to 1980, instead, was more centered on power-related matters: as new clichés arose, in fact, female politicians began to be pictured as "superwomen", that is, elegant and competent individuals who had everything under their control: family, career, motherhood.

Lastly, the 1990s opened up the way to a more equalitarian conversation: the media narratives came to generally benefit from more positivity, though they still remained controversial in terms of a male and female administrative manner.

In conclusion, the objective of this research has been that of investigating gender framing and the representation of women politicians within the media. It is true, however, that such analysis does require additional deepening in order to provide a more rounded overview on gender, media, and politics. For example, implacable and competitive journalism could be matter of more careful revision, as it has extensively been condemned for underplaying such issues, as well as turning political campaign into identity disputes.

2.2 The Causes for Women's Political Under-Representation

In order to grasp a better insight of the insufficient representation of women within political organs, it is first necessary to draw attention to the elementary causes for which women's political incorporation has not entirely been successful.

To begin with, it is not uncommon that multiple feminist scholars accuse the implementation of liberal principles to be responsible for the impediment of female political integration. Although the public sphere of political rule and the private sphere of family relations were decidedly disconnected (McDonagh 1999), indeed, that did not necessarily entail that women's progress in politics would benefit from the replacement of feudal, hereditary norms with liberal ones. In support of this, in fact, a piece of research on female leadership patterns showed that, in the 20th century, women's political incorporation as political actors derived, as a matter of fact, from the structural ascriptive and traditional features in the government.

Accounts on the contemporary insufficient representation of women as state leaders are widely varied too. Firstly, psychological reasons revolve around those gender norms based on the perception of politics as a masculine area, in which autonomy and aggression are usually the dominant modes of behavior. As a consequence of such belief, two opposite scenarios may arise: on the one hand, women, presumed to be lacking flesh and blood, are regarded as unqualified to be political chiefs; on the other hand, if women do possess any of such masculine traits, then they are viewed as deviant, inappropriate and still unqualified to cover authoritarian positions. Secondly, the under-representation of women as heads of state has been framed by social conventions that connect women with parental obligations and men with productive employment. In such regards, the contrast between sex and gender turns out to be significant too: the election of a woman may not differ from the election of a man, in the sense that the voted woman may exhibit arrays of conduct related to males rather than to females.

Political structures and party systems can also have an impact on the difficulties that women face while running for political office. States with a parliamentary legislature, a multi-party governmental system, and a proportional voting system seem to be more favorable to women's election. On the contrary, women's electoral success has been hampered by the low turnover rate in office and the high percentage of re-election for previous officeholders. At the same time, moreover, the importance of political parties cannot be disregarded. Indeed, gender quotas have been created by political parties in Nordic countries, requiring a particular number of parliament seats to be destined to women. Such legislation, as a structural characteristic, has also directly affected women's legislative representation at the national level, and needless to say that it has positively contributed to enhance their role within and without politics as well.

2.2.1 The Paradox of "Women's Issues"

Reproductive health, gender-based prejudice and sexism are just a handful of the themes that frequently arise while discussing "women's issues." In fact, despite becoming a catchphrase, such expression has often been used without a proper definition, as well as having involved multiple derogatory and contentious implications (Rubin 2018).

In the very first place, for example, the question of "women's issues" poses a contradiction; indeed, not only is it likely to create hurdles to men's engagement in such regards, but it also depreciates that, to solve all of these challenges, men's full involvement is beyond necessary too (Lupel and Taylor 2018). What is exactly intended for "women's issues", then? When does this language come in handy, and when does it not?

On the whole, in their quest for social and political equality, women face particular obstacles (UN Women). Using the term "women's issues" to address these barriers can bring attention to the specific struggles that women stand up to in comparison to other groups. In fact, while women's rights are human rights, employing precision to define them also gives a voice to a community that has been, up to now, marginalized and quieted (Solnit 2017). Classifying problems as "women's" also emphasizes the historic foundations of inequality and oppression that have led to their discrimination, thus implying that particular forums are needed to eliminate them. This terminology is particularly appropriate in the debate over women's equal participation, highlighting the reality that, although women are still commonly viewed as second-class citizens, their personhood incontestably demands explicit recognition. It further denotes that gender-sensitive approaches and knowledge are necessary to solve issues related to women's lived experience, a competence that males may not necessarily possess since they enjoy the benefits of a patriarchal system, whether consciously or unconsciously (Ridgway 2013).

Conversely, as a qualifier, it can occasionally be used to characterize a subject as "lesser," "weaker," or "unimportant," or to suggest that something is not appropriate to (or of concern to) men. However, it is worth remarking that speaking of sexual abuse or maternal health as "women's issues" diminishes the importance of males being held accountable for preventing violence, as well as ignoring the fact that women make up half of the global population (The World Bank Data 2019), and that any problem that affects them has an impact on everyone around them too. Furthermore, the word implies that women are excluded from "other" topics that do not form part of the "women's issues" category, thus further creating distance between the two sexes. In proof of this, in fact, Author Emma Bjertén-Günther (2018) wrote that labels foster divisions which strengthen a "false male-female binary where issues seen to be important to women are not also seen as important to other gender groups, including men."

Such type of language, thus, has the potential to promote traditional gender roles in which women are viewed as victims, a very risky consequence in a society where women have historically been downgraded, subordinated, and detached from participation. An additional note of caution regards the nonuniform nature of the female group, meaning that not every woman sees the world in the same way, and that such aspect needs to be further deepened the through the discipline of intersectionality. Indeed, based the various forms of discrimination that individuals can encounter on the basis of their identity (Smith 2014), women have happened to be oppressed because of their culture, social status, and sexual orientation, naturally in conjunction with their gender too.

2.3 The Inclusion Project: When & How Do Women Make a Difference?

The inclusion project, as Squires (2007) termed it, attempts to uncover the issue of women's absence in politics, to highlight the extent to which this contributes to partial, shallow, and inaccurate learning, and to incorporate them into ideas, organizations, and procedures from which they had previously been excluded (Sapiro 1981).

The inclusion project investigates women and politics in a more classic way, such as election institutions, national parties, and political conduct, demonstrating where women integrate and what influence they have. It also tries to find similarities and differences between men and women without viewing the latter as a deviant variant of the male standard, as well as to determine whether "gender-blind" ideas equally apply to women, in different ways or not at all. Researchers questioned commonly held preconceptions regarding women's political engagement and behavior in the traditional political realm. The traditional early gender studies on voting patterns, for instance, established that when education, age, and background are accounted for, women and men participate at the very same rates, debunking old notions that the former went at a lower rate than the latter. Likewise, research in the United States shows that when women run for public office, they are just as likely as men to win, and just as capable of raising finances. However, experts have also demonstrated that men and women frequently differ in their political ideologies and demeanor, although not always in the manner that had been expected (i.e., it was a long-standing belief that women were intrinsically more right wing than men).

Gender researchers have investigated women's involvement in parties and governments as part of the "inclusion project," concentrating on the varying quantitative levels of their (descriptive) representation, especially in parliaments. They have advocated for more female politicians and have proposed initiatives (i.e., party and electoral mandates) to boost the number of women in legislatures (Dahlerup 1988). Women in executive positions have recently been studied both comparative and in individual case reports, mirroring real-world trends.

Part of the reason for interest in descriptive representation was a preoccupation about its linkages to substantive representation: do women represent women's concerns and affect political style and culture?

The topic of whether and how women lawmakers improve women's substantive representation is critical. Those who pushed for a presence politics stated that women's stories produced knowledge about women's issues and their solutions, and that women prioritize such matters. Moreover, some research revealed that the presence of women influenced decision-making and policies (Wängnerud 2000). Some feminist academics, however, have critiqued the "add women and stir" approach, which tries to incorporate women into political theory by posing old questions and employing conventional

methods. For instance, according to Goertz and Mazur (2008): "the 'add women and stir" metaphor suggests that the result of the addition of gender is only minor. However, the key issue is what happens to the mix after stirring: if the mixture blows up, then the addition of gender is of importance." Moreover, Pamela Paxton (2008) has shown how including women's suffrage as a component in the categorization of democratic regimes substantially alters regime classifications. Despite all of this, skeptics continue to believe that problems with female inclusion in political science will persist because, as previously disclosed, many dominant theories, categories, conceptions, and practices have been founded on the omission of women from the very start. As a result, the inclusion project is grounded on limited understandings of how discrimination and structural disparities operate and cannot conceptualize the wider social dynamics behind gender inequality. The exclusive focus on women and gender differences frequently reflects an unquestioned argument that women are a homogeneous class of steady and coherent beings with recognizable, common goals. For instance, only lately has study on the influence of quotas examined the impact on ethnic minority women. On the whole, thus, the whole scheme remains unfulfilled, and the discipline still has a lot to understand about women in traditional politics.

2.3.1   Case Study: Political Role of Women in South African Developing Countries

Full and efficient political inclusion for women is a matter of human rights, together with inclusive progress and long-lasting development. Women's active participation, on an equal basis with men and at all levels of political activity, is vital for achieving peace, equality and democracy, as well as the integration of female viewpoints and expertise into decision-making procedures. Yet, women all over the world are under-represented in legislatures and are far distant from dominating decision-making positions on both a social and economic basis (Kumar 2018). Protocols, conventions, and international accords on gender mainstreaming have advanced strategies to promote women's political participation, but they have yet to show their effectiveness in accomplishing gender balance in the highest government rankings. Indeed, half of the world's population is made up of women, even though they now only occupy 23% of all seats in parliaments and senates worldwide (Chalaby 2017). For what concerns Africa, the government's civic intentions to greater protection for women and support for victims have evidently not been fulfilled, forcing women to operate outside the political arena. According to Rop (2013), many African countries initially agree and pledge to promote gender parity in political participation, but then they all abandon the pact. The state has ignored women's concerns as a consequence of abuse of power and a desire to gain authority through self-serving ways. As a result, women remain underrepresented in government across the country,

and confront impediments that make it tough for them to wield political influence and acquire positions of leadership in the public domain.

According to the research, the variables that hinder or promote women's political engagement differ depending on economic and social development, culture, region, and form of political system. In Africa, for example, the political atmosphere and conditions are frequently antagonistic to females. The implications of atrocities suffered by women and girls during crises are often disregarded and underplayed, particularly when it comes to political engagement and women's role in politics and policymaking. Political parties in Africa lack political willingness, since they are solely concerned with acquiring power and winning elections. This has shaken women's faith in their ability to cooperate in democratic processes, an event which has unfortunately become reality all over the world. In this international trend, indeed, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is no exception. Member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are actively seeking to achieve equal participation of women and men in administration and decision-making roles at all levels. The SADC currently has the highest proportion of seats held by women in parliament in the world, a percentage which has been progressively increasing in both the SADC region and Africa at large, despite the fact that the rate has been much higher in the SADC region than in the rest of the continent (SADC 2019). Even though women have a sizable parliamentary presence in Southern Africa, the region comprehends some of the world's worst scorers too.

According to the research, a variety of elements function as impediments to female political participation; the major constraints are, above all, political, socioeconomic, and cultural restrictions. To begin with, politics in many African countries is plagued by phenomena such as violence, torture, persecution, and intimidation. While both genders are affected by this, it primarily poses significant challenges to women's political engagement and participation.

Pursuant to the United Nations (2019), an Afro-barometer report found that women feel "a sense of vulnerability to political intimidation and violence". While entire communities experience the consequences of armed conflict, women and girls are often the first to lose their right to political involvement, education, and livelihood, besides other liberties which are flagrantly violated. Others, though, suggest that women may opt to become more active in public life, or join in politics in order to deal with the difficulties of war. However, quantitative studies have found that the occurrence of war and conflict is positively connected to political involvement. Namely, several studies have revealed that people who have been exposed to wartime violence had higher levels of civic and political engagement after the event (Blattman 2009); for instance, Bellows and Miguel discovered that conflict-related killings and displacements increased political engagement and political understanding in Sierra Leone. All things considered, thus, the improved role of women in post-war

recovery frequently leads to the formation of women's groups and networks (Bellow and Miguel 2009). As a result, their aim becomes that of including a gendered viewpoint in both security discussions and throughout the post-conflict era.

Election violence, as a second component, is a coercive and purposeful approach employed by political actors (both incumbents and opposition parties) to serve their interests or achieve specific political objectives in respect to an electoral fight (Adolfo, Kovacs, Nyström and Utas 2012). As a result, many politicians deploy illegal electoral techniques (i.e., militant youth wings, militias, or state paramilitary forces) to either win elections or bolster their post-election negotiating power. Electoral violence is one issue that has been cited as a barrier to women's full involvement in the political process and government. In fact, throughout the political cycle, violence against women is used as a specific and damaging strategy to discourage them from participating as election officials, voters, and candidates. Failure to resolve these electoral hurdles inevitably creates an environment in which women have poor perspectives towards political participation.

Institutional transformation is another route by which armed conflict can produce structural changes that affect the presence of women in politics. Institutional restraints include restrictions such as political systems that run on fixed schedules which ignore women's family responsibilities, as well as the sort of electoral quotas utilized, if any (Kangas, Haider, Fraser and Browne 2015).

On the one hand, adoption of new election or party laws during or after a conflict may make it easier for women to enter politics, but on the other hand, political parties are usually reluctant to enact reforms, something which happens out of their fear to lose political support and, consequently, political power.

It is crucial to note, moreover, that the primary restraint that women face is an embedded patriarchal system in which males have family authority and decision-making capabilities. Traditional roles and labor divisions are still distinctly gendered, and social standards make it extremely challenging for women to go from historically domestic duties to more leadership roles outside the house.

Finally, women's socio-economic standing has a larger role in increasing their involvement and representation in political decision-making organs. Because the cost of campaigning is expensive, women's common lack of an economic base has played a negative role in their participation in politics. Independent funding and campaign expenditure constraints may help women overcome hurdles to political participation (WPL 2014). Accessibility to power is often facilitated by familial, social, and economic ties, and these characteristics may help explain patterns of participation.

In order to draw some conclusions, therefore, political participation, as measured by the proportion of seats held by females in parliament, is much higher in the SADC region that in Africa and in the world in general. Even though this is impressive, some of the world's worst actors, in terms of women

political participation, belong to the SADC region too. For example, the SADC 30% average, whilst still higher than the general African average, is still barely halfway to the 2008 Protocol on Gender and Development's aim of 50% women representation.

Fully equal involvement of men and women in policy decision creates a balance that more precisely represents the configuration of society and, as a result, may increase the legitimacy of political processes by means of more inclusiveness and responsiveness.

Women's political participation is positively related to labour involvement, government functioning, political culture, and overall political engagement. The findings also revealed a negative association between women's political participation and civil freedoms, the human development index, the election process, and pluralism (Mlambo and Kapingura 2019).

On the basis of these results, there are a few points that should be followed.

First and foremost, governments must work with political parties to guarantee that more women are included on their candidate lists. Political parties should turn into the institutional mechanism for increasing women's political involvement, particularly by encouraging their participation within party structures and during election seasons. Second, there is a greater necessity for women to be engaged through awareness efforts. Women must be taught and informed that political participation does not end with mobilization and election campaigns. Third, governments should increase funding for independent female political actors as well as political parties with a significant and recognized number of female political candidates. This will encourage political parties to include more women in positions of power.

Finally, governments should encourage women's economic emancipation. When women achieve it, in fact, they will be empowered to make their own decisions, potentially laying the groundwork for them to enter politics without being constrained by their male equivalents.

3. Chapter Three: Cases of Women in Politics

Over the course of international history, there have been only few instances of women who's right and competence to enter politics (and change the world through it) was recognized. In particular, starting from the aftermath of the Second World War, a radical transformation of the conception of the role of women within well-off Western societies was witnessed. In fact, thanks to the reconversion of industrial production for the purpose of warfare economy, for the first time, many women had access to working positions, to salaries and, most importantly, to a first taste of autonomy. As a consequence, together with the rise of new debates over gender parity within the working environment, the third wave of feminism began to unfold starting from the 1990s. Several scholars refer to it as "post-feminist society", but equality rights between males and females continued to remain on paper only. Indeed, discrimination was still firmly in place, and strikes and marches in favor of equal pay and women's independence came to highlight the challenges that they frequently had to face so as to pursue a career. In the United States, for example, the situation worsened following the election of President Bush and the terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001, when conservative and patriotic rhetoric became even more predominant, enhancing masculine virtues such as strength, bravery and charisma. In the face of such scenario, however, some women had the chance to appear on the global political stage, and their life mission became that of reversing the idea of the position covered by women within world-wide communities. By having reached powerful statuses, indeed, they voiced their standpoints and managed to bring about change for the better in a still male-dominated realm. Hence, this third and last section of my dissertation will be dedicated to the analysis of three of the most prominent female political characters of all times.

The first political actor at issue will be former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, also known as "the Iron Lady". Due to the economic and political outcomes produced by her reforms, in fact, not only is she considered one of the most controversial individuals in the history of the world, but she also had a huge impact on the social landscape of the 1980s, especially because of her anti-feminist attitude and remarkable insensitivity towards the lower classes' needs.

In continuity with her scrutiny, the figure of current German Chancellor Angela Merkel will be investigated too. Because the end of her fourth and last mandate is approaching, the primary focus will be on the legacy that she is leaving, as well as the ways in which she has been able to shape Germany for the past sixteen years.

Finally, another political character worth of recognition is Michelle Obama and, specifically, not in the capacity of merely the wife of the former US President, but rather in the shoes of a skilled and captivating lawyer, who always strived to accomplish her social projects for the benefit of the more disadvantaged groups.

3.1 Margaret Thatcher – "The Iron Lady"

Born Margaret Hilda Roberts and later become Lady Thatcher, Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of the UK from May 1979 to November 1990. She was the first woman to hold such office, as well as the only stateswoman to carry out such a lengthy mandate in the history of the United Kingdom (La Repubblica 2013). From 1975 to 1990, she also served as leader of the British Conservative Party, besides being endowed with the title of Baroness of Kesteven, or simply Baroness Thatcher too. Her political and economic ideology is now referred to as "Thatcherism" (Magazzino 2010), and because it was based upon both very close regulation in terms of the economy and a libertarian kind of governance, she was soon dubbed as "The Iron Lady", as evidence of her resolute personality (Campbell 2011).

It is precisely due to this last aspect that Margaret Thatcher was always considered one of the most debated political actors: she was praised by some as one of the most influential politicians in the history of Great Britain, and she was averse to others because of her incapability to compromise, her lack of social compassion and her apathy towards the necessities of the lower groups.

Margaret Thatcher is regarded as a woman of flesh and blood, with a strikingly decisive temper.

Such feature of her character emerged several times during international summits and political disputes, both with the opposition and within her own party. Her ferocious determination visibly sparked out after the declassification of multiple documents, which portrayed her as willing to do anything to achieve her administrative goals (Gessa 2014). During her mandates, indeed, she distinguished herself thanks to multiple characteristics. Firstly, she was known for a strong sense of patriotism, upon which she frequently leveraged to foster pride and glory among the British people; secondly, her repulsion towards trade unions grew exponentially, as she regarded them as obstacles for the industrial modernization of the country; and finally, several racial accusations against her ignited too, as a result of her reluctance to allow 10.000 Vietnamese political refugees into the UK, out of the conviction that the British public opinion would consequentially be subverted.

Despite her depiction as a strong-willed woman, Margaret Thatcher never contributed to support the feminist movement as a way to produce a new generation of women in politics.

Apparently, being able to break the glass ceiling did not necessarily entail the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. She was a woman of success and of power, but she never wanted to be described as a role model for other women in politics. Tough and unwavering, she employed the same power mechanisms typically adopted by men, because her mindset correspondingly resembled the one of men. She never favored the election and growth of other female politicians, and that is why many still accuse her legacy of being responsible for the wide-spread machismo which now haunts the British political environment (Soffice 2013).

During her eleven years at the head of the nation and after three consecutive electoral victories, her popularity started to encounter ups and downs, all mainly linked to the occurrences of the time. At the beginning of the 1980s, in fact, due to the increasing unemployment rates, surveys about her began to show negative records. The tenacious management of the first two international crises had her regain consensus, but it was mostly the patriotic wave born out of the victory in the Falkland War (1982) that restored her credibility. Between 1984 and 1985, then, even though the miners' strike and her speech in Brighton in the aftermath of the IRA terrorist attack strengthened once again her leading potential, a substantial rise in the levels of inflation and unemployment gave rise to harsh discontent and several complaints against her, which, together with her anti-European approach, brought her to resign in 1990 (Travis 2016).

Her policies were - and still remain - profoundly divisive (Aitken 2013): her admirers maintain that she was able to rejuvenate the British economy, and that the nation became one of the greatest commercial powers under her administration. Her opponents, instead, claim that her aggressive strategies led to the growth of noticeable inequalities, fostering the marginalization of the less wealthy portion of the population.

In order to draw some conclusions, therefore, it is inevitable to acknowledge that, over the whole Thatcherism era, attention with regards to social subjects was far too scarce. For instance, considerable cuts to welfare subsidies were actuated, and complete disregard for the workers' stances was often on the agenda as well. Overall, Margaret Thatcher undoubtedly left a huge cultural and political heritage behind her, together with a much more florid economic situation in the United Kingdom in comparison to the one that she had found at the beginning of her political pathway. Indeed, despite its not few faults, Thatcherism allowed the country to re-conquer its place among the most significant economic powers, and to transform the LSE into one of the most important financial squares in the world.

3.2 Angela Merkel – The German "Mutti"

Ever since she became the Federal Chancellor of Germany, as first woman and first Eastern German citizen, Angela Dorothea Merkel led her country through the eye of several storms. She overcame the financial crisis of 2008, the Arab Springs, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, the migration crisis and, ultimately, the Covid-19 pandemic, whose management has revealed some structural weaknesses in her mode of governance (Ronzoni 2021). In 2007, she also served as the President of the European Council and as the President of the G8, in which she was only the second woman to cover such position after Margaret Thatcher.

In terms of political longevity, Angela Merkel has no rivals, whereas, unlike her political predecessors, her administrative legacy remains a challenging key point to frame.

Konrad Adenauer is usually associated to the *"Westbindung"*, that is, the coupling of the young German Republic to the West and to a transatlantic politics (Hiscocks 1975, p. 290). For Willy Brandt, the code word was *"Ostpolitik"*, entailing the normalization of the relationship with the Eastern part of the continent, together with other gestures such as the Warsaw Genuflection. Helmut Kohl, instead, was the chancellor who reunited the whole country and established the euro as the official currency, so as to put down roots for the enlargement of Europe (Thompson 2008).

What about Angela Merkel, then? Her cautious and reflective politics allowed her to maintain power for a long time, but it also frustrated those who hoped for a more commanding and decisive Germany. Now that she has arrived at the end of her fourth and last mandate, it is necessary to examine her character, to analyze her leadership style and to figure out what and how much she is leaving behind her, so as to better welcome the approaching and uncertain future which she set the stage for.

Angela Merkel who, from a political point of view, was born out of the patricide of her forerunner Helmut Kohl[1], distinguished herself as chancellor due to her compromising skills, her tenacity in battle and the capability to manipulate the agenda of her interlocutors, whether they were government allies or foreign leaders. She built up her public image upon the paradigm of ordinariness: her style is usually sober and pastel-colored, her intonation is typically Brandenburgian, and sometimes she even does the shopping at the local supermarket. Her personal qualities are hard to replicate too: her sense of humor is famous, her memory is outstanding, and her ability to master the affairs at issue renders her an exceptional stateswoman. In particular, she singularizes herself for her communication style which "anesthetizes" her orators, "lulls" conversations, cools down tensions and, de facto, depoliticizes clashes (Carter 2020). This is a fundamental weapon when it comes to ward off political opponents, as well as to settle conflicts and create helpful alliances.

The second peculiar element has to do with her supervision of trust relationships. Her inner circle is only made up of the most trustworthy partners, upon whom she can rely unconditionally. Those who do not fit into this category are kept at a distance, which may appear as a limitation, but also as an unfailing tactic to preserve authority. Lastly, she has always stored great attention to the wishes of her people. In fact, each of her political decisions is first put to the test through surveys and, even her most contrasted choices (i.e., the closure of nuclear stations after Fukushima and the access given millions of immigrants in 2015) were in accordance with the reviews.

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[1]In 1999, she was the one to ask the former leader to stand down as a consequence of several financial scandals.

Overall, thus, Angela Merkel largely operates on the grounds of judiciousness, but she was also able to go against the current in certain cases; for example, when she supported the permanence of Greece within Europe during the euro crisis in 2011-2012.

Understanding the direction of her politics is no easy task, even though it is evident that the basic principle remains an underlying pragmatism (Scally 2018), aimed at the resolution of problems rather than at the setting of a vision. And maybe this is observable even in the Germany that she is bequeathing: a richer country with improved life standards, low levels of unemployment and massive surpluses. Conversely, what has been missing, is perhaps more willingness to innovate and to produce an effective policy of supervision: several scandals (i.e., Deutsche Bank and Wire Card), indeed, exposed the dark side of the German economy, which eventually ended up affecting international trust relations too.

For what concerns transnational relationships, the chancellor's policies have been influenced by the structural necessities of Germany, that is, to safeguard the American military shield (upon which it depends), to cultivate an energetic policy favorable to Moscow (upon which it depends) (Francis 2008), and to foster commercial trade with China (upon which it depends) (Herald Globe 2014).

On a EU-wide scale, instead, it is to be remembered that, amidst the pandemic, her intervention proved to be decisive for the approval of a solidarity plan aimed at fostering the recovery of Europe. Despite this, however, although Germany had exhibited a respectable response to the first epidemic wave, the second one had the country fall into chaos for multiple reasons: the local dispersion of the healthcare system, the imminence of both regional and national elections, a general picture with too many rules and not enough organization.

All things considered, the last months of Angela Merkel's mandate will not be different from the previous ones: eventful, complex and full of trials. The (almost) former chancellor, thus, is ready to leave Germany in a totally unprecedented and worrying situation for the German population: uncertainty (BBC 2018).

3.3 Michelle Obama – More than just a First Lady

During the course of history, there have been numerous women who distinguished themselves for their substantial devotion to significant social issues, and who, consequentially, fulfilled unforgettable targets. Among them, it is worth mentioning Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani activist for civil liberties and for Muslim girls' right to education; Lady Diana, former Princess of Wales and tireless charitable operator; and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a Catholic missionary who dedicated her life to help those in need. However, one of the most well-known and praised women in the world

(especially out of her communicative and leadership skills) is undoubtedly Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama, wife of the former President of the United States of America.

Michelle Obama was the first woman of color to overthrow the political history of America, the first descendant of slaves to have access to such an eminent public position, the first one to cover such a determinant role for the political appreciation of her husband, and the first female character to make her way through the tough territory of the White House, so much to become celebrated as one of the most influential female leaders of the planet (Brooks 2016).

Michelle Obama was born in 1964 in Chicago and has relatively simple family roots. Her childhood was described as an ordinary "American story", sometimes marked by episodes of racism. Her family was made up of several women, all of whom assumed very important responsibilities in the domestic sphere, thus inevitably shaping Michelle's persona (Britannica 2021). Moreover, she grew up during a historical period in which attitudes towards female leadership and discrimination towards Afro-Americans began to evolve, all of which predisposed her capability to build relationships and to master dialogue.

Michelle Obama's first sparkling talent consists of taking action on the basis of solid values and morals. Habitually, she used to make choices related to the matters that she had at heart, so that she would persevere in front of distressing circumstances as well as in front of the selection of constructive priorities. This ability allowed her to have a huge emotional impact on the American citizens; in fact, they could soon easily realize how she herself was motivated to carry on battles in aid of the whole people, and how passionate she was about taking care of the most vulnerable individuals.

The second skill of the former First Lady, instead, revolved around the wise arrangement of boundaries among the factors that made up her existence (i.e., her family commitments, private life, motherhood, activism, political career etc.). In this way, she managed to stay put on one single aspect of her life at a time, so as to make the most out of every project that she had envisaged.

Finally, her ultimate attitude is probably the most innovative, as it comprised the embracement of change as a positive opportunity, rather than as a threat. Thanks to such quality, in fact, Michelle learnt to identify the possibility to fearlessly confront multiple problems, and to step out of arduous events by means of resilience and optimism.

All things considered, therefore, framing Michelle Obama is no walk in the park. She has not merely been the first Afro-American First Lady. It is true that this allowed her to make history, but it was not to be taken for granted that she would be guaranteed a place in the Americans' hearts because of this. Indeed, her skin color had nothing to do with the extraordinary imprint that she left as a woman. The former US President's wife was immediately well-regarded out of her incisive personality and

brilliant intellect, which gave her the chance to be included in the National Women's Hall of Fame too (Dente 2021). Because such institution, in fact, honors women who excel in the fields of Science, Politics and Sport, Michelle could not help but being involved, as a result of her efforts to promote minorities' rights and to get in the game on various fronts.

Once entered the White House, Michelle Obama did not confine herself to be "the wife of". Before the election of her husband, she was already a successful lawyer, a resourceful activist and, only after that, she became a real icon, not as a First Lady, but rather as a person, as a woman. Her triumph, in fact, persisted even after the end of Barack's mandate, demonstrating how, by that time, she had managed to gain everyone's trust and affection, as well as to turn into a role model for the majority of women (Zack 2020).

Due to her mediatic power, Michelle Obama unquestionably contributed to the diffusion of a very clear-cut political thought, a sort of symbol (at least in the Western part of the globe) which was able to help the affirmation of a liberal movement which, at the same time, she further transformed by means of the "politically correct", some bioethical relativism, a sort of do-goodism and a pinch of third world respectability. In support of this and, to sum up, the former First Lady di not simply politically engage for the protection of the LGBTQ+ community, the expansion of the educational system and the advocacy for more sustainable and healthier nutrition; most importantly, she was constant in delivering a message which rejoiced the glory of diversity and the principles of justice, honesty and kindness (Bellantoni 2009). Unsurprisingly, at the end of her final speech at the White House, Michelle Obama was welcomed by a warm applause enclosing all of the admiration and gratitude that she had deservedly earned by virtue of her enthusiastic social commitment (Santi 2017).

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have attempted to analyze the connection between the presence of women within the political sphere, the gender issue and, through some empirical models, even the kind of governance and communication through which three different political systems were shaped for years. In particular, I have reported some of the major theoretical grounds upon which Political Theory is funded, as well as to give substantial importance to the most striking problems affecting gender equality in the political leadership sphere. The conclusions reached are multiple.

First and foremost, at all levels of politics, key issues still exist. Gender equality concerns have become more contentious, suggesting that their political nature is interwoven in deeper societal and political dynamics. On the one hand, feminist organizations and groups are entrenched in these developments too; on the other hand, a sexualized culture, increasingly marked by rape, pornography, harassment, and violence, may also be affecting feminism's widely touted downturn.

Nevertheless, feminism has received renewed popularity, particularly among younger females, thanks to the progression of new forms of activism such as blogs, marches, and technological advancements (i.e., social networks). In the face of this scenario, thus, the gender scholarship faces a number of significant obstacles. First, as many have argued, too little attention is given to issues of intersectionality yet, meaning that investigations around sexuality, race, disability, class, lesbian, and postcolonial feminists should be deepened. In addition to this, politics and gender students are gradually delving into what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) referred to as "political intersectionality" (i.e., how intersectionality is pertinent to political initiatives) and exploring how political structures and processes (i.e., laws and equality organizations) yield intersectionality policies that either help or hinder feminist objectives.

The conclusion grasped in the second chapter, instead, has had to deal with two core subjects: both the mediatic assessment and the actual position of women within political organs.

Concerning the first topic, the research revealed that, within the political context, characteristics such as lifestyle, attitude, parenthood, and private affairs have become progressively determinative in assessing political leaders. Indeed, by leveraging on the so-called ideological "personalization" – that is, public interest in political models' personal lives – it has been possible to define not only how personalization affects the general opinion of political actors, but also how, through the inspection of gender variables, women appear to be frequently illustrated differently than their male counterparts (in particular, as either highly sexualized individuals or, in contrast, as "weaker" or "unimportant" entities). In continuity with this, the second part of the second section brought to light some recurring matters regarding the existent permanence of women in political institutions.

In fact, through the scrutiny of the so-called "women's issues" (i.e., those political areas automatically attributed to women out of the belief that they are either of less importance or of no concern to men), the female under-representation within institutions was tackled, and to better support its unhelpfulness, the benefits that the inclusion of women could bring about were also shown through a study on women's participation in the SADC region. Despite some negative aspects that are to be improved in the future, in fact, the general trend was that female political actors are crucial for the well-functioning of organizations at large, and that governments should promote their economic freedom, so that when they achieve it, they will be able to run for office without being bound by their male peers.

Finally, the goal of the last chapter was to exemplify and evaluate the research conducted through the description of three among the most high-profile politicians in history. The most salient aspect that emerged, in particular, was that through three completely dissimilar paradigms of administration and communication, Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel and Michelle Obama were all able to mark their countries and the realm of politics forever. Thatcher's controversial rigor, Merkel's pragmatism and Obama's empathy inspired different reactions at both national and international level, but what is most significant is that, due to their assertive actions, they didn't leave anybody uninterested, which is perhaps the most pivotal quality that a leader should possess.

All things considered, therefore, a ray of light appears to have glimpsed. The key for female inclusion and consideration into politics seems to consist of reading female diversity as a strength point, rather than as a problematic element. Indeed, it could potentially innovate the ways in which organizations are managed, so as to fulfill the new demands that of politics, society and economy request.

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Riassunto in Italiano

Nel corso di questo elaborato, si è tentato di realizzare un'analisi circa i principali fattori che contraddistinguono la leadership femminile in ambito politico. Infatti, a partire da un breve excursus letterario a testimonianza di come tale argomento sia sempre stato parte (sia tacitamente che fragorosamente) degli storici dibattiti quotidiani, è emerso lo studio di tre importanti aree di interesse. La presente tesi, di conseguenza, si comporrà di tre capitoli e il suo obiettivo, dunque, sarà quello di illustrare, sia attraverso teorie tradizionali che dimostrazioni empiriche, come l'emancipazione e la partecipazione politica femminile abbiano contribuito (e ancora contribuiranno) a formare e migliorare gli scenari politici passati e presenti.

Innanzitutto, la prima sezione si rivela di natura storica e accademica. Il contenuto si rivolge all'origine e all'evoluzione di quell' ideologia politica che ha permesso che le donne venissero intrinsecamente distanziate dai centri di potere amministrativo. Nonostante ciò, comunque, mentre l'autorità maschile si impegnava a costruire principi che comprovassero l'incompatibilità femminile con la direzione dello stato, le donne si dedicarono a far fronte alla loro emarginazione e a contrastare ripetutamente le asserzioni riguardanti loro inferiorità, sia politica che non. Pertanto, a fine di documentare gli storici progressi portati a termine, è stato necessario muoversi attraverso il legame teorico che unisce femminismo e prassi politica, giungendo alla conclusione che, attraverso lo studio di nuovi rami (quali la differenza tra sesso e genere e il supplemento dato dall' intersezionalitá), è stato possibile non solo ridelineare la originariamente androcentrista definizione di politica, ma anche avvalorare che lo sviluppo di un maggior pluralismo di prospettive abbia poi giovato alle correlate discipline in maniera preponderante.

Il secondo capitolo, invece, si divide in due sezioni. Per quanto riguarda la prima, partendo dal presupposto che lo stereotipo femminile è sempre stato collegato ad un tipo di rappresentazione mediatica ostentata e fuorviante, è stato possibile pianificare un quadro di riferimento degli approcci giornalistici nei confronti di politici di sesso femminile e, inevitabilmente, osservare spiccate differenze con le illustrazioni dei loro corrispondenti maschili. La pronunciata sessualizzazione della figura della donna o, d'altra parte, la sua considerazione in sola veste di madre o moglie, sono solo due delle cause basilari che portano a soffermarsi sulla loro sotto-rappresentanza all' interno degli organi politici, seconda priorità del capitolo. Infatti, considerando che la sfera politica è sempre stata percepita come riservata agli uomini e che, in essa, le caratteristiche dominanti dovessero essere autonomia e aggressività, due possibili panorami possono affiorare: da una parte, le donne, pensate come emozionabili ed esitanti, vengono automaticamente riconosciute come non qualificate per essere capi di stato; dall' altra, al contrario, se le donne di fatto possedessero qualcuno tra i tipici tratti caratteriali maschili, verrebbero viste come devianti e, di conseguenza, comunque inadatte per

ricoprire ruoli così autorevoli. Al fine di sostenere tale ricerca, inoltre, sono stati riportati i risulti di uno studio condotto in vari paesi in via di sviluppo dell'Africa del Sud, così da provvedere ad una più accurata dimostrazione di come l'inclusione delle donne nelle istituzioni sia garante di maggiori benefici per l'intera comunità di uno stato.

Il terzo ed ultimo capitolo, infine, si propone di esemplificare e valutare i punti cardinali dell'elaborato attraverso la descrizione di tre tra le leader più influenti della storia: l'ex Primo Ministro Britannico Margaret Thatcher, l'attuale Cancelliera Tedesca Angela Merkel e l'ex First Lady Americana Michelle Obama. In particolare, il più importante aspetto venuto alla luce è stato la completa dissomiglianza tra i loro paradigmi di amministrazione e comunicazione, grazie ai quali, ad ogni modo, sono state in grado di segnare i loro paesi e il mondo politico per sempre.

La Thatcher e il suo contestato rigore, la Merkel e il suo pragmatismo e Michelle e la sua carica emotiva, pur avendo suscitato reazioni popolari diverse sia a livello nazionale che internazionale, sono riuscite a non abbandonare mai nessuno nello stagno dell'ignavia politica, dimostrando di avere le qualità necessarie essere alla guida dei rispettivi stati.

In conclusione, quindi, la multidimensionalità che caratterizza le donne non dovrebbe mai porre loro limiti verso il raggiungimento dei loro obiettivi politici; infatti, non solo considerare il rapporto uomo-donna come una disposizione aut-aut è un errore madornale, ma previene inoltre che l'intera società tragga vantaggio da una maggiore cooperazione e vivacità di idee. Tutto ciò, per di più, potrebbe marcare l'inizio di una nuova era politica molto più fruttuosa ed inclusiva.